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Teak Emanuel Hodge
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Queer Otherwise: Embodying a Queer Identity in Cape Town

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Abstract

This research responds to the following question: how do LGBTQ South Africans in Cape Town come to understand and embody their queerness?

Drawing on ideas of the body as a sense making agent (Meyburgh 2006) and site of socio-political contestation (Foucault 1975) this research adapts body-mapping methodologies (de Jager, Tewson, Ludlow, Boydell 2016) to excavate the ways in which LGBT South Africans negotiate their queerness. Through centering the experiences of three LGBTQ identified South African's in conversation with the experiences of the researcher, this paper delves into how queer people make sense of and understand themselves in relation to their material reality.

Foregrounded by an overview of the methodological and ethical considerations operationalized throughout, this paper will present the narratives of each participant culminating in a discussion on observations surrounding ideas troubling queerness as 'un-African', of language, and of community gleaned during these conversations closed by a final reflection from the researcher.

KEY WORDS: *queer, LGBTQ, embodiment, body, body-mapping, sense making, language, community, Cape Town, South Africa*

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Introduction

In a rapidly globalizing world, the language surrounding and the ways in which we relate to our identities and ourselves are influenced by colonial hegemony. For lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) South Africans, this has precipitated new ways of embodiment and sense making influenced by the appropriation of queerness from Western scholarship. Understanding queer in South Africa thus requires contending with the nation's unique historical, social, political, and cultural positionings that resignify queer in entirely new and subjective ways. There exists a developing body of research that historically trace understandings of what could be and are considered LGBT identities in South Africa (see, for example Epprecht 2004 or Swarr 2012). Fewer research attempts to ground an understanding of queerness in this way. This research works to address this gap, by gleaning an understanding of the ways in which LGBT and now Q (queer) South Africans understand, relate to, and embody queerness in Cape Town.

At various instances during my three month study experience in South Africa, it has been expressed that queer has either not taken root here, or is difficult to articulate in this space. I remember one specific experience, sitting in the audience at the Cape Town Open Book talk, where one of the panelists describes her difficulties with articulating what her self-identification as queer means to her mother in Afrikaans. The panel pertains to the book *They Called Me Queer* by Kim Windvogel and Kelly-Eve Koopman, an anthology of the experiences and stories of queer people in South Africa. It is actually Kim, the aforementioned curator of the collection, who expresses discomfort with the

“colonial language of queerness,” and who begins to deconstruct the flaws of a Western-bred queer praxis (Windvogel 2019, personal communication).

I mention this experience with Kim’s not to coopt her narrative, but to bring attention to the need for more cross-cultural queer critique and to define a central focus of this research. To me, to be queer or to uphold a queer politic entails interrogating rigid and oppressive binary regimes, contending with the volatility of the identities that shape my understanding of self, and creating space for my expanded vision of community. That I, as an American, relatively middle-class, Black, sometimes man other times queergender student, have come to understand queerness in this way reflect the material realities of my existence, whereas Kim’s understanding of queerness, and critique thereof, reflect hers. Working from this premise of queer as discursive, where do these layered conceptions come into conversation, when do we begin to interrogate the potential limitations and nuances of a queer embodiment in Cape Town, and how do we create space for queer people to learn and grow from one another?

Thus, this research responds to the following question: how do LGBTQ South Africans in Cape Town come to understand and embody their queerness? Drawing on ideas of the body as a sense making agent (Meyburgh 2006) and site of socio-political contestation (Foucault 1975) this research adapts body-mapping methodologies (de Jager, Tewson, Ludlow, Boydell 2016) to excavate the ways in which LGBTQ South Africans negotiate their queerness. Through centering the experiences of three LGBTQ identified South African’s in conversation with the experiences of the researcher, this paper delves into how queer people make

sense of and understand themselves in relation to their material realities.

Foregrounded by an overview of the methodological and ethical considerations operationalized throughout, this paper will present the narratives of each participant culminating in a discussion on observations surrounding ideas troubling queerness as ‘un-African’, of language, and of community gleaned during these conversations closed by a final reflection from the researcher.

Central Question –

How do LGBTQ South Africans in Cape Town come to understand and embody their queerness?

General Goal –

To see how people make sense of their queerness through the exercise and experience of adaptive body-mapping and other conversational methods

Sub-Questions –

How has the construction of the queer self been shaped by the legacies of racialization, legislation, and apartheid?

What experiences, language, and ideas are constitutive of a queer embodiment in Cape Town?

In what ways do we come to understand ourselves as queer?

How do individual subjectivities reimagine South African queerness?

Structure of the Research Exercise –

During an initial meeting in which the scope, purpose, and reasoning behind the project is explained, participants were given informed consent forms wherein the researcher again explained that their participation in the project was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. Scheduling the body-mapping exercise for a later date, I met with a group of participants for a sit down creative session wherein we both created and discussed our body maps. With roughly one hour for creating and one hour for discussing, both participants and I endeavored to narrate their understandings of their queerness through the artistic rendition of the body map. Loosely guided by questions, which I projected at the fore of the room, we (myself and participants) created our body maps in collage form drawing from a host of different magazines. Going around in a circle, we each briefly explained the words, images, and other creative ideas that we had placed on our body maps, why we placed them where they were, and what significance they held for our understandings of our queer selves. After the initial round of sharing, I asked questions that pertained to what had been expressed by each of us; whether they expressed common or differing sentiments, the goal was to probe a little deeper to get a more clear understanding of how queer is understood in this space. This entire conversational period was recorded, with digital copies of the recordings given back to participants. When the body-mapping exercise could not be undertaken, I conducted an unstructured interview where, through the same questions projected during the body-mapping exercise, I asked participants about their experiences coming into their queerness, shared my experiences, and continued to inquire based on the narratives we both shared and created together.

Guiding Questions from the Researcher –

What words/language would you use to describe your sexuality and/or gender identity?

How did you come to understand yourself as queer?

Where/how did you grow up?

With whom do you feel most comfortable?

Who supports you?

When was the first time you felt seen/heard?

Literature Review

Distinguished on the African continent for its' deliberate inclusion of protections regarding sexual orientation into the constitution, South Africa extends its' idea of the Rainbow Nation to be inclusive of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. LGBT people, however, neither simply appeared after the ratification of this new constitution, nor have the experiences of their identities remained stagnant since. Through heightened global interconnectedness, use of the term queer as both reflexive noun and critical verb have risen to explicate the multiplicity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) people's experiences in South Africa. Queer is at once resistance to predominant categories, narratives, or structures that aim to

regulate LGBTQ people's lives, and being in critical relationship to binary regimes that construct identity (Mathebeni, Munro, Reddy 2018). In South Africa specifically, what has it meant that this understanding of queer has come from extra-national bodies and not those existing within the country? Framed as transgressive, what are the impacts of a queerness that, on the surface, is foreign, how have individuals come to understand their own bodies as queer, and how are these individuals endeavoring to rearticulate their humanity on their own terms? Evaluating these questions will take place on three planes of research: an historical deconstruction of South African sexualities, excavating linkages between the racialized and sexed body, and an uplift of contemporary queer voices.

An Historical Deconstruction

South Africans have historically wrestled with the concept of queer identities. Although such relationships were perhaps rare, Marc Epprecht contends that despite defining sexuality in reproductive terms, pre-colonial societies could accommodate homosexual deviances by ignoring or shaming those involved, without punitive punishment (Schmidt 2007). Epprecht does this through tracing what he refers to as dissident sexuality in Zimbabwe and South Africa using the Shona term *hongochani* (Schmidt 2007), to explain that these societies had modes of understanding normative deviance that predate queer. Mary Hames too engages in similar etymology, yet with the word *stabane*, which describes an intersex person in isiZulu vernacular, but is a derogatory term in isiXhosa (Matebeni, Munro, Reddy 2018). Although such language existed and

persists, it cannot be understood as encompassing the same meaning as queer. Expanding on Epprecht, if *hungochani* refers to deviance from normative reproduction, then it does not take the same vantage point as queer, which works on the premise of questioning normative modes of being and identity, beyond merely sexuality. Hames tracking of the word *stabane* approaches the meaning of queer in its account of both sexuality (in isiXhosa) and sex (in isiZulu), yet enters this conversation from a stance of conflation that wrongly assumes parity between ‘intersex’ and non-heterosexual (Mathebani, Munro, Reddy 2018, 5). Despite the existing critique of queer as privileging certain sexual and gender hierarchies above others (Hames in Mathebani, Munro, Reddy 2018, 152), queer, at minimum, takes sex and sexuality as interstitial yet not inherently same. Thus, words such as *hungochani* and *stabane* bring awareness to the historical existence of queer people in South Africa, are perhaps constitutive elements of a South African queer development, and begin excavating the limitations of a queer framework, while still being operationally different from queer. This research delves into the nuances of these limitations as queer people in South Africa understand them.

Transgressing language, African societies have historically interpreted differences in gender expression or perceived sexuality through the lenses of spirit possession, most commonly involving a male ancestor inhabiting a living female person or vice versa (Epprecht 2005, 139). In her autobiography *Black Bull, ancestors and me: my life as a lesbian sangoma*, Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde examines how her possession by the male spirit of her grandfather, her namesake, has afforded her a level of relative acceptance from her community. Nkabinde’s

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explanation that, “the taking of an ancestral wife and/or female sexual partner by female sangoma with a dominant male ancestor may satisfy both community needs and the individual sangoma’s need,” (Stobie 2011, 150) exposes the unique understandings surrounding queerness in South Africa. Here, queer is imbricated with an acknowledgement of spirituality and ancestor worship that is perhaps at odds with the established Western frame. It is thus useful to situate queer in relation to spirituality and religion, in ways that reveal how these processes operate within South Africa. While the scope of this research may not readily address this relationship, the researcher will use it to frame their line of questioning and build their exercise with this knowledge in mind.

Nkabine’s experience, however, is further significant as it explores the complex intersections of and crossings of identity, gender, body, sexuality, spirituality, and nation that approach queer (Stobie 2011, 150). When analyzing Nkabine’s autobiography through a transgender lens, Cheryl Stobie has the following remarks on Nkabinde:

Further, she is not merely an isolated individual, but is part of a group of same-sex identified sangomas who are expanding the community’s notions of spirituality, gender, and sexuality, demonstrating that the sex/gender/sexuality matrix can profitably be seen as a variable continuum rather than a binary and hierarchical system. (2011, 156)

Operationalizing their power as respected community members, spiritual authorities, and queer people, these sangoma's engage in crossing normative confines and approaching a queer praxis (Anzaldúa ,25). This interstitial thinking that encourages crossing between and through identities will be a central focus of this research.

Excavating Linkages between the Racialized and the Sexed Body

Further, acknowledging these crossings requires understanding the body as a racialized entity that is inflected with and shaped by other intervening forms of power, such as sex, sexuality, and gender. Specifically, under the apartheid regime, racialization of the body was integral to the maintenance of the state. Embedding race into the national fabric as, “a web of socio-political, cultural and historical relations (woven by humans) that demarcates humanity in terms of the categories fully human, not quite human yet and not human” continue to shape understandings of the ‘human’ (Erasmus 2018, 53). Erasmus uses the caveat in parenthesis, “not quite human”, to explain how humanity has historically been conceptualized under normative whiteness, making white people its only beneficiaries. She goes on to demonstrate that racial markers are dependent on their inherent connotation, and that these connotations themselves depend on the ways race is imbricated with gender, class, nation, language, sexuality, geopolitics and the human (Erasmus 2018, 52). Reading this in conversation with Amanda Swarr's book, *Sex in Transition*, which aims to, “reconceptualize apartheid as reliant on gendered disjunctures,” (Swar 2012, 4) brings useful

context to the ways in which apartheid both encouraged and punished non-normative gender and sexual expressions along lines of race and class.

Exemplifying this, “boy-wives” or male-male mine marriages were assimilated into society as a tool to keep men away from prostitutes that would harm the stability of the homosexual marriage (Epprecht 2001). Further, the Births, Marriages, and Death Registration Act of 1963 made it possible for transgender persons having undergone, sex affirmation surgery to change their official sex in state records (Thoreson 2013, 649). However, Liesl Theron (2007) expands on the stipulations of these changes:

...they were advised to move. To break ties with all people and if possible even move to another country. (...) so in South Africa you didn't have many role models or older transgender people who can give advice to new young emerging ones, because they were told to disappear. (Thoreson 2013, 29).

Trans people were allowed to conclude their transition, physically and legally, at the cost of breaking their former social and political bonds. Here, Erasmus and Swarr define a contour of this research.

Swarr uses apartheid's stance towards, what she phrases “gender liminality” to explicate the ways in which apartheid legislated the sexed body (Swarr 2012). She grounds this in an understanding that the states' acceptance of

non-heteronormative and non-normative gender identities, “rested on the extent to which gender liminal bodies were under state control and supported institutional gendered ideologies”(Swarr 2012, 13). Thus the race and class of the mine workers, historically poor Black men, and the race and class of those with the means of transitioning, historically white, must be taken into account to understand how apartheid approached these bodies. Here, who is human and who isn’t matters. Erasmus beautifully explains this when exploring the subjective realities of the racialized body:

This self-making was limited by apartheid’s constrictions regarding who I could become as a person, and with and amongst whom my personhood could be made. (Erasmus 2018, 12)

With this history in mind, how has the construction of the queer self been shaped by the legacies of racialization, legislation, and apartheid. If queer, as previously stated, is meant to transgress the boundaries prescribed by sexual normativities and gender-binarism, how has this stance influenced the ways in which individuals relate to their racialized bodies? Further, does identification with queer open up the spaces in which the individual crafts their relationship with Self, thus shifting from racialized ways of knowing to sociogenic ways of coming to know? (Erasmus 2018, XXV). On a micro level, this research will attempt to evaluate these questions.

Uplifting Contemporary Queer Voices

At the fore of all this history and abstract conceptualization of the human lay the actual experiences of the individuals existing in contemporary South Africa as queer. The experiences of these individuals begin to articulate a snapshot of how queerness has both been embedded into and shaped by South Africa, and how individuals have endeavored to actively queer their understandings of Self. While trans experiences are typically situated parallel to the queer umbrella, I use them here deliberately to excavate how trans people potentially embody a queer politic, and bring attention to the need for more queer and trans narratives. Quoting wo_men, a term Donham deliberately uses to visualize the interstitial spaces between the gender binary of man and woman, they remark that, “gay identity meant literally a new gender and a new way of relating to this body (...) ‘Before I thought I was a woman. Now I think I’m a man.’ (quoted in McLean and Ngcobo 1994, 168-9)’ (Donham 2002,420)” (Klein 2009,19). Remaking corporeal relationship through constructing a personal Self, the body moved from a fixed and static category to a site of contestation. It is in this contestation that the body, and thus the Self, can be remade. What are the implications of such movement on other constitutive identities, and to what extent do they appear in a Cape Town, South African context?

Furthering this idea of contested corporeality, Kgaogelo, a transwoman interviewed in *Trans: Transgender Life Stories from South Africa* who came to her understanding of her trans identity through the insistence of others, remarks on this process. She states, “I didn’t know where I belong but I ended up

accepting who I was.’ (Kgaogelo 2009, 53)” (Morgan, Marai, Rosemary 2009, 53). Thus, her understanding of Self was born in the conversation between her, her body, and her community. Who constitutes this community, and how do queer people make and remake themselves through their different communities? Transgressing the borders of her lived and unknown experiences to articulate a sense of personhood outside of established modes of belonging, Kgaogelo’s journey to Self-exaltation can be understood as one narrative that contours and invites further inquiry into queerness in South Africa.

Similarly, Thamar Klein recounts the words of an anonymous interviewee, whose experience of ill-belonging complements Kgaogelo’s:

So I don’t want to be anything. But I mean I’m female. I present myself as female. But I’ve got a dick. I don’t want “guy” attached to me. [...] I like being me. [...] I just wanna be me. “Chick with a dick” that’s like the closest that I can describe myself. The closest. *Not really*. But the closest. (Anonymous interviewee, 24 September 2007) (Klein 2008, 4).

Both of these stories highlight the feeling of ill-belonging possibly resulting from the dialectic between the individual, their body, normative understandings thereof, and community. Queer is meant to fill these intervening spaces, yet in neither instance did that label suffice. Although both Kgaogelo and the anonymous interviewee were engaged in queering their understandings of Self,

their personal identification with queer was left to speculation. Is queer then an adequate tool to describe the experiences of LGBT people in South Africa? To what degree does it work and to what extent doesn't it?

Conceptualizing a queerness that is at once subjective, discursive, and contextually relevant requires contending with the various societal forces that have shaped people in South Africa. This means having an awareness of the history and development of a queer embodiment and politic, contending with the interaction between the racialized, sexed, and gendered body that prescribes the Self, and delving into the personal narratives of those lives whose experiences can be understood through a queer lens. It is through more open and honest discussion with LGBTQ peoples that an understanding of how queerness is shaped by the contours of South African society can begin to be gleaned.

Methodology

This research approaches the body as the foundation from which we make sense of the world, and thus deliberately uses the adaptive body map as a tool to attempt to unravel and explicate this sense making process. As we enter the world, our bodies are transcribed with norms or forms of power that dictate the limitations and possibilities of our self-making (Foucault 1975). With our bodies situated at the nexus of different forms of power, we find that articulating the self is a process of negotiation wherein we both resist and conform to the pre-established rules of intelligibility (Butler 2004). While Butler confines this idea to the gendered body, Erasmus (2017) expands this with an understanding of the body as the subject of racialization. Researching racialization without regards to class or gender without an awareness of sexuality, however, proves to be at once flat, bland, and without real nuance. Hence, this research borrows from an intersectional feminist lens that looks at the relationships between different aspects of identities and the implications they have on power relations (Kara 2015). So, while embodiment is influenced by a myriad of identities and practices, this research will look specifically at the relationships between race, gender, class, sex, and sexuality. Focused in this way, qualitative research methods, such as the body map exercise, are most appropriate to reflect the subjectivity of participants. Facilitated through arts-based research methods that are particularly useful at investigating topics associated with emotion and feeling (Kara 2015), such as identity and embodiment, the body-mapping exercise seemed best equipped to respond to the particularities of participant's experiences.

Typically, the body map exercise is conducted by tracing the outline of the participant on a large sheet of paper and, through successive reflective sessions, having them fill in the outline with creative articulations of their embodied experiences (de Jager, Tewson, Ludlow, Boydell 2016). The final artistic piece attempts to articulate the individual's relationship to their body and the ways in which they experience various aspects of their personhood. Such an exercise in body-mapping hinges on three main attributes that make it uniquely suited to a research study such as this: a valuable social justice history that makes visible potentially obscured perspectives, visual and arts-based collaborative processes encouraging embodied awareness, and a knowledge translation method that allows for different levels of knowledge creation and dissemination (de Jager, Tewson, Ludlow, Boydell 2016). Expanding on Tamale's (2011) assertion that thinking from an understanding of multiple sexualities is crucial in dispelling essentialisms embedded in much sexuality research, the body map works from the position that our identities are necessarily layered, personal, and informed by our corporeal experiences. A main feature of this research is to glean an awareness of how queerness is understood in Cape Town. . Hence, this research operationalizes the body map as a tool to engage with the multiplicity of and volatility between our identities, sensations, and feelings that inform a queer embodiment. Facilitating this process means engaging in a level of unpacking and creative knowledge development that the body map exercise is primed for.

However, this research project has severe time and resource constraints. Four weeks is not nearly enough time to have participants sit for multiple sessions, let alone have them create and articulate their creations during each

session. Such a task undertaken in four weeks time would place undue burdens on the participants. Further, finding the materials necessary to conduct multiple life-size body maps would be financially costly and difficult. Although the full-size body map exercise could serve as a useful research method for a longer term and better-funded project, I found that it would not be feasible within the time frame and budget provided. Participants were found through relationships with people I've befriended since coming to South Africa. Being put in contact with people through friends, instructors, and colleagues here in Cape Town, I was able to find a several people willing to participate in the body-mapping exercise with me. However, only two out of the three participants were able to sit for the body-mapping exercise due to the short duration of this project. As such, this research will still situate body-mapping as a primary methodological tool, yet will center itself around narratives expressed during conversation so as to equally respect the stories and experiences of all participants.

The adaptive body-map meaningfully draws from the full body map exercise, in ways making it more appropriate to the scope and frame of this research project. Rather than tracing the outline of the participant's body, the adaptive body map asks the researcher to provide a uniform miniature body template that fits on standard 8'x11' size paper. While standardizing the body map does perhaps create more distance between the paper and physical bodies than the full body map exercise, the participant still retains the right to adorn and style the body map in any way they chose. The goal is still to assure the participant that the paper body is theirs, irrespective of whether the outline adheres to their specific physical disposition or not. Essentializing one idea of the

body cannot be helped using such a method, but can only be mitigated through participant's readiness to individualize their body outlines.

The adaptive body-map exercise also condenses the time frame with which the participant has to create and reflect. I met with each participant at least once before conducting the actual body map exercise; the details of these initial meetings will be discussed in the Ethical Reflexivity section that follows this methods section. From the initial meeting, however, participants were asked to think about how they might artistically express their understanding of queerness, and were encouraged to bring in any materials that they felt especially salient to their identities. Here, it was important to emphasize that the creative session would only last about two hours maximum, with roughly one hour for creation and another hour for discussion; this would be the only session explicitly devoted to artistically rendering our identities. Two hours was chosen to respect the time of participants, and not ask them to give up too much of their own time. As I could neither compensate participants nor provide transport, I felt that two hours was long enough to stimulate a nuanced conversation and creation session without being too demanding of participants. Two hours, however, is not a lot of time for deep reflection; the expectation is that participants have thought some about the project and questions posed during the initial meeting and that the creative session will be a space for them to engage these reflections and artistically recreate them. This is a limitation of the research project that more time for reflection, discussion, and creation could not be given.

Further, I will not be analyzing the body maps, but will be representing and drawing from the narrative that participants describe during conversation of the body maps. Analyzing the body maps would require a deeper level of research and methodological analysis that are potentially beyond the capabilities of this researcher. Thus, a method of discourse analysis outlined by Kara (2011) that centers around the narratives expressed during the process of discussing the body maps will be the main focus of this research. This is meant to, “foreground the experiences of participants as well as the meanings and interpretations that they attach to these experience” (Tamale 2011, 29). In this way, the body map becomes a tool to facilitate and extend conversation, and a focus point through which discussion and introspection can begin. Here, this research takes a relatively unstructured approach. Projecting guiding questions during body the body-mapping exercise and discussion, I engaged in questioning and personal sharing that responded to what was expressed by participants. The questions I projected were my attempt to delicately excavate the ways in which experiences of race, gender, sex, and class are informally constitutive elements of a queer identity. Working, however, from a more unstructured approach means drawing on ideas, “that the process of designing a research project on sexuality is by no mean a linear exercise. Rather, it is a circuitous, undulating process” (Tamale 2011, 28). This entailed active listening and attention to what is being expressed, and engaging in a form of reciprocal sharing that uniquely responds to rather than structures the research environment.

As intimacy cannot exist without reciprocity (Oakley 1981 quoted in Racine 2003), this research draws on ideas of co-creation, mutual sharing, and

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vulnerability that aim to position both the researcher and participants as actor in the research process. Conducting the body-mapping exercise in a focus group setting meant to accomplish this by provoking conversation and dialogue that was organic rather than extractive. Further, participating in the project myself was a way in which I could attempt to locate where I stood in relation to the social structures participants expressed and those that I had experienced during my time in South Africa (Wambui 2013). Such a stance invokes a level of autoethnography that attempts to bring my experiences into the conversations as a means of personal reflection and self-investment in the co-created space (Kara 2011). Thus, my participation in both the body-mapping exercise and the subsequent narration and conversation session were instrumental in attempting to create a more equitable, safe, and layered research environment.

Ethical Reflexivity

I was put in contact with participants through my peers and faculty in SIT who knew the basics of my project. Sending them a brief synopsis of the main themes and tasks this project would entail, they put feelers into the community and asked people they thought might be willing to participate. From here, I directly contact potential participants first via email and then What'sApp to schedule a time and place to meet and discuss the details of the research project. We met in public cafés around the Observatory and Rondebosch area, and I would begin by introducing myself as an American student studying abroad and doing research in Cape Town for a month. It was very important for me to be as transparent as possible about my reasoning behind my project, the genesis of it,

and my positionality as a foreign researcher. However, these initial meetings were not interview sessions, but were informal dialogues where both researcher and participant asked questions and got to know one another. Towards the close of the meeting, if the participant still agreed to participate in the research project, I would go through the necessary informed consent forms with each participant. Synthesizing the main points (that participants were allowed to withdraw at any time, that they could keep what they created in the space, and that the audio recording would be sent to them at the close of the project) participants were asked to sign the document, or email me a signed copy. In emails sent to participants providing a digital copy of the informed consent and expressing gratitude at having taken time to meet, participants were encouraged to reach out to other individuals whom they felt might be interested in engaging in this research project as well.

In this study, I attempted to keep an awareness of participants race, gender, sex, class, sexuality, language(s), ethnicity and education in mind. As I didn't know participants before my initial contact with them, I relied heavily on what they were willing to disclose from our initial meeting. It was during the actual body-mapping exercise, or interview conversation, that these themes really came to the fore. In this way, it was incumbent upon me to actively engage participant's levels of disclosure so as to influence conversation towards deeper introspection and vulnerability. This meant contending with the level of vulnerability I was willing to give in order to invite further vulnerability from others. Here, I walked a delicate balance between over-sharing with strangers, and usefully sharing in ways that pushed us collectively to greater depths.

However, as I will discuss later, I often found that I was not in control of conversation, and that participants directed lines of thought, inquiry, and disclosure themselves.

Participants were given general questions, but were encouraged to interpret, diverge from, and imagine new questions than those that I posed. This was my attempt to create a space of artistic liberty and subjectivity as the base of this research exercise. However, through out the exercise I emphasized that if ever there was a time when they wanted to stop recording and speak, they were free to request an intermission. No such time arrived during conversation. While I encouraged participants to select pseudonyms, none expressed interest or chose an alternative name to represent their narratives. As such, I will simply refer to the participants by their respective first initials.

The first two participants, V and D, are current UCT students in their twenties. One majoring in social work, the other majoring in law they both have lived and studied in the Cape Town area recently, but have lived in Jo-Burg, Eastern Cape, and other places around South Africa. In this regard, they could speak about their experiences around in other cities, and to their experiences as young people in the city. Further, as self-identified Black queers, they dived deeply into how their experiences as Black queer bodies have shaped their understandings of self and community.

The final participant was met at a later date due to scheduling constraints, and thus I was unable to offer space for the body-mapping exercise. Despite not being able to participate in the body mapping exercise, J was able to speak very candidly about her experiences and life growing up as a Coloured person, a queer

person, and a queer organizer in the Cape Town area. Being in her early forties, J was able to articulate reflections on the development of her queer identity through the South African democratic transition.

Conversations

Participants V and D – Body-Mapping Exercise

Both Participants V and D knew each other; in fact Participant V was the one who told me to reach out to Participant D for this project. So, on the day of the body-mapping exercise, after initial hellos, I began by explaining the exercise again. A few questions came up about whether the collage had to be limited exclusively to the body, or if the margins of the paper could be used as well. I encouraged participants to do what felt right, but noted that they would have to be able to explain their reasoning behind their words and the placements thereof. Following the initial set up, I directed their attention to the general questions displayed on the board, and we began the exercise by looking at the magazines and creating our respective collages. After about an hour of creating, I asked if anyone was ready to share, and Participant V happily began by explaining aspects of his body map (Appendix: Figure 1.1). He began by stating that he didn't really answer any of the questions, but had specific things to say about how his queerness has informed who he is.

When I look at where I am now to when I first came out to myself, there has been a lot of healing that has happened over time. My life has certainly gotten better

(Participant V, 2019)

Being queer and being myself is one thing. I can't separate them. How do I describe my queerness, it's all just one element one entity

(Participant V, 2019)

I'm learning to find more positive ways of describing myself, of relating to myself and my to queer self because the world has not always related to me and my queer self in a positive manner

(Participant V, 2019)

I used *trots* which is an English work that means trots, like a horse trots, but in Afrikaans it means proud because I couldn't find pride anywhere.

(Participant V, 2019)

Once Participant V finished sharing, Participant D volunteers to present next. Beginning by explaining that he didn't really answer the questions I posed, but used them more as a guide, he too describes his journey into self-understanding and queerness.

This particular part of the journey has helped me to reimagine what love looks like, what life looks like, and how queerness is sort a lens through which I can time my relationship with other people

(Participant D, 2019)

Making a poem out of the words on his body map (Appendix: Figure 1.2), he recited the following:

Stay

Hodge

Anonymous

Love in murmurs

Live in a small

Fiction

then

Break

The silence

Burst Into Life

Dream of Flying

in Love

The placement of the words follows their anatomical positioning as they were placed on the paper body. At this point, it was my turn to share my body map, but instead I asked a question: Where along the line did you start seeing yourself as queer as opposed to any other language, identity, or sense of expression? To this, both participants explained in a little more detail the development of themselves as queer people,

Probably last year for me, because throughout high school I was on this really sanctimonious intellectual thing where I was above sexuality. I'm not attracted to any of you I don't like anyone stay out of my way.

Towards the end of high school I was like okay maybe I do actually exist

Hodge

as a sexual being. So I started to identify as bi and then last year I was like hang on a minute the word doesn't fit right none of the other words fit right, but then queer just kind of clicked.

(Participant D, 2019)

I liked it because it had this big definition that was just so broad and plastic, which is how I felt.

(Participant D, 2019)

I think I was probably queer in relation to everybody else around me probably as far back as I can remember. Just feeling different.

(Participant V, 2019)

Even now, queer doesn't seem to fit but it's the closest fit.

(Participant V, 2019)

Finding a word that over time doesn't fit because you interrogate it, you learn more about yourself

(Participant V, 2019)

The conversation then moved to me, and I hesitantly began sharing aspects of my body map (Figure 1.3). Bringing my collage into conversation with theirs, I remarked how we all used more words than pictures to articulate our understandings of self. Here, I began by sharing a little about my life experience, where I grew up, and how these things have shaped me.

Hodge

I grew up at the beach, and to me, the water the ocean a lot of these things just seemed to expansive to me and I realized that I wanted to be like that. That to me is kind of what coming into my queerness means. I wanted to be that more expansive self

(Hodge, 2019)

I didn't feel I fit the masculine man mold that I was made to go into, especially being Black it felt like that was all I had.

(Hodge, 2019)

I went on to describe my first experiences with seeing other queer (read gay) representation on television. Remarking how the characters were always either out, hyper-visible, and uber sassy or closeted until they were outed without their consent, we began to laugh and talk animatedly about this shared experience. Participant D flips his wrists to signify the stereotype of how gay men hold their wrists when they speak (Steinberg 2000). We laugh and talk briefly about how these sorts of tropes are bothersome and create harmful ideas about what it means to be queer. More specifically, I talk about how if these sorts of harmful images are all that were being offered through being gay, then I couldn't see myself defined in such narrow terms.

Once we had all shared our body maps, to keep the conversation going I had to begin asking questions to the group. I tried to base my questions off of things that had been said, or sentiments that both Participant V and D had reacted to in ways that warranted further inquiry. Returning to what Participant D had

Hodge

previously shared about his journey through different language for his identity, I asked him why he felt that the definition of bi, an abbreviation for bisexuality, no longer fit his understanding of self.

There was kind of like this internal drive to become, as you said more expansive. For me like bi and gay all the strictly defined terms are very problematic in that they aren't malleable. You can't build a bear for bisexuality, there's none of that. Even though everyone has their own way of being bi or gay, queerness does have a much more plastic standard

(Participant D, 2019)

Expanding on these linguistic nuances, I asked the group if they spoke any other languages and whether they felt that those languages might better encapsulate their experiences. I asked this question because I wanted to further interrogate what shapes the language we use to describe ourselves. With the knowledge of South Africa's history of 11 official languages (Alexander 2018), I wanted to better understand the interplay between these languages and how they influence identity. Both participants connected on how the language used to describe them, or people potentially like them, in their mother languages was often derogatory or harmful.

I speak English almost as a first language even though officially my first language is Xhosa, but I struggle to express myself in Xhosa as much as I can and do in English. There are times when I feel that English is not deep enough, and then other languages will kind of speak to that experience.

(Participant V, 2019)

It also has to do with the experience of being queer in the space that I was in back home. So a lot of people I grew up around were Xhosa speaking, the language that was used to describe me in relation to queerness was very violent or derogatory. I started moving away from that, and when I found my created family of friends and stuff, because they were from different backgrounds the common language was English. Obviously this kind of had to do with the education system I went through with English medium schools.

(Participant V, 2019)

In my experience, I grew up speaking Zulu, Tswana and English, but basically English was my first language in Suburbia. Then I went to high school and started learning German so I had all of these languages flying around me all the time. I had access to all of these languages, but I only really had true mastery of one. To me mastery is not only really being able to express yourself, but where there is a gap being able to fill it, creating something new.

(Participant D, 2019)

Delving a little deeper into the politics of language, Participant D briefly narrates how words in English have, through the process of resistance and resignification, been reclaimed by those they formerly harmed. Reflecting this in

Hodge

terms of other South African languages, Participant D (2019) describes that to him, “the derogatory words in Zulu, there is absolutely now recounting them no reclaiming them, I just kind of leave them.” Here, both participants find another point of agreement and express their disaffection towards reclaiming of various derogatory words for South African queer people. Further, Participant D describes his intense immersion in the English language as a sort of defense mechanism to push himself away from the very language that happened to be used against him, which in his case was Zulu. Participant D has describes that this process of distancing himself from Zulu has placed him in a state where he can’t, “open the language fully.”

Continuing along this line of conversation, Participant D explains how, “traditionally, a lot of people consider that if you are queer you are trying to be white, and I think I fled that identity a lot.” Articulating that queerness is viewed as something proximal to foreign whiteness, I ask why queerness is framed in this way. Both participants are eager to respond.

It’s from this whole idea that being queer is ‘un-African’. So if its ‘un-African’ its approximate to whiteness. I remember my parents at one point through my coming out experience were like, ‘was it because we sent you to these white schools?’”

(Participant V, 2019)

There’s always been this association that queerness is closer to whiteness and anyone who is breaking the gender binary or breaking gender

stereotypes is trying to be white. Even feminist Black women are tagged as trying to live a Western lifestyle

(Participant D, 2019)

The participant's variation in where they had grown up or moved to influence their perspectives on how they relate to this tension between their queerness described as 'un-African' and themselves as South Africans. Specifically I asked them how they interacted with white spaces as Black queer bodies. Participant D grew up primarily in the suburbs of Jo-Burg and thus talked about how the politics of whiteness, language, and class permeated everyday life.

The northern suburbs in Jo-Burg, which is like I wouldn't say cosmopolitan but there are a lot of liberal white people. People are more likely to judge you there based on your accent cause there is a whole politics about how your accent shows which school you come from, like in Jo-Burg its hyper specific.

(Participant D, 2019)

I went to the theatre once and I was just speaking with my friend and this lady turns around and she goes 'excuse me did you go to Saint Johns College' and I was like 'yes I did' and she was like 'you have the accent'

(Participant D, 2019)

He goes on to explain that the salience of his Blackness was felt and experienced through the ways in which certain people (read white) related to him.

Hodge

There are certain class markers where you become a safe Black, but there is a certain level of deference to you. Not that you are not going to experience racism, but that people are going to sort of walk on egg shells around you.

(Participant D, 2019)

Participant V's experience growing up exposed some of the contours of wealth differentials as he experienced them.

My parents are from the Eastern Cape, that's where they are, and so when I was born we lived with my maternal grandmother for about 5 or 6 years, and that was in sort of a township. Then we moved into suburbia into the town center. Having these two different experiences where everybody around my grandmothers, poverty was very visible and people were struggling and to move to the suburbs where poverty was sort of a foreign thing. At 7 o'clock in the morning and 5 o'clock in the afternoon there was like no poverty because the workers would come in.

(Participant V, 2019)

In exploring these nuances of what it meant to occupy space as a Black body, the concept of judgment came to the fore. We all described a difference between experiences of judgment amongst Black versus white peers. It became apparent that the acceptance we experienced as a result of being Black and queer was relative. Specifically, we began to dive into how our experiences as queer people amongst Black people differed. While Participant D describes the

judgment he feels in Black spaces as simply a different form of judgment, I described how this judgment was simply more visceral coming from Black people who I perceived as apart of my community. Participant V's echoed similar but also divergent sentiments.

Being a queer Black person in white spaces I've found more acceptance. I'm able to navigate those spaces which also I guess speaks to where I went to school, because there is a lot of social capital that came with the school that I went to or the type of education that I was afforded at that school.

(Participant V, 2019)

I didn't find it particularly more hurtful when I had discrimination from Black people. I probably be very like actually I don't feel anything

(Participant V, 2019)

During school the white friends that I had, if they were saying stuff that would hurt me because we see each other every day.

(Participant V, 2019)

Participant V frames this by narrating his experience growing up going to white schools and existing frequently in predominantly in white spaces. This meant that the friends he hung out with regularly at school were typically white,

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that the classes he attended were mostly white, and that he became comfortable navigating white spaces. Both agreed they felt that this comfortability translated into a type of boldness and self-assertion in spaces where they were perhaps the minority. They talk quite a bit about how this level of exposure has translated into their experiences at UCT.

You feel a right to it. Even in university spaces when you are in a tight environment a lot of the times there will be more white people than Black people and the white people will speak more often. But coming from the same spaces you feel that claim to take up space and I guess that's kind of my experience that it kind of rubs off on me, this deep internal feeling of the right to take up space.

(Participant D, 2019)

Lightly unpacking this sense of entitlement and certainty taking up space, they begin explaining a little more about the history and nuances of the South African education system.

I think it's a socialization because I was just looking at the posters there on the history of South Africa (Figure 1.4), where to be safe as a Black person you had to follow orders from white people. That has almost inherited over time and crossed on to generations. Even the way Black parents relate to their Black children is an autocratic way of relating. Being in white spaces you see how everybody else goes about.

(Participant V, 2019)

Hodge



Figure 1.4: Placards with history of apartheid South Africa

They recount that the legacies of apartheid run deeper than just the structural displacement and marginalization of people, but into the very

psychology and perception of self. Listening to their conversation, I share my reflections that I haven't given thought to the ways in which growing up in predominantly white spaces has informed how I maneuver collegiate space. Here, we continue talking about how these experiences of being Black in middle to upper middle class white spaces creates a niche and typified view of Blackness. Participant D directs this conversation by bringing up the idea of a 702 Black and I ask him to explain. As I have no context for the expression, he starts with saying that 702 is the national public talk radio, sort of like NPR, and to be a 702 Black is to fit a stereotyped mode of Blackness.

It means being somewhat liberal Black, middle class, university educated mostly, you have a house and a car in suburbia, you send your kids to prep schools. All of these class markers are associated with listening to 702.

(Participant D, 2019)

While I've never listened to 702, I join in the laughter about the description of a classed type of Blackness that sounds proximal to my understanding of typified American middle class Black ideal. The idea of national ideals is furthered during our conversation when Participant D speaks on the impacts of socialization and how he feels interacting as a Black queer person.

In a lot of these spaces I expect the worst and I hope for something good to come out. A lot of times a lot more good than bad.

(Participant D, 2019)

Hodge

I am constantly weary of everyone's socialization in this country. We are all steeped in racism, we've all got at least a dash of homophobia, we all know sexism, so it's kind of like in every single space I'm weary and I have to test the waters rather than going in there and trusting people.

(Participant D, 2019)

South African culture, patriotism is bigotry. That's the one thing we share in common other than like the Springboks and the braai.

(Participant D, 2019)

Here, Participant D has to leave for a job interview, and I quickly pause to say my goodbyes and let him out. I return, and now it's just Participant V and myself talking. The conversation, for me, is a bit easier because I'm no longer solely watching as Participants D and V engage each other and go back and forth on topics. While I've appreciated their directing and dominating the conversation, it has placed me closer to the role of research observer than participant. Actually circling back to the questions I've posed, we begin by evaluating the following question: Who supports you?

Cape Town's huge, but all the queers know the other queers.

(Participant V, 2019)

In relation to this, I put home in the center because I found home in myself.

(Participant V, 2019)

Hodge

Creating community outside of a family, making sure that I've got safe people, that's been a part of my journey as a queer person. I think it's particularly significant in South Africa because you'll find here that queers are marginalized and particularly that Black queers are marginalized. I think people are like, we'll share half of my meal because you don't have anywhere else to be. People will connect you to people.

(Participant V, 2019)

I connected with Participant V on this; that the nation to which one belongs does not adequately support, protect, and uplift those at the margins is a feeling that I could relate to. Sharing a similar sentiment, I offered my meditations on the American situation.

I feel like a lot of American ideology is built on this idea of the very white cis-hetero family with 2.5 kids and a dog living in the suburbs Like that's the ideal and anything from that ideal is dismissed.

(Hodge, 2019)

Participant V interjected to say that anything beyond this narrow ideal is simply relegated to silence and effectively doesn't exist to the nation-state. This frustrated both of us, and guided our conversation towards intra-community reflection on how we as queer people exclude one another. Participant V shares that such exclusions are particularly salient in Cape Town.

I've seen very wealthy very rich white queers who will dismiss Black queers or queers who aren't in the same income bracket. It's never the right time to address a particular issue because they have other issues.

(Participant V, 2019)

Once again, I can relate, but in a different sense. Feelings of separation or differing approaches to community I've experienced have typically been perpetuated by white gay men. I ask Participant V specifically if he means white gay people when he says white queers, and not perhaps white gay men. While he asserts that white queers is the correct expression, I still maintained my stance on white gays for reasons I will explain later.

He goes on to talk about situations in which white queers differing perspectives towards queer community created areas of tension.

If you look at MCQP, which is the Mother City Queer Project that had happened annually for a long time, there was a lot of cultural appropriation going on for a long time. Or if you look at the pride march, Cape Town Pride, that has for as long as I can remember been a very white queer centered. Even where it happens, it's usually in Green Point, Sea Point area in the CBD. They started like charging people and so it was like gatekeeping the space. This is not right, you've got company sponsoring so let people go in for free.

(Participant V, 2019)

Having personal experiences with the commodification of Pride spaces and events, I was more than empathetic. We both divulged that charging people to enter spaces is and never would be our understanding of community. We spoke at length about how these spaces are homogenous in the people that they attract, and that specifically for him, even when he does attend such events it feels like meeting the same people over and over again. Such interactions don't leave him enriched because they don't actually challenge his conceptions of self, queerness, or any of the other identities that interpolate his personhood. Rather, he's found that when he's challenged about his politics or exposed to other ways of being queer, he actually grows and develops as a person. Thus, he wouldn't want so many people around him who are just like him, who don't push him. He remarks that it was actually through encounters with "radical" understandings of Blackness that he was able to navigate how he wanted to be as a person. Resonating with this, I reflect on how the different personalities I've encountered since coming to South Africa have shaped me.

That's what I've gotten the most from other queer people, and this experience in Cape Town and moving around South Africa. Even though there are so many different ways to just exist and it's only through meeting other people who either are queer or Black or both, whatever the different identity combinations are, that I actually learn and grow and like you said shape myself.

(Hodge, 2019)

There were many interactions that I've had that I didn't label as racism, I was just like oh that person is being a dick. It was through experiencing life with people who had very radical views on Blackness, not even pro Black they were just like anti white. I found that their experiences were a particular way and through them I understand the problematic elements of whiteness. But I also didn't agree with them fully but I was able to take a spoonful of lessons from them and navigate my life.

(Participant V, 2019)

We continue to use this spoonful analogy to speak about the ways in which we appropriate teachings from others to better understand and articulate ourselves. I express that I feel this, the grafting of different understandings from other people's understandings of themselves, is the essence of my queerness. Participant V shares his thoughts that he doesn't feel we can actually be ourselves alone, and that through community we learn more. Thus, he states that a gift from his queerness has actually been to engage with activism as a liberatory tool. This has meant actively calling out family who use the derogatory term *moffie* and working in organizing spaces. Describing the passage on his body map that reads, "join the revolution," we try to imagine a space where queer people, specifically Black queer people can just exist without severe harm to our lives. We decide that we must have each other, work together and be there for each other.

Queers will at some point will be able to just exist but I think it'll take a lot of us. It'll mean us sharing from our experiences.

(Participant V, 2019)
Hodge

Participant J – Coffee Conversation

I met Participant J in a coffee shop in Observatory first to explain the basis and scope of my project, and then to ask if they were interested in participating. As this conversation took place during the third week of the research period, I couldn't prolong things by scheduling another day to body map collage, and instead asked if I could interview her as we sat. I had the same questions as those I projected during the body mapping exercise with Participants V and D, and took the same approach as before where I listened and asked questions based on what was said. As soon as we sat down, before I could even ask a question Participant J had already started talking about her life growing up during apartheid, her Coloured identity, and here queerness. Specifically, she talks about her lack of interaction with white people outside of her grandmother, about whom she knew very little.

I hardly engaged with white people. The engagement would be the odd relative. Like my great grandmother was not moved with the Forced Removals Act, she was not reclassified as Coloured.

(Participant J, 2019)

She talks about this period as growing up during the “Dark Apartheid Era,” and how this time is distinct from South Africa post-democracy. As she continues sharing her narrative, the importance of this distinction becomes clearer, specifically in terms of the development of her queerness and the language she uses to describe herself. Starting from her earliest recollections, she talks about how her queerness was always an aspect of her identity, whether she actively acknowledged and cultivated that piece of herself or not. On this, we found common ground.

In terms of my queerness, I supposed I never got to come out. Just the physical aesthetics of my being and being very masculine presenting, I was always outed as such.

(Participant J, 2019)

My queerness is kind of assumed, and I know I haven’t had to come out in the ways that others potentially have had to come out.

(Hodge, 2019)

Here, I felt it necessary to dig a little into how being physically read as queer has potentially shaped her relationship to her queerness.

Being outed at such an early age, which was obviously violent passively or otherwise, I was the one who was catching up to my sexuality.

(Participant J, 2019)

I steered away from female-female sexual urges or acting out on it. I tried to conform. Even being this very masculine person, I was really just trying to fit in.

(Participant J, 2019)

She describes how trying to fit in was influenced by her commitment to Christianity, which was her safe haven at the time, and by living in spaces that appreciated her silences.

Being raised in a way that one must be seen not heard. I don't remember, I have a very clear memory, but I don't know at what point did I really start talking. I have so many memories being in my home being at family gatherings and not having a voice, just being there.

(Participant J, 2019)

Despite her silence, Participant J describes how her queerness was almost undeniable, and that those around her began to take notice even before she did. She began to seek out role models and figures who could potentially speak to the ways in which she navigated the world. Thus, she began to find queer community through the networks she already had.

I leveraged off the very few role models I had in my community, which ended up being very extravagant very effeminate men. In our South African culture, and cultures all over the world, those men have maintained their structure in communities. My community is no different.

(Participant J, 2019)

In terms of a woman role model there was nothing. I remember thinking when I first started coming up, Martina Navratilova who was the first out sportswoman that I know of at the time that I was becoming aware. This fucking white woman from Czechoslovakia in the states. I remember being like oh God really this can' be it

(Participant J, 2019)

As she starts talking more about her queer development, I ask how she came to the specific language of queer, and when along the line she adopted queer as her own personal identity. Here, she talks more about the nuances of her ethno-cultural background, where the language available to describe herself was at once slim and ill-fitting.

We have one word in Afrikaans, you are aware of that. The one word is *moffie* and I obviously couldn't identify with that. That taught me that within my community within my limited language there is something. The language I adopted from English, there is still very little. There isn't even work being done on formulating words in Afrikaans, we're light-years away from that. We've just latched onto English and then just latched

onto what's happening in the states. Because we are South African we look often to the West.

(Participant J, 2019)

Once she switched to English medium schools in high school, more of the language was available to her. However, she describes that during this period she identified as a lesbian. It was around the nineties, that she was dating an American Black woman who pushed her to think more critically and expansively about her identities. I shared that I, in somewhat different fashion, had meditated on the use of other language to describe myself, but that I didn't come to *queer* until I really reflected on what language made sense to me. I described that in my life I had only ever seen or experienced the word *gay* in respect to middle to upper class white men, which in no way reflected how I saw myself.

Fast-forward, I meet this amazing Black American woman who speaks a language of Self in terms of identity and queerness that I'd never heard. At the time I'm 20 years old, my reality then is do I have a job?

(Participant J, 2019)

Continuing to evoke the spirit of her twenty-year-old self, she talks about the experience being kicked out of her mother's house and how her first instincts became survival. This event catapulted her more fully into her queerness, an experience she foregrounds against the burgeoning political democracy of South Africa at the time.

It was about survival. Where I could be free and felt a sense of home was really in the nightlife and the club life. We had just kind of dawned on our new democracy and were in this pink cloud of freedom where a little bit of class issues and race issue lifted. They've now subsequently settled, like I said it was a pink cloud.

(Participant J, 2019)

She returns to describing her relationship with the Black American woman she was dating at the time, and how it exposed her to so much and was a fundamental force in helping her explore what it means to be a person of color (POC). She asserted that it was during those two years that she experienced more growth and exposure in respect to her identities than she did in a decade. Narrating her arrival back to South Africa after having spent three months in the US with her lover, she notes that it was through experiencing the pink cloud of democratic euphoria that she was able to interrogate the limitations of being gay and lesbian. She describes this as a bursting of the old order, and appropriates the idea of the melting pot to articulate that the democratic pink cloud allowed people the space to expand.

Here, I ask how she got involved with queer event planning. This sit down interview is not the first time I've met Participant J, but is the first time that we've actually had the opportunity to speak. I attended an event, the Pink Party, that she and her partner had thrown the weekend prior as a social gathering space for Cape Town's queer people. These Pink Parties are monthly affairs that intend to draw an array of people from all over Cape Town. She tracks her journey to

Hodge

becoming an event organizer by articulating her desire to create spaces that she would want to inhabit, and spaces that usefully diverged from the predominant white marketed and white owned spaces. She goes deeper into the nuances of the club scene that helped her define her queerness, and how event planning is her way of paying homage to that.

We would cling together very much in that club kid kind of way. We weren't real friends; we were friends for the night. Depending on what drugs you took. You know that kind of false freedom I supposed. Just growing increasingly more aware and increasingly more tired of not being included and not being represented. Wanting to break that and create a space where people like me want to come to.

(Participant J, 2019)

To actually create these spaces, she talks about how she teamed up with other women friends to reach different people and different groups. Although she says the spaces were initially women only, she remarks, "that is what I needed, and what was needed at the time" (Participant J, 2019). So, in this way the Pink Party idea started as a project between Participant J and her friends.

It started as an extension of who we consider our family and who we consider our friends and their support. The fact that people can commit to one night a month, keeping that as our core. The support of the city to have people from all walks of life, I understand that we aren't always accessible because of the locations we find. We're actually walking into heterosexual places and asking them to team up with us for one night.

Hodge

(Participant J, 2019)

It was important for her to emphasize that her and her partner create these spaces to decisively depart from the oversexed and drug riddled environments that are perhaps more available. Further, asserting that Cape Town is very white male centered, they wanted to create spaces that supported women and people of color in their mission. She intones, “we started out as that and we’ve continued as that” (Participant J, 2019). Speaking a little more on the reasons why white men dominate the queer scene, she concedes that it is because they have the money and the resources to do so, “they operate in a separate world independent from us” (Participant J, 2019). Despite her rapidly approaching exhaustion, she recognizes that there exists a continued need for such spaces and that the support she receives helps her to continue. I ask her whether she has given any thought to a succession plan, and she replies that she hasn’t because she still feels ready and able to organize.

The organizing process, however, is not easy. Participant J spends much time and energy booking spots and researching locations that are at once safe, accessible, and appealing. It’s not always easy work, but it is work she willingly does to make sure that certain communities are represented.

Right now our trans community are hardly represented. Most venues that operate, they are not welcome. We have male-male only spaces, obviously white male only spaces, who are turning away transgendered men. I’ve experienced also where someone with a female only event turning away transgender women.

Hodge

(Participant J, 2019)

If you are Coloured and you are a drag queen, there is a space for you because that is a legacy that my community has built.

(Participant J, 2019)

To me, it became apparent that she was making a distinction between her communities, and so I asked what she meant by community in this instance. Specifically speaking about Coloured people, she intones that this would be her direct community. Here we venture into a discussion on what this means for her.

In my mind I don't think of leaving my community because then would be leaving behind my responsibilities. I could move closer to the CBT where things are I guess more cosmopolitan, I could move closer to where I work. I don't have to stay a two-hour bus ride from Witches Plain. I have those opportunities and the resources. I don't have family members who are dependent on my resources and my job.

(Participant J, 2019)

I wouldn't feel safe living in a Coloured community. I would be picked on, I would be threatened, because who I am and the life that I've chosen just makes people uncomfortable still. Meanwhile, I think every South African right now should know somebody who is gay.

(Participant J, 2019)

With that being said, we begin talking about how the diverse nature of South Africa means people's experiences can be so different. She tells me of her frustrations with the lack of non-English language surrounding queerness.

I speak to my Black friends, and they tell of their experience where the language is there in so many of our languages, but there's been no reclaiming process. It's still incredibly negative.

(Participant J, 2019)

In many languages it is there, but not in my language. And my language is connected to the historic oppressors, which I have reclaimed.

(Participant J, 2019)

This reclamation process is ongoing, as she narrates the current Afrikaans versus Afrikaaps movement happening around the country. She describes the tension she experiences with family who speak the "pure" version of Afrikaans, and how they view Afrikaaps as a disgrace to the established language. Here, she stops to talk about how the development of Afrikaans has effectively stopped, while the Afrikaaps movement has only just begun. Recognizing the language has become a movement that has inspired and garnered much support from Coloured people around the country. She traces this development from the movement in the fifties that has been revived in recent years through literature and academia. In personal regards to the movement, she is hopeful.

I think that if we are going to develop queerness in our language its going to come from Afrikaaps

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(Participant J, 2019)

She makes this claim based on the linguistic construction of *Gayle*, a form of Afrikaaps derived from Afrikaans that, “is also this crazy melting pot of languages” (Participant J, 2019). Although *Gayle* is very region specific, she talks about how it has its roots in the queer drag scene, and how it has been essentially created and operationalized by queer people. This was the language that she learned when articulating her burgeoning queer identity in her early 20s. She learned from older queers, effeminate men in the community who were able to teach this secret language. Further, she emphasizes that the language has its roots in District 6, and is thus formed through a patchwork of identities, experiences, and cultures deeply embedded in the South African framework.

The first recordings of it date back to the 1950s and in the language that the drag queens used. The premise is simple, every word that you want to use you replace it with a female name that starts the same. Its very basic, the development is it obviously not national, it’s kind of like communities of exposure. There is a base for it.

(Participant J, 2019)

We are talking about a time of pageants, or beautiful performances, we are talking about our slave celebration on the 2nd of January, the minstrel carnival and you will always find the drag queen walking the front, she kind of leads the pack. In communities that were incredibly religious, staunch Muslim and Christian, but it was accepting on that day for that

drag queen to walk leading the troops. This is where the language comes from.

(Participant J, 2019)

It's interesting that the drag queen leads the procession; that her presence is deemed acceptable in the event of the slave celebration warrants further discussion. I ask Participant J if she has experienced or witnessed other such instances where queer people or people engaged in queer(y)ing are conditionally accepted. Here, she discusses her father who, working in the mines, was able to talk about the queerness of the mineworkers. He narrates how these communities of men so far away from home developed new modes of relationship and understanding.

One of the language elements my father spoke to me about was *Fanagalo*, which was also a mixture mainly of African languages and Afrikaans and a little bit of English. I suppose it was spoken with the in crowd only. I can't imagine people who were not flexible, still wanting to be incredibly racist and not living in the space of being unified. My father was inside of that.

(Participant J, 2019)

With the Black renaissance movement and the previous government of Thabo Mbeki who said that being queer is 'un-African', my father told me about the relationships between men, based on need not desire, that lived in the time of the mines. The way he explained it to me is that it was

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similar to what we still experience in a prison environment, that those men are not queer, but this is not the language my father used. It is out of a need, and it does not define you outside of that environment. He explained to me about the sexual intercourse amongst men, that it was often not penetration. As if you were tucking your penis and the men penetrating you would then penetrate in between you legs.

(Participant J, 2019)

She goes on to explain that mining life perhaps mimicked larger society through the ways in which effeminate men made their way to the mines as home keepers. Thus, she describes her father's anger at Thabo Mbeki for saying queer is 'un-African,' because he felt Mbeki ignored and silenced the different modes of living occurring in places such as the mines. Further, because the companies employing these men did not provide effective safe sex tools (condoms) or information, many people got infected and then perhaps infected their families. She describes this as part of the legacy of the Mbeki presidency.

It's part of our history because we are not birthed from queerness, and yet we maintain a steady percent of every population in every country.

(Participant J, 2019)

We continue by talking about how queer people, and thus queerness exist everywhere whether they are called queer or not. Returning to talk about South Africa, Participant J describes the relative legal safety that she feels at home in Cape Town that she perhaps didn't feel in Tanzania or Zanzibar when she visited.

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She attempts to detangle comparisons between the three nations by saying that, “a lot of us are safer, but not all of us are safe” (Participant J, 2019).

Continuing by talking about our ideas of community, we share a bit about what community means to us, and how we go about creating that. Sharing that she has several friends whom she’s known for around 20 years, she explains how she understands community as something that one both moves and moves through. We talk about people we’ve encountered when organizing, and how listening to and sharing different experiences has helped us deepen our understandings of mental health, personal growth, and how we relate to the collective. When exploring these ideas, we come to the conversation of what resources we have at our disposal to actually create and support our communities. I confess that I’m still developing my ideas surrounding what resources I have, because I’ve had to unpack the idea that resources are solely tangible goods or money. Through experiencing more of life and challenging my ideas of things, I’ve learned that sometimes resources can be as simple as showing up, holding space, and being present for others. In this way, we talk about resources as how we navigate and nurture our interpersonal relationships to be there for others and ourselves.

If my body is always a political playground, where do I step outside of politics?

(Hodge, 2019)

I have a small group of friends, and some of them I've had for over 20 years. We go in and out of each other's lives, but I think to a measure I've always held space for them as they have for me. By allowing them freedom of yes we are collecting and no we are not.

(Participant J, 2019)

I've thought about this and I don't think we can say that there exists or should exist one idea of queer community. We've already said that everyone has their own journey their own way, and to me that creates the community, those different ways that moving in and out of each others lives that creates the community.

(Hodge, 2019)

My queerness has never been a struggle. That alone makes me fortunate. Even though I was confused and I fought against it, the reality is there was no other way of being.

(Participant J, 2019)

Through her struggles Participant J has made peace in herself and found community through accepting and standing in her queerness. Her community, however, is perhaps sectioned between her racial and sexual identities. More

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specifically, she draws a parallel between her queer and Coloured communities and states that they really don't often overlap. In the overlaps exist several cherished relationships; again she speaks on her group of queer women friends that she mentioned before. They knew her when she was a "baby dyke" (Participant J, 2019). She still maintains friendships with a few older queers within the Coloured community she inhabits, and many across racial and class boundaries, yet the overlap is still small.

It's minute. It's like if you had to draw two circles, maybe where the two circles cross that little space.

(Participant J, 2019)

Even in the space of queer community, yes that is my community but I don't necessarily feel like I belong to it. It is a space that I am moving through. The people don't belong to me, the experiences do and that's why it not this cup that you fill up, but is fluid.

(Participant J, 2019)

As a masculine women and a person of color, that obviously makes me very niche. And I can walk the street without seeing another masculine woman for days. And suddenly I have an experience where I see three in two hours of my day. That's not something I often speak of; there are not many who I can speak on this with. It is a road that I have to walk alone.

(Participant J, 2019)

The connection I feel when a masculine woman nods back or smiles back. I don't have words for that.

(Participant J, 2019)

I think the queer community that accepts me the most is the drag queen community, because we operate as two opposites of a coin in terms of gender. That is where I am most balanced.

(Participant J, 2019)

Eventually, we entered a discussion on privilege and Participant J asks me how I've dealt with privilege in my life. I answer that I have to sit in and be

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aware of the privileges I hold because, “ to act like I don’t have it, like these things don’t impact the opportunities and resources that I have is wrong. I can’t do that and still talk about this idea of community because community cant exist if I’m not even willing to acknowledge the privilege that I have in whatever shape that comes” (Hodge, 2019). We discuss how we balance our privileges amidst our drive to create and partake in community; that we both give and take in equitable relationship so as to maintain balance. Wrapping up our conversation, Participant J shares the special nature of their community, and some words she would say to her younger self.

She [her sister] ultimately when everything else fails, she is my queer community. And she is made of one.

(Participant J, 2019)

I never dreamt of my life as an adult and now I wish I had dreamt bigger. I wasn’t allowed to dream.

(Participant J, 2019)

Discussion

While each participant describes their individual narrative and personal reflections surrounding their queerness, there exists a common thread articulating how the development of themselves as queer people was both formed by and formative of other identities they embody. The focus of this section will be to tease out particular nuances of this thread, put them in conversation with existing literature, and theorize what more can be gleaned through the experiences of Cape Town queer people.

Debunking Queer as ‘un-African’

During both the group body mapping exercise with Participants D and V, and the conversational interview with Participant J, the idea that queer is ‘un-African’ and thus a symptom of foreign whiteness was expressed. Despite the existence of indigenous queer identities, each participant being an example, there persists the general notion that to be queer or queer aspiring is to approximate oneself to whiteness (Participant D, 2019). While scholars such as Epprecht (2001), Hames (2008), and others have worked to debunk the notion that queerness is ‘un-African’ through tracking other language and terminologies that reveal historical understandings of differing sexualities, the limitations of these works is perhaps that they don’t track how and when the language of queerness was first operationalized. That being said, Participant J (2019) discussed how her entry point into queer understanding came around the time of the South African democratic transition, where the auspices of democracy and global

interconnectedness pushed her to challenge the limitations of language she formerly used to describe herself – lesbian.

The experience Participant J describes can perhaps be understood through the ways in which, “the inclusion of ‘sexual orientation’ in post-apartheid South Africa’s constitutional Equality Clause can instead be read as a queer globalization” (Oswin 2007, 93). This is framed within the idea that for so long apartheid South Africa fashioned itself around the European ideal, that the new constitution represented a chance to imagine a new post-colonial African politics that acknowledged queerness as African (Oswin 2007). Here, queer is not merely appropriated from the Western frame, but is reinterpreted and given new meaning by those South Africans articulating a queer identity. Thus, what Participant J (2019) describes as a bursting of the old order towards imagining something new during the 1994 democratic transition, is perhaps indicative of the genesis of the language of queerness in South Africa.

Further, the history of the mines the Participant J illustrates through her conversation with her father, is perhaps a tangible example of a queer South African understanding. Epprecht (2001) describes the male-male mine marriages that Participant J depicts, and underscores her assertion that relationships not only emerged organically, but should be constitutive of a queer South African understanding. It is perhaps also important to address Participant J’s connection between mining and prison conditions. Taiwo Adetunji Osinubi, in his essay *Creaturely Lives and Sexual Exposure in African Prison Writing* asserts the following:

Imprisonment not only ruptures domestic space and re-gender the arrested but also radically upends all previously accepted social codifications of biological life and attendant life processes (Mathebani, Monro, Reddy 2018, 56).

Understanding the mines as a space of upend is perhaps necessary towards developing a nuanced idea of the ways in which queerness shaped the space. While this is not the focus of this project, I use this history to ground an understanding of queerness in South Africa's past that highlights the malleability of sex-gender conventions in this space in ways that complicate the notion of a completely heterosexual Africa.

It would be remiss, however, to not account for the ways in which the linkages between queer and 'un-African' continue to implicate racialized bodies, specifically bodies of color. Participant's experiences alluded to the idea that, "cultural politics consistently mark the Black queer body as the constitutive outside of blackness and the queer body is subsequently racialized as white" (Livermon 2012, 314). While Participants D and V identify as Black and Participant J identifies as Coloured, each participant describes how they became immersed in the language of queerness around the same time they began attending English medium schools. Particularly, Participant V's description of his parent's attributing his queer development to his attending white (read English) schools, perhaps alludes to ideas connecting English to whiteness that, when translated onto the Black body, entail approximation to whiteness. More clearly, by framing English as foreign and white, it becomes easier to dismiss the ways in

which queer people of color shape their subjectivity in English in ways that make the language more completely their own. Here, queerness is attributed as the byproduct of exposing people of color to Western, white modes of expression; what does it mean then to Black or of color and have subjectivity in these spaces? It thus becomes necessary, to understand Participant V's linguistic development, being that he describes English as the language in which he feels most comfortable expressing himself and the language in which he has found community, as an extension of his subjectivity. Further, Participant D's (2019) self-proclaimed mastery of the English language where, "mastery is not only really being able to express yourself, but where there is a gap being able to fill it, creating something new" is perhaps indicative of the ways in which English is becoming depersonalized from whiteness through being remade by people of color. More research is perhaps necessary to excavate this linkage.

With that said, however, English is not the only language that participants were exposed to or were using to unpack their identities. Participant D (2019) shares his reservations about using words in his native Zulu to describe himself, because of their derogatory underpinnings. Articulating that queer has been reclaimed, he asserts that he cannot envision such a reclamation process for the words in Zulu that describe different sexualities, because of their violent nature. Further, Participant J contends that in her native Afrikaans, there are no words to describe feminine sexual different, in that the word *moffie* is the only term. As *moffie* typically used to refer derogatorily to effeminate gay men (Klein 2009), Participant J did not and could not see herself reflected in the language and sought terms more indicative of her experience. Thus, there exists no language

perhaps native to South Africa that participants' felt described their experiences as queer people; queer was appropriated from English and given new meaning.

Conceptualizing Queer Community

Participants assert that developing their understandings of queerness was relational and interpersonal in nature, and that this development happened through their respective communities. Similar to Zoë Wicomb's (1998) ideas surrounding Blackness, participants drew meanings of queerness, "from multiple, overlapping and contractor belongings and not-belongings" (Erasmus 2017, 24). Participants V and D both speak at length about how living in the suburbs influenced the ways in which they conceptualized themselves as Black queer people. Posited as a white space, Participant D describes how living in the suburbs and attending classes with white people from an early age helped him to internalize, "this deep internal feeling of the right to take up space," that was perhaps formative of how he approaches his University of Cape Town (UCT) class environment. Putting this in conversation with Participant J's three-month trip to the USA, perhaps reveals an understanding of queerness imbricated with class. In fact, it was through my discussion on unpacking privilege with Participant J that it became apparent how much our queerness is shaped by the resources we have. Thus access to English language instruction, the internet, cell-phones, modes of travel, all things each participant and I have, are privileges that have shaped and continue to shape our queerness. It is perhaps a limitation of this study that more cannot be done to excavate the relationship between class and the use of queer language in South Africa. That each participant spoken to came from

a relatively middle-class, collegiate background speaks to an understanding of queerness couched in this frame.

Community remained a central focus during much of our discussion, to the extent that community clearly defined an insider-outsider threshold. To each participant, community consisted of chosen family, friends, and close relatives with whom participants formed bonds of kinship. These kinship bonds helped to facilitate the process by which participants came to know themselves through sociogenic ways of coming to know (Erasmus 2017). Coming to know oneself in relation to others made participants aware of the limits to which community could be defined. More specifically, both Participants V and J speak at length about how white queer people center themselves in queer movements and spaces, thus dismissing those who do not fit the ideals of whiteness. Jane Bennett (2018) complicates these ideas when she builds the argument that it is oxymoronic to be both white and queer (Mathebani, Munro, Reddy 2018). Culminating in the idea that, “no-political language in which queer may co-exist with the interests of whiteness,” I draw from Bennett during my conversation with Participant J. I’m skeptical of his description of white ‘queers’ because my framework doesn’t allow for queerness to exist where whiteness is aspirational; that is why I persisted in saying white gays. What then does this mean for South Africa, and to what extent is a queer politic imbricated with whiteness?

Developing New Queer Language

Participant J imagines a language of queerness unique to South Africa drawn from the burgeoning Afrikaaps movement. Described as a living language,

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(Schuster 2016) Afrikaaps is a linguistic representation of the connections between the people, languages, and cultures that have interacted in the Cape. As such, the movement to reclaim Afrikaaps has meant not only an acknowledgment of this history, but entails reimagining the future of South African subjectivities. Participant J alludes to this future when she espouses hope that Afrikaaps might one day foment ways of articulating and understanding queerness that are entirely unique to the Cape Town, South Africa setting. While the scope of this project cannot begin to address the connections between Afrikaaps and queer imagining, it is my hope that more research be done in this regard in the future.

Further, the idea of *Gayle* as a queer South African language complicates how queerness appears in Cape Town and South Africa more broadly. As it is historically recorded, Gayle developed from a few slang words into locally specific versions of a secret language used by English-speaking and Afrikaans speaking gay men (Cage & Evans 2003). It is described as, “a language which developed to meet the particular communicative needs of a specific portion of South African society in a specific socio-political and historical context”(Cage & Evans 2003, 1). In this way, we can approach Gayle as an historical manifestation of language queering that has supported queer people. That Participant J, a queer woman, was taught the language of gay men by gay men perhaps speaks to the ways in which Gayle could be further taught to meet the needs of other people in the LGBTQ community.

With that said, the realities of living in a nation with eleven official languages mean that the language in which queerness is expressed should not be

uniform. Both Afrikaaps and Gayle originate and are operationalized almost exclusively in Coloured communities, which only comprise a portion of the South African population. It is perhaps a limitation of this research that more could not have been done to excavate the nuances of other languages that hold space for queerness in their linguistic construction.

Reflections

Embodying queer identity does not simply mean adopting the American frame. To be queer in Cape Town has meant shaping, changing, destroying, and remaking ones idea of queerness with respect to the unique contours and conditions of life in South Africa. As such, queerness is no more foreign to Cape Town than the winds that blow; just as air travels across seas to be transmuted into life by those who breathe, so is queerness transformed by those identifying as queer.

In this paper, I shared space with three people whose stories, experiences, and unique understandings of their queerness not only helped me understand my positionality and development, but whose narratives texturize what it means to be queer in Cape Town, South Africa. Their struggles with queerness's perceived 'un-African' nature, the language in which it is packaged, and their work to articulate queer community amidst working to make sense of their bodies perhaps brings more context and more questions surrounding what queer means in this space.

It is my hope that we as queer people can continue to learn from one another, learn from each other, and create spaces of belonging together that further expand our ideas of what it means to be queer. Such work will require not only engaging in more research related to queer subjectivities and sense making, but creating room for the narratives of queer people to claim their own space.

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Body Outline –

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Appendix/Appendices

Body-Mapping Outline

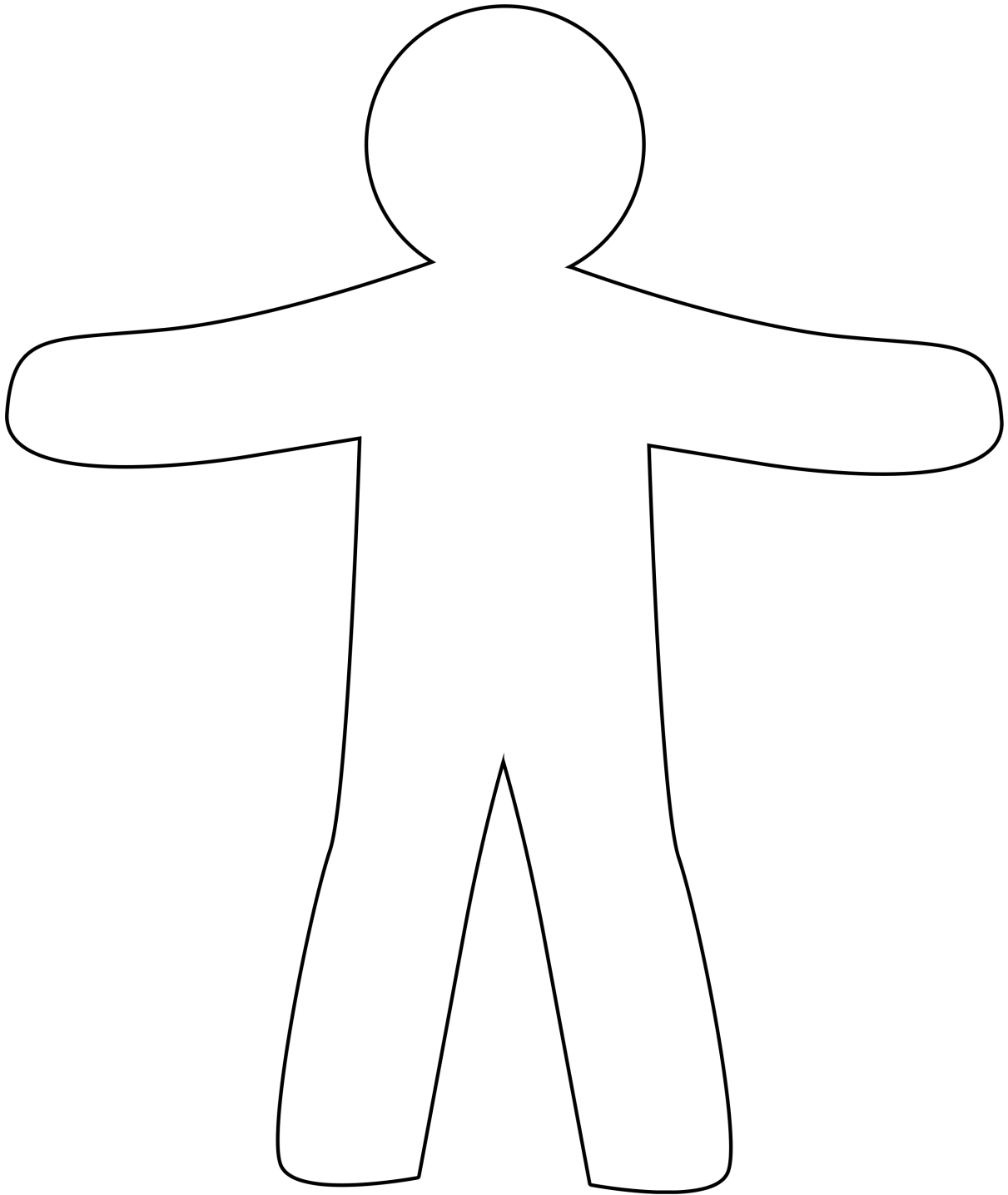


Figure 1.1 – Participant V's Body Map

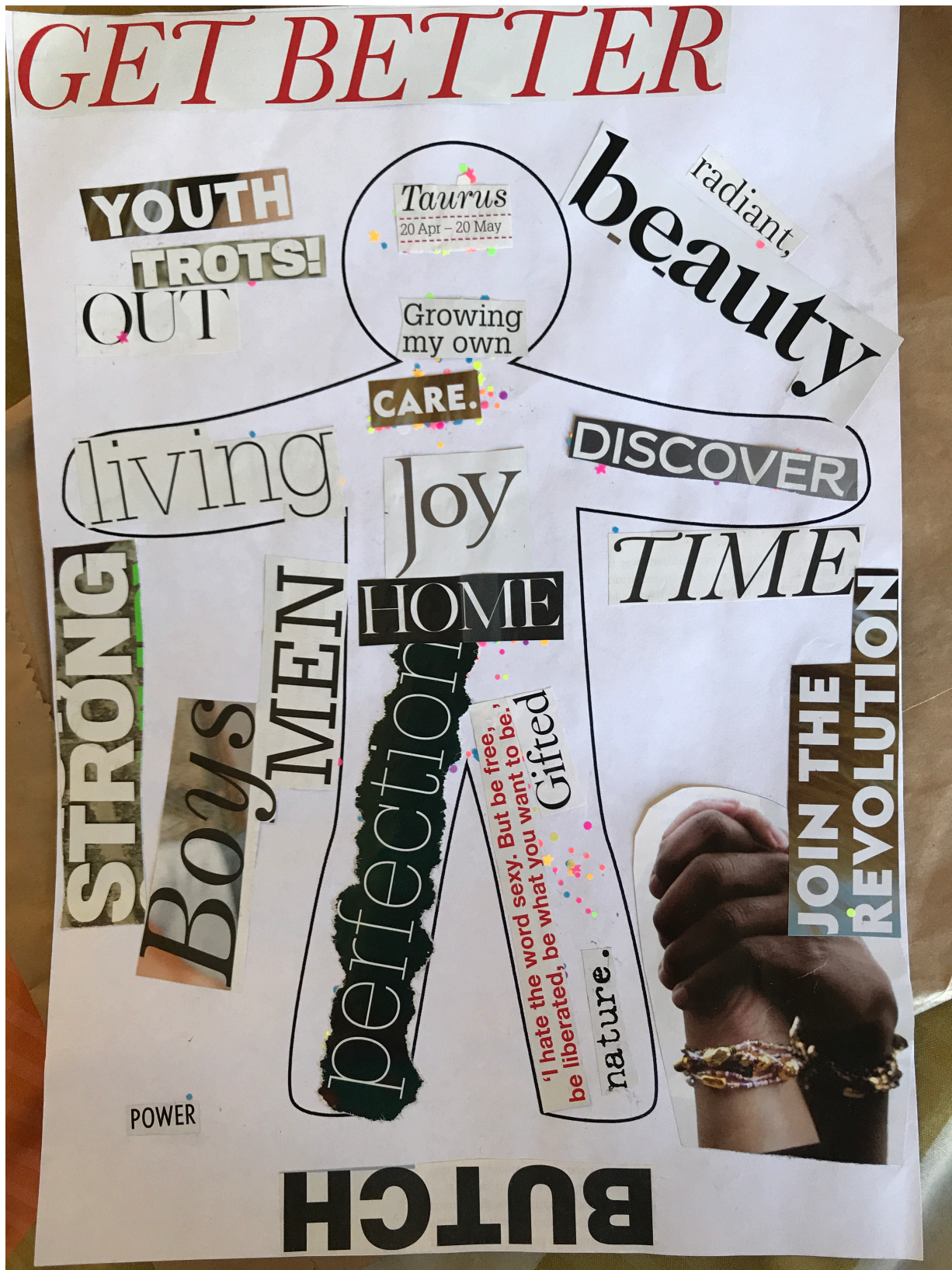


Figure 1.2 – Participant D's Body Map

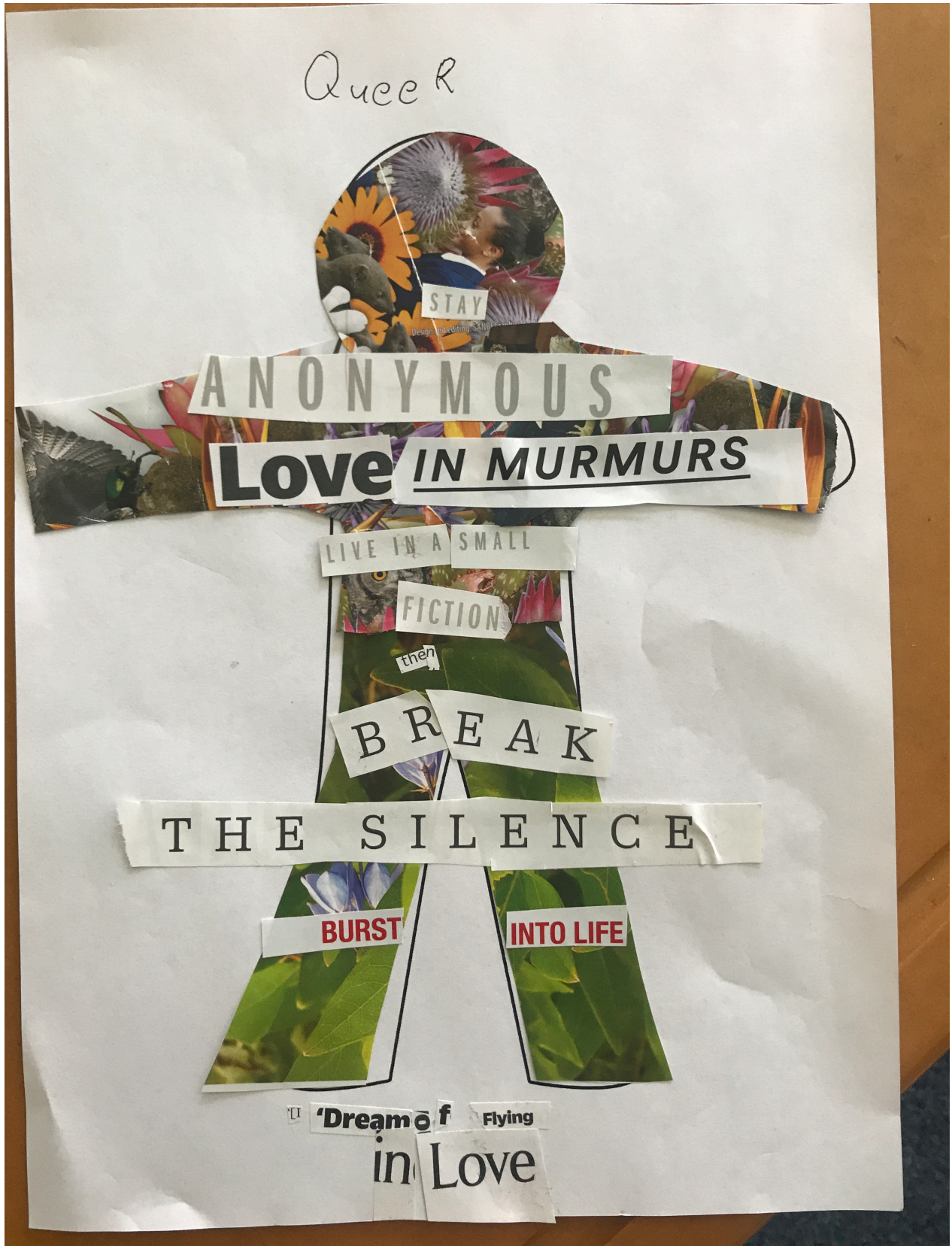


Figure 1.3 – Hodge’s Body Map

