

“Love Beyond Colour”: The Formation of Interracial Gay Men Intimate Relationships in Post-apartheid South Africa

Abstract

South Africa became the first country in Africa to legalise same-sex marriages in its post-apartheid constitution. The formally instituted racial and sexual discriminations that dominated during the apartheid period were revised and equality of all citizens, irrespective of their race and sexual orientations, represents one of the key achievements of democratic South Africa. The current constitution gives room for people to express their sexualities freely without being discriminated against. This recognition is bridging the gap of racial and sexual exclusion and inclusion that were created during and before the apartheid era. Despite the everyday negative experiences of gay men based on their sexual orientation in post-apartheid South Africa, gay partners persist in their intimate relationships and continue to negotiate their social and constitutional rights. What is interesting at the moment is the increasing visibility of interracial gay partners in this country as a whole. This paper explores how a small group of men of different racial backgrounds assert their constitutional rights through the formation of interracial same-sex intimate relationships that used to be a criminal offence.

The study is based on an eight-month fieldwork and data were collected through in-depth interviews from ten interracial gay partners (comprising of twenty gay men). The study found that there is growing formation of gay men romantic relationships that transcend colour in post-apartheid South Africa given the previous history of racial segregation and criminalisation of same-sex attractions as the ‘other’ in the country. The two common ways in which gay men that participated in this study form their household are through face-to-face and computer mediated relationships.

Keywords: Family Sociology* Interracial gay family* Face-to-Face dating* Internet dating* Homosexuality* Post-apartheid South Africa*

Introduction

Countries around the world are currently witnessing changes in traditional family structures. Changes in family patterns have been argued to be the consequence of a variety of social, cultural and technological transitions, and an increase in personal freedoms and choices (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). Giddens (1992:33) states that “. . . sexual diversity, although still regarded by many hostile groups as perversion, has moved out of Freud’s case-history notebooks to the everyday social world.” Similarly, Bristow (1996: 247) maintains that “same-sex desire can be threatening to those institutions of power, such as the family and the state that assumes that heterosexuality is a natural, as opposed to a cultural phenomenon.” What these quotes hint at is that whilst ‘threatening’, the resilience of same-sex intimacy and people’s choices to adopt non-conventional lifestyles is reshaping the ‘everyday social world’ and the thinking about what constitutes family and marriage.

Feminist critique of family and gender relations has also rendered the concept of family problematic, hence, the call for a conceptual turn away from the conventional definition of family (Smart, 2007). According to Giddens (1999) family is a ‘shell institution’ whose forms have changed over the years but its essence remains static. On the other hand, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002: 203) argue that family is a “zombie category that is dead and still alive.” The modern family sociology has witnessed the usage of the term ‘families’ to recognise the various forms of lifestyles and intimate relationships that exist (Morgan, 2011). For example, same-sex intimate relationships that were once excluded from the scope of traditional family life has now been embraced and accepted as another form of family (Edwards, McCarthy and Gillies, 2012; Weeks, 2007).

Arguably, family sociology has witnessed a paradigm shift from a general view of family as a monolithic entity to recognising family pluralism in the last few decades (Edwards, McCarthy and Gillies, 2012; Biblarz and Savci, 2010; Acock & Demo, 1994; Cheal, 1991). Recognition and appreciation of diversities such as race, class and gender are at the forefront of this change (Allen and Demo, 1995). This shift includes the construction of day-to-day lives of same-sex households. It should be mentioned that feminist scholars have made important contributions to the role and position of women in families but lesser contribution has been made to same-sex families’ research. Similarly, it has been argued that same-sex family research is one of the important aspects of family scholarship that has not been adequately explored and it is yet to make serious impact in family studies (Berkowitz,

2007; Doherty, Boss, LaRossa, Schumm, and Steinmetz, 1993). 'Family' as a sociological concept is at the transformation phase in the twenty-first century. It has been argued that individuals are forming enduring romantic relationships outside the traditional concept of family and this trend has been observed by some family sociologists (Budgeon and Roseneil, 2004). For example, this familial tendency outside the conventional family unit has been described by Stacey (1998) as 'brave new families' and by Weston (1991) as 'family of choice'. The traditional family unit has enjoyed favour over other forms of familial relations until the late 80s when family sociologists began to explore and pluralise the concept such that they now speak of 'families' rather than the 'family' (Biblarz & Savci, 2010; Berkowitz, 2007; Morgan, 1996). The shift in the definition of family has influenced gay men's sense of belonging as gay and as partners that can form enduring romantic relationships (Lau, 2012; Rosenfeld and Thomas, 2012; Shieh, 2010; Berkowitz, 2007).

However, in spite of the fact that some social scientists, particularly family sociologists, have been advocating for the plurality of family, some scholars continue to question the compatibility of 'family' and 'homosexuality' (Biblarz & Savci, 2010). For example, Butler (2004) argues that kinship is a heterosexual phenomenon. In her analysis of the gay marriage debate in France, she maintains that gay and lesbian couples have the same rights as heterosexual couples, except the right to adopt children. This limitation of the right to adopt children was based on the fact that only a conventional family unit (that is, heterosexual couples) can bring up children appropriately and, that heterosexual couples are best at instilling the cultural values in children because of the presence of male and female role models (Biblarz & Savci, 2010).

Same-sex romantic relationship is seen as a threat to the development of children because homosexuality is seen as a subculture of the mainstream (heterosexuality) culture (Halberstam, 2005). Some writers have questioned whether the full acceptance of gay and lesbian families is possible because the very concept of 'family' is entrenched in heteronormativity (Biblarz & Savci, 2010; Butler, 2004). Despite the different arguments regarding the compatibility of homosexuality and family, it is important that the definition of family accommodates all other kinds of familial arrangements that exist apart from the conventional heterosexual family unit. Much research on families often focuses on heterosexual households because lesbian and gay men are thought of as individuals without a stable household. This assumption is rooted in the societal belief that views gayness and family as two somewhat contradictory different concepts. This is because the construction of same-sex family challenges the traditional patriarchal family concept and gender relations

(Laird, 1993). Given the insubstantial attention same-sex familial relations have received in family studies, family sociologists have welcomed this new theoretical understanding of families, hence, the current research on interracial gay partnerships in South Africa.

Family in South Africa has also been viewed as the bedrock of society and this has conventionally been ascribed to opposite-sex couples (Lubbe, 2007; Johnson, 2004). Heteronormativity is the custom in South African society, and there have always been negative responses towards other forms of intimate relationships, despite the constitutional rights of same-sex partners in the country. This study departs from general legal and moral discourses about homosexuality and focuses more on interracial gay men familial relations and their everyday life in post-apartheid South African society. As such, this paper examines the two common ways in which interracial gay men intimacy is formed in post-apartheid South Africa.

Homosexuality Discourses in Africa: A Review of Literature

There have been different discourses about the visibility of homosexuals, particularly same-sex partners, in Africa. Some writers have argued that it is un-African while other scholars' studies reveal that homosexuality has been in Africa since the earliest time (McAllister, 2013; Makofane, 2013). In the pre-colonial Africa, some heterosexual married men and women engaged in same-sex relationships outside their home but no name was ascribed to such relationships (Ajibade, 2013; Wallace, 2010; Kantor, 2009; Arnfred, 2004; Kendall, 1998). This clearly shows that sexual desires were not attached to gender (Wallace, 2010; Esterberg, 2002). Conversely, colonial and post-colonial Africa gave different stereotypical names to same-sex sexual desires and was subsequently criminalised (Ajibade, 2013). Post-colonial Africa conflated sexuality with gender and this led to the current state of homophobia in the continent. Some scholars have argued that the introduction of Western religion, such as Christianity, brought about the criminalisation of same-sex relationships and propagated that heterosexual unions are the norm while other relationships outside it are abnormal and not natural (Ajibade, 2013; Sonnekus, 2013, Dlamini, 2006). This is entrenched in the ideology that only opposite-sex couples can procreate and form an ideal family unit (Van Zyl, 2011). Procreation and patriarchy were the underlying factors of heterosexual unions in Africa. For example, similar ideology could be seen in the apartheid Nationalist government ideology that was well-established in the Dutch Reformed Church principles. This ideology gave credence to heterosexual unions, industriousness and

patriarchy (Gustavo Gomes, 2013; Sonnekus, 2013). This is because procreation is believed to be the divine connection between the past and future (Thornton, 2003).

Prevailing discourses in the continent tend to suggest that same-sex relationships are un-African and that sexuality in Africa is largely a heterosexual phenomenon. For instance, Robert Mugabe barred the organisation of Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ) in 1995 from participating in an international book fair arguing that “sodomites and perverts had no rights at all” (Welch, 2000:12). Critics suggest, in contrast, that homosexuality has been in Zimbabwe long before colonialism as noted by the established use of the Shona word, *ngochani*, which means ‘homosexual’ (Makofane, 2013; Stobie, 2003; Welch, 2000). Namibian Minister, Jerry Ekandjo, announced in 1996 that homosexuality was not natural and not part of African culture. He therefore ordered police officers to eradicate gays and lesbians from Namibia because they were said to reveal social norms at odds with that of mainstream Namibian society (Amupadhi, 2000; Murray, 1998). In 2002, the Ugandan President, Yoweri Museveni, ordered the arrest and imprisonment of homosexuals in the country (Stobie, 2003). In the same vein, Daniel Arap Moi (the Kenyan President) also declared war on homosexuals because he believed that same-sex relationship is alien to Africa (Luchsinger, 2000). Same-sex relationships were also prohibited in South Africa during the apartheid era (Sonnekus, 2013; McAllister, 2013; Gevisser & Cameron, 1994). Most of the current African leaders reject same-sex intimate relationship and believe that it is un-African. Past and current studies have shown that homosexuality is African and what is un-African is homophobia (Mafokane, 2013; Ajibade, 2013; Van Zyl, 2011; Kelly, 2011; Dlamini, 2006; Reddy, 2001). Epprecht’s (2008) extensive research on same-sex relationships in Africa shows that same-sex attraction is part of African culture. Similarly, Reddy’s (2001) and Phillips’s (2003) studies also reveal the presence of same-sex intimate relationships in Africa since the earliest time. Ajibade’s (2013) study of Yoruba people in the South-Western part of Nigeria shows the presence of same-sex relationships in the country since the earliest time despite the recent criminalisation of same-sex attractions in that country. Similar to heterosexual relationships, some of the studies on homosexuality in Africa reveal that same-sex intimate relationships in traditional African societies were established in terms of hierarchical, patriarchal, gender relations, where partners assumed almost conventional masculine and feminine roles (Ajibade, 2013; Van Zyl, 2011; Salo et al., 2010; Wieringa, 2005, Murray, 2004). Conversely, modern discourses on same-sex intimate relationships in Africa give credence to equality in gender relations but this is seen as a threat

to the dominant African definition of marriage, family and patriarchal gender and power relations (Ajibade, 2013; Van Zyl, 2011).

The Nigerian government recently passed a bill that anybody caught in same-sex intimate relationships will be jailed for 14 years (The Economist, 2014). While this is the case at the national level, some Sharia states governed by Islamic law in the country have instated the death penalty for same-sex unions (Ajibade, 2013). This is extraordinary since, although kinship is regulated through marriage in Africa, it is recognised that some men and women have been involved in same-sex relationships since the earliest time (Makofane, 2013; Sonnekus, 2013; Epprecht, 2008; Dlamini, 2006; Morgan & Wieringa, 2005; Cock, 2003; Murray & Roscoe, 1998). It is therefore noteworthy that heterosexual hegemony acquired dominance in Africa through colonial law on sexuality and implementation of Christian marriage that is based on procreation (Makofane, 2013; Van Zyl, 2011). Having examined the past and prevailing discourses of same-sex relationships in Africa in this section, the following section examines same-sex relationships in South Africa from the apartheid era to post-apartheid period.

Racial/Sexual-Apartheid South Africa

Historically, one of the most common ways to distinguish a superior group from a marginalised one is the use of discriminatory policies. Like in some countries in Europe and America, South Africa witnessed a malicious racial discrimination and segregation system of government (apartheid) in history. The apartheid system of governance that marginalised the black South Africans and other minorities, such as coloureds and Indians, stemmed from the racist policies of the past colonisers (Gustavo Gomes, 2013; Jacobson, Amoateng and Heaton, 2004). The apartheid regime racial agenda was clearly stated in the Afrikaans word '*apartheid*' that means 'separateness'. The apartheid system of government was rooted in the meaning of the word and the idea was to separate the native blacks and *other* non-white minorities from the then South African social order. The initial purpose of apartheid was for each racial group to develop itself but was implemented as an extreme form of racial segregation policy after the triumph of the National Party (NP) in 1948 (Gustavo Gomes, 2013; Jacobson, Amoateng and Heaton, 2004). This system of governance was successful because white hegemony assured that indigenous black South Africans and other non-white minorities would be displaced and moved to homelands that were far from white suburbs and racially specific designated areas (Gustavo Gomes, 2013; Giliomee and Mbenga, 2007).

Historians have estimated that more than three million blacks were forcibly displaced (Giliomee and Mbenga, 2007). Part of the motivation for this social engineering was to discourage possible mixing of whites and non-whites (e.g. interracial intimate relationships) and to inhibit for political and economic reasons the urbanisation of black people (Welsh, 2010).

It is important to mention that Afrikaner apartheid ideology emerged from the Dutch Reformed Church (Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk) that was based on Calvinism- the idea that gives primacy to industriousness, separateness and religion (Giliomee and Mbenga, 2007; Giliomee, 2003). The apartheid government's ideology of 'separateness' stemmed from the theological interpretation of the myth of the Babel Tower where God separated a united group of people by distorting their common language and gave them different languages (Genesis 11:1-9). In his words, J.D. Du Toit, minister of the Dutch Reformed Church states that "...those whom God has joined together had to remain united; those whom God had separated had to remain apart..." (Giliomee, 2003: 462). This statement and apartheid ideology privileged white groups to stick together as the superior group while the indigenous blacks and other non-white groups should be separated from the superior group. Several policies such as, the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages of 1949 and Immorality Amendment Act of 1950 were implemented to criminalise opposite-sex interracial intimate relationships during apartheid in order to protect the pure white blood from being polluted by "black danger" (*swart gevaar*) (Gustavo Gomes, 2013: 317).

Similarly, the apartheid government policed same-sex intimate relationships with its racist' policies. Some scholars argue that uncompromising sexual policing had been visible since the inception of the apartheid regime that separated different racial groups in South Africa (Ajibade, 2013; Gustavo Gomes, 2013; Sonnekus, 2013; Retief, 1995). The apartheid government criminalised same-sex liaisons through the Immorality Act of 1957 and attempted to crush and subject to surveillance the emergence of a gay sub-culture in some South African cities such as Johannesburg and Cape Town. For example, section 20A of the 1957 Act states that:

1. *A male person who commits with another male person at a party an act which is calculated to stimulate sexual passion or to give sexual gratification shall be guilty of an offence;*
2. *For the purposes of subsection (1) 'a party' means any occasion where more than two persons are present. [...]* (cf. Gustavo Gomes, 2013).

The Immorality Act of 1957 was later amended and implemented as the Immorality Amendment Act of 1969 that criminalised same-sex relationships and other sexual offences. These laws were put in place to punish those involved in homosexual intimate acts, particularly gay sex, in order to protect the agenda of the apartheid regime. Despite the criminalisation of same-sex relationships during the apartheid era in South Africa, some heterosexual Afrikaner men (as members of the dominant racial group) engaged in sexual relationships with fellow men but they did not see this as outside their heteronormative world (Sonnekus, 2013). They differentiated their sexual desires from their gender. This was because the idea of gayness negates masculinity among this group. Different international and local organisations fought earnestly for homosexual rights during this period and the 1969 Act was amended and gave provision for homosexuals' consensual sex (Gustavo Gomes, 2013). For example, this implies that two men or women can collectively agree to involve in intimate relationships without discriminations.

Several gay networks and movements sprung up in South Africa in the 1980s and 90s (Gevisser and Cameron, 1994). One such movement was the Gay Association of South Africa (GASA) whose members were largely white with no political agenda and attachment to any black or mass-based liberatory movement (Hoad, Martin and Reid 2005; Thompson, 2001). This group included a few black members arguably to show the international community that it was not racist but rather inclusion. However, it was subsequently expelled from the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) after it failed to represent Simon Nkoli (a gay rights activist) when he was arrested (Gevisser and Cameron, 1994). The arrest of Simon Nkoli was a conscientising moment and led some international and local liberation movements to propose and fight for the inclusion of homosexual rights into the post-apartheid government agenda after the fall of apartheid (Cock, 2005; Gevisser and Cameron, 1994). The inclusion of sexual minorities' rights in the post-apartheid South African constitution did not occur without several challenges and attacks by some homophobic leaders as well as the hesitancy of many sectors of the South African public. For example, it was recorded that Ruth Mompati, a member of the African National Congress (ANC) in the United Kingdom made homophobic statements to the British gay press in 1987 that the ANC would shift from its major political agenda to end apartheid if it included homosexual rights on its agenda (Tatchell, 2005). Many international and local organisations condemned the homophobic statements made by some South African political leaders and mandated the post-apartheid government to assure the world that homosexual rights would be included as part of

the constitution. This was in fact achieved and subsequently included in the post-apartheid South African constitution that criminalised any discrimination based on sexual orientation (Gustavo Gomes, 2013; Van Zyl, 2011; Heyes, 2009; Tatchell, 2005; Croucher, 2002).

The newly acquired constitutional rights of South Africans irrespective of sexual orientation offered hope to gays and lesbians' enabling them to continue to fight for the legalisation of same-sex marriage until it was approved under the Civil Union Act of 2006. The Civil Union Act of 2006 provides the same benefits for both opposite-sex and same-sex couples. Some gay men forged ahead in commitments to their relationships by legalising their unions under the Civil Act Union of 2006 (Fine, 2007). Despite the inclusion of homosexual rights and same-sex marriage in the post-apartheid South African constitution, some of the current political leaders and immediate societies still discriminate against same-sex intimate relationships. For example, the present South African President, Jacob Zuma, described same-sex intimate relationships as 'a disgrace' to the country in 2006 (Croucher, 2011: 63). This kind of statement from the president shows that the future of same-sex partnerships in the country is uncertain despite the inclusion of their rights in the constitution (Gustavo Gomes, 2013; Croucher, 2011). Also, the ongoing hate crimes in the country, particularly in townships, are a reflection of societal sentiments towards homosexuals, particularly gays and lesbians. Evidence shows that gays and lesbians are more accepted now than a decade ago (Sonnekus, 2013; Van Zyl, 2011) but that they still face immense discrimination and stereotyping. The solemnisation of same-sex marriages at the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) and the annual 'gay pride' that is celebrated across the country are good examples of such an acceptance. Therefore, it is safe to argue that the visibility of gays and lesbians and the commitments of same-sex partners to one another in their unions are gradually changing the stiff discrimination towards them.

Same-sex Unions in Post-apartheid South Africa

Several studies have shown the existence of homosexuality in South Africa from pre-colonial period to the contemporary South Africa (Makofane, 2013; Sonnekus, 2013; Reddy, 2009 & 2006; Potgieter, 2005; Gevisser & Cameron, 1994). The present South African constitution that is largely based on protection of human rights of all citizens is deep-rooted in the 1948 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and anti-apartheid Freedom Charter of 1956. One of the human rights clauses in post-apartheid South Africa constitution is the one that prohibits "unfairly discriminating against anyone on one or more grounds, including

race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic, or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language, and birth” (South Africa Constitution, 1996: 2(9)(3)). This section addresses all forms of discrimination and made provision for equality and recognition of human rights irrespective of race and sexual orientations. Despite the inclusion of gays and lesbians rights in the Bill of Rights, the right to marry and other marital benefits were restricted to heterosexual couples until the 2006 Civil Union Act that gives same marital rights to both opposite-sex and same-sex couples was enacted (Van Zyl, 2011; Reddy, 2009; Judge, Manion, & DeWaal, 2008).

The liberation struggles of sexual minority in South Africa from apartheid era to post-apartheid South Africa have sharpened the sense of belongings of this group over the years. Despite the freedom gained by this group in terms of their human rights in the contemporary South African state, the dominant heterosexist patriarchal notions still persist. That is to say, some South Africans still denigrate same-sex intimate relationships because of the belief that homosexuality is un-African and it is outside the dominant social norms of the country (Makofane, 2013; Dlamini, 2006; Cock, 2003). It has been observed among gay communities that same-sex partners’, particularly gay partners, feel safe and have a sense of belonging because of the non-sexist post-apartheid constitution that makes provisions for their rights (Van Zyl, 2011 & 2005; Roberts & Reddy, 2008). It is imperative to mention that those living in townships are likely to experience hate crimes than those privileged to be living in urban areas. This could be as a result of greater visibility of gay community in the city while those living in townships are still trying to accommodate gays and lesbians. As such, this study examines the familial arrangements of middle-class interracial gay partners living in urban areas of Johannesburg because homosexuals are freer to express their sexual orientations without the fear of being attacked in the city compared to townships.

Interracial Gay Partnerships

Same-sex unions have had mixed receptions in different countries over the past few decades. While some countries have accepted and legalised same-sex unions, others have rejected calls for legalisation (Baiocco, Argalia & Laghi, 2014; Eskridge, 2012). Despite some resentment towards same-sex unions, same-sex partners have been accommodated in many European and North American countries (Badgett, 2011; Balsam, Beauchaine, Rothblum, & Solomon, 2008). Denmark, Norway and Sweden recognised same-sex unions as registered partnerships in 1989, 1993 and 1995 respectively (Andersson et al., 2006). In 2001,

the Netherlands became the first country in the world to grant same-sex couples the same marital rights as heterosexual couples (Andersson et al., 2006). Belgium, Spain and Canada also followed this trend in the 2000s. Like in Europe and America, the African continent has also witnessed varying attitudes and institutional responses towards same-sex unions. Despite the antipathy towards homosexuality in Africa (Stobie, 2003; Amupadhi, 2000), gay couples have forged spaces to live fulfilling lives and insist on the recognition of their unions as legitimate (McAllister, 2013; Makofane, 2013; Ramos & Gates, 2008; Hoad, 2007; Andersson et al., 2006; Jepsen & Jepsen, 2006; Epprecht, 2004). In this regard, South Africa impressed the international community by recognising same-sex unions in its post-apartheid constitution (South African Bill of Rights, 1996). Given this recognition, same sex unions have become increasingly visible in democratic South Africa. What has been significant also, in the case of South Africa and many other countries, is that the legal recognition of same-sex unions has also revealed the breaching of racial barriers. Homogamy, that is, the long-established tendency to select a mate with similar attributes to one's own (race, class, religion) seems not to apply (in the case of same-sex unions) given the commonplace occurrence of interracial relationships (Rosenfeld, 2010). This represents an interesting tendency that requires further research.

Past and recent studies have shown an increase in interracial same-sex unions. Polsky (1967) opined (approximately fifty years ago) that there are more socially integrative and interracial intimate relationships among homosexuals than exist in the heterosexual world. Andersson et al. (2006) show evidence of this in their study of gay partnerships in Norway and Sweden where they reveal that Norwegian and Swedish citizens (who are gay) commonly build intimate unions with non-citizens (most often of a different race). In line with this, Rothblum et al.'s (2008) study reveals an increase in interracial/inter-ethnic same-sex unions in some states in the United States, more so, though, amongst women than men. Increments in interracial same-sex intimate relationships have also been observed from the apartheid era to post-apartheid South Africa (Melanie, Manion & Waal, 2008; Fine, 2007; Gevisser & Cameron, 1994). Fine (2007) describes how interracial same-sex unions that were previously prohibited are gradually increasing and becoming more noticeable in post-apartheid South Africa. Ramos and Gates' (2008) study of California's Latino/Latina Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual (LGB) population reveals that a high proportion was in a partnership with a white or African American. Similarly, Savage (2012) argues that same-sex couples are more likely to be interracial/inter-ethnic. Savage found that one in five same-sex

couples are interracial or inter-ethnic: specifically, he showed with reference to the USA, 20.6% of same-sex couples (married or cohabiting) are interracial/inter-ethnic compared to 9.5% of different-sex married couples and 18.3% unmarried different-sex couples. Similarly, Rosenfeld & Thomas (2012 & 2010) reported the influence of Internet in formation of interracial gay partnerships among Americans.

‘Race’ in post-apartheid South Africa remains significant in state and popular discourses, legislation and everyday language. Whilst this paper is sensitive to contested identities, reference to four ‘race groups’ are made: Black, White, Coloured and Indian. ‘Interracial’ logically implies partnerships between individuals representing any of these groups – so long as the partnership is between men of different races, for example, Black-White, White-Indian, Indian-Black, Coloured-Indian etc. The below table shows the number of same-sex marriages documented in South Africa from 2007 to 2011 (2012 to 2014 statistics are yet to be published). The data is informative but unfortunately does not separate lesbian unions from gay unions. Also, it does not specify the number of interracial gay partnerships.

Same-sex Union Statistics in South Africa (2007-2011)

Province	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total
Eastern Cape	0	41	30	24	29	124
Free State	1	23	20	26	28	98
Gauteng	49	362	324	391	381	1,507
KwaZulu Natal	8	74	87	79	63	311
Limpopo	0	15	10	10	7	42
Mpumalanga	3	7	11	11	16	48
North West	2	6	5	9	3	25
Northern Cape	1	11	43	75	93	223
Western Cape	16	191	227	261	238	933
Outside South Africa	0	2	3	2	9	16
Total	80	732	760	888	867	3,327

Source: Statistics SA 2011 Marriages and Divorces Report

Terminology, Research Method and Data Collection

This article focuses on interracial gay men partnerships and the term ‘interracial’ is used in this study to mean partnerships between men (both South Africans and non-South Africans living in Johannesburg) of different races such as Black-White, White-Indian, Coloured-Indian etc. ‘Middle-class’ is used in this study to connote gay men that occupy a socio-economic position intermediate between those of the lower and upper classes, while ‘intimate relationship’ indicates that they are in romantic relationships (married or cohabiting). The term ‘family’ also extends to gay men in intimate relationships aside from its traditional meaning of relationship between a man and a woman. Furthermore, the term ‘union’ also extends to married/cohabiting couples and this is between couples where both partners are men.

This study adopts a qualitative research design. The data were collected over a period of eight months from twenty gay men (comprising 10 couples) currently in interracial gay unions living in Johannesburg. The data were collected through in-depth interviews to allow for rich descriptions of the men’s lives within a definite cultural, historical and social context. The men were interviewed individually and then invited to participate in focus group discussions. Interviews were conducted in the English language and lasted approximately an hour or two. The semi-structured interviews were tape-recorded with the consent of the participants, while informal discussions and observations were written down. The interview covered a series of topics such as the formation of interracial relationships, division of household labour, professional roles versus domestic roles, personal and public challenges, and power sharing, decision-making and general experiences of participants in order to explore the dynamics of their private lives. The respondents’ age ranges from 23 to 58 years at the time of the research. Focus-groups discussions were not possible due to time constraints on the side of the participants while some of them preferred to be interviewed only without any involvement in group discussions. This affected the researcher ability to conduct the focus groups discussions.

Following this, a snowball technique was adopted. The snowball technique was useful in identifying other participants within the social networks of the participants (Elze, 2009). For example, it was not easy at first to locate and access interracial gay partners that are willing to commit to the study. The access was granted after a friend introduced me to one interracial gay partner who subsequently introduced me to his gay friends in interracial romantic relationships. The participants were asked to introduce the researcher to other people that meet the criteria of the study and those recommended were contacted and

considered for interviewing. Preliminary investigation suggests that strong networks exist; thus, once the initial access was formally granted, then the networks themselves became more easily approachable. The researcher of this study made contacts and found a number of willing participants who also introduced him to other participants that participated in the study. Social scientists, particularly family sociologists, are aware that some hidden populations, such as gay families, are difficult to locate and it takes time to gain access to them (Rumens, 2011). Snowball sampling provides us with the opportunity to unearth some parts of hidden population social life that are not physically accessible to the researcher and other people within the society (Holt & Walker, 2009). Therefore, snowball technique was of great importance to the success of this study.

Core concepts and arguments in family sociology as well as social exchange constructs were most useful in unravelling the micro-dynamics of same-sex relationships. The fundamental supposition of exchange theory is that people enter into social relationships with some sense that such relationships hold mutual benefits (Zafirovski, 2005; Blau, 1994). However, the continuity and perseverance of social exchange is based on trust in interpersonal relationships, unlike economic exchange that is based on markets and lawful regulations (Cook, 2000; Blau, 1994). Thus, ideas about social exchange presented a theoretical lens through which tangible and non-tangible elements of gay intimate unions were interrogated in this article.

Key Findings and Discussion

This section discusses two main channels of romantic relationship formation that is peculiar to this study:

Face-to-face relationships: From Casual Partnerships to Committed Relationships

Past and present studies have demonstrated the importance of formation of romantic relationships through face-to-face interactions. According to Stacey (2006), gay men familial arrangements is complex due to the discrimination attached to their sexual orientation. It is imperative to mention that gay partners often meet at different places such as gay bars and pubs, sex parlours and so on (Stacey, 2006). The majority of gay couples that participated in Blumstein and Schwartz's (1983) study started their relationships at gay bars. Other studies have shown that gay men meet their partners through friends and associates (McWilliams & Barrett, 2014; Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012 & 2010; Huston & Schwartz, 1995; Vetere, 1982;

Peplau, Cochran, Rook & Padesky, 1978; Tuller, 1978; Warren, 1974). The following excerpts from the interviews conducted show how interracial gay men that participated in this study met their partners:

Cici (42 years old, white Afrikaner South African, Consultant):

Regarding our relationship formation, it is a very complicated issue. I had one proper relationship before and it was my first proper relationship that lasted for 9 months. It was a doom from the start. I decided not to go into any relationship anytime soon when it ended. I met one Indian guy and we became friends. I met my current partner through him because they are both Indians and friends. When I first met him, I can't say there was something that attracted me to him but our second meeting brought us together. I felt something natural and some fascination and attraction just occurred. It was not a magic but I realised I had found someone stimulating. He stimulates me every time. We are just compatible in everything such as political and business ideologies. He is quite academic (smiling). We have different level of education. He holds a doctorate degree while I only have a bachelor degree...I won't say similar traits such as education and physique impacted on our relationship formation. I did not find him attractive at first. It was a gradual development. Economically, we are on the same level and our aspirations are the same.

Juke (37 years old, non-South African black, Businessman):

I met my current partner in an odd place (giggles). When I was facing difficulties in my past relationship, I started staying out with friends because there was no comfort at home and going home made me sick. A friend of mine invited me to a sex party and I went there. So, that was where I met my current partner. We thought it was a one night stand but we became very good friends afterwards. He knew I was in a relationship and he also told me about his relationship. The most interesting part of the story was the fact that we were both going through hard times in our relationships that period. I broke up with my ex-boyfriend after a few months and he also did. We did not start dating immediately after we broke up with our partners. I told him I was not ready to jump into any relationship at that moment. We agreed to be friends and see if things would work out between us. We became best of friends and eventually became partners. We were friends for more than a year before we became partners. I think that was the best choice I have ever made. I have never been so happy and fulfilled in my life. I thank God for this relationship...It was not love at first sight at

all. If I had to look at physical appearance, I will never date him. He is also older than me. I just felt we should have fun that night because I was trying to forget my worries. He became caring afterwards and started calling me...

Mikasa (23 years old, black South African, Graduate):

I was still with my former boyfriend when I met him. We were celebrating 4 months of our relationship in a club and I was drunk. I was standing and this white guy was looking at me. I called one of the bartenders to tell him to stop looking at me and buy me a drink. He bought me a drink and we chatted. My boyfriend was angry and we fought at the club. We broke up the next day when we couldn't resolve the issue. I went to Pretoria after I broke up with my former boyfriend and my current partner came there to visit me. We became friends from there and advanced to intimate relationship...My relationship is amazing but I don't know what makes it amazing. I can't think about the fact that he is white. Although he is white, we don't see colour, all I see is his personality.

From the above excerpts, I would argue that face-to-face interaction is important in gay men relationships formation. The majority of gay men that participated in this study met their partners at gay clubs, bar, pubs, social events, and through friends & associates and so on. This suggests that networks represent the meeting point in this section. Some writers argue that face-to-face relationship gives partners the opportunity to interact with their future partners and people often look for similarities in such contexts (Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2010; Stacey, 2006 & 2005). Through these different forms of face-to-face interactions, gay men form lasting romantic relationships that transcend class, racial and national boundaries (Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012; Sautter, Tippett, and Morgan, 2010; Stacey, 2005). In face-to-face interpersonal relationships, physical attraction, attitudes and proximity are important (Stephure, Boon, MacKinnon, & Deveau, 2009; Merkes & Richards, 2000; Myers, 1993).

It is also imperative to mention that people are quick to judge the outward looks of individuals in face-to-face interactions. This suggests people often take appearance for reality although it depends on what people are looking for in potential partners. This is described as “what-is-beautiful-is-good stereotype” according to Brehm (1992: 65). For example, one of the participants in this study-Juke- would have missed his soul mate if he had looked at the outward appearance of the man and age. According to him “...*If I had to look at physical appearance, I will never date him. He is also older than me...*” Evidence from the above

excerpts suggests that physical appearance plays no major role rather, it is the connection between people that is much more valued than physical appearances (Turkle, 1995).

Excerpts from the fieldwork show that predictors (e.g. physical attributes and individual personality) of face-to-face interpersonal relationships determine the continuous interactions of people after their first meeting (Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012; Montgomery, 1994). People often look for similarities other than physical appearance that will eventually aid their intimacy in those interactions (Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2010; Brehm, 1992). It should be mentioned that some of the participants in this study only came to love their future partners after spending some time together as friends.

From Computer Mediated Relationships to Long-Term Unions

Family sociologists have been beguiled by how different people that met online are forming enduring romantic relationships. Over the past 20 years, online dating has become popular in both heterosexual and same-sex intimate relationships (McWilliams & Barrett, 2014; Rosenfeld & Thomas; 2012; Barraket & Henry-Waring, 2008; Toma, Hancock, & Ellison, 2008; Whitty, 2008). Despite the importance of face-to-face interactions in forming romantic relationships, the use of Internet to meet potential partners has increased over the years (McWilliams & Barrett, 2014; Stephure, Boon, MacKinnon, & Deveau, 2009). Apart from the influence of Internet in fostering intimate relationships among sexual minority such as gays and lesbians, it has been observed that online dating is also common in heterosexual relationships especially among aging adults (McWilliams & Barrett, 2014; Gonzaga, 2010; Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2003; Cooney & Dunne, 2001). Computer mediated relationships are increasingly becoming popular daily because it gives people from different backgrounds the opportunity to mingle before face-to-face interactions. For example, the movie “You’ve Got Mail” was about two people from different backgrounds that met online, and subsequently became lovers (Brown, Durk, & Ephron, 1998).

Family sociologists have welcomed and acknowledged the influence of Internet in the formation of contemporary relationships (Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012; Merkle & Richardson, 2000; December, 1996; Turkle, 1995; Walther, 1994).). In the context of gay relationship formation, it has been argued that this channel of familial formation is likely to aid intimacy between gay men before their initial physical interaction (Sautter, Tippett, and Morgan, 2010; Madden and Lenhart, 2006; Stacey, 2004). Social scientists, particularly family sociologists, are beginning to investigate how interpersonal and intimate relationships are formed in this

inanimate social context (Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2010; Merkle & Richardson, 2000). According to Rheingold (1993: 3), “there’s no monolithic culture. It’s more like an ecosystem of subcultures, some frivolous, others serious.” This implies that Internet contacts could be a playground as well as an important channel for meeting a good friend or a life partner. The following excerpts from the fieldwork attest to the influence of Internet on the construction of some participants’ intimate relationships:

Kadi (33 years old, non-South African black, Graduate):

I met my partner online through a friend. We had been chatting for 3 years before we finally met. It was an on-and-off relationship then. We were just online friends. Although he asked me out but I didn’t give him a positive answer then because I wasn’t sure of him. It has always been my dream to get married one day as a gay man but I was afraid of my homophobic environment. I have seen his pictures and I knew what to expect. At a point, I agreed to his proposal and we started dating until I came to South Africa and we are now married. I looked at his physical appearance first because I like a man with a good physique...It wasn’t love at first sight. We were just internet friends and we graduated from friends to a couple.

George (24 years old, black South African, Graduate):

I met him in a chat room on Mxit. We started chatting and later became friends. We met afterwards and started dating...I like his personality. I found him funny. We have a lot in common. We like same movies, same sports etc. He is good looking as well. What I found good looking in him might be different from what another person will find. I just like him...I wouldn’t say it was love at first sight...I knew this was the person for me after spending some quality time with him...

Acali (45 years old, white South African (Afrikaner), Senior Manager):

I was online and I have heard a lot of bad things online. What attracted me to him was his openness and honesty online and we moved from there to blackberry chat. I was actually expecting sex talks and pictures from him but none came through. It was unusual for me and I decided to meet him in person. I wouldn’t say it was love at first sight but I was impressed with what I saw and the connection between us that day. So, we took it from there...I never thought about colour since I have been engaging in same-sex encounters and relationships, what matter most is the personality of the person. We are just two individuals in love.

The above excerpts from the fieldwork show that some gay partners that participated in this study met their partners on the Internet. Some of them met their partners at chat rooms and this helped them build their intimacy. Most studies on Internet interpersonal contacts were conducted by linguistic and communication scholars and this has not been previously subjected to critical sociological inquiry. In this regard, online dating is important in this study because it fosters interracial gay men familial relationships. Computer mediated relationship (CMR) is adopted because it encapsulates how some of the participants in this study formed their intimate relationships. Although personal contact has been argued to be the most effective way of forming a romantic relationship, the importance of Internet-relating prior to physical meeting of partners cannot be disregarded (Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2010; Walther, 1994). In other words, computer mediated communication provides room for the parties relating to disclose personal and private information that they would not have disclosed in face-to-face encounters (McWilliams & Barrett, 2014; Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012; Jaffe, 1995).

Mutual self-disclosure of people who met online has been observed to bring greater satisfaction in forming intimate relationships (Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2010; Merkle & Richardson, 2000; Brehm, 1992). Thus, computer mediated relationships make it easier for people to disclose personal or private information they would not have revealed in face-to-face interactions. It is also imperative to note that understanding and acceptance between people that met online could lead to a deep bond between them. According to Levine (1992: 42) “on the way to the solace of being understood, and on the way to the pleasure and privilege of hearing another person's inner self, powerful emotions can be generated in the listener and the speaker, especially the speaker . . . Within both the speaker and the listener there is a feeling of attachment, a loss of the usual social indifference, a vision of the person as special.” This implies that electronic communication fosters propinquity between people irrespective of their backgrounds, race, ethnic group, class and geographical location (Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012; Walther, 1992).

This has to do with how familiarity leads to closeness and intimacy between people. A relationship of mutual understanding or trust and agreement between people can develop between people on the Internet irrespective of their ethnicity, racial and cultural backgrounds. Some writers contend that Internet dating is important to sexual minority group such as gays (Robnett and Feliciano, 2011; Anderson, 2006; Carey, 1996). According to Carey (1996:9),

“for many GLBT [gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered] young people, communicating via e-mail and online is a lifesaver...” Thus, Internet increases people’s chances of meeting like-minded people. In Rheingold’s (1993: 24) words “life will be happier for the online individual because the people with whom one interacts most strongly will be selected more by commonality of interests and goals than by accidents of proximity.” This implies that Internet aids positive interaction for people with common interests who have trouble connecting with others during face-to-face contacts irrespective of their sexual orientations (McWilliams & Barrett, 2014; William, 1996).

Furthermore, online dating has been observed to transcend the notable limitations in face-to-face interactions (Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012; Anderson, 2006; Wellman, 2001). For example, interracial intimate relationship (both heterosexual and same-sex) is increasing due to the influence of Internet contrary to what it used to be when such relationship was marred by family and society influence (Rosenfeld & Thomas; 2010; Rosenfeld 2007). This does not mean that Internet dating does not have its own forms of racial segregation. Studies have shown that some people online often declare their racial preference of potential partners (Sonnekus, 2013; Robnett and Feliciano, 2011; Hitch, Hortaçsu and Ariely, 2010; Hargittai, 2008). Despite the perceived online segregation, the effectiveness of online dating has had some interesting impact on the market for romantic partners among sexual minority such as gays and lesbians. The number of gays meeting their partners online has increased over time.

Moreover, Internet has made life easy for gays and lesbians facing dating markets and this is arguably due to the fact that Internet provides safer and anonymous environments for gay partners (Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012; Brown, Maycock & Burns, 2005). However, it is imperative to mention that many of the real world relationships often begin with face-to-face contacts, and physical traits are often considered (Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012; Cooper & Sportolari, 1997). Notwithstanding the above assertions and regardless of whether it is an online or face-to-face contact, each relationship formation is unique and exclusive. What is interesting is that both face-to-face and computer mediated relationship are interdependent in forming romantic relationships and continuous communication will sustain these relationships. Communication is crucial to the successful development of intimate relationships whether through online or face-to-face attractions (McWilliams & Barrett, 2014; Anning, 1996).

The Role of Personal Resources and Traits in Gay Men Romantic Relationships Formation

Numerous studies have evaluated what attracts both heterosexuals and homosexuals, particularly gay men, into intimate relationships. Some scholars argue that men often appreciate the physical beauty of their partners whereas women, irrespective of their sexual orientations, tend to value personal qualities of their partners (Gonzaga, 2011; Peplau & Spalding, 2000). Similar positive assorting mating traits (e.g. age, socio-economic status, and education) have been identified within the gay community (Jepsen & Jepsen, 2006 & 2002; Klawitter, 1995). Becker (1991) argues that the individual selection of partner with similar traits can be likened to selecting a job that gives someone satisfaction. Similarly, Rosenfeld & Thomas (2012) argue that people look for commonalities in their potential partners. Laner (1977) argues that selection of partners based on similar traits varies depending on the sexual orientation of the individuals. She observed that gay men value intelligence rather than the physical attractiveness of their prospective partners. In contrast, Sergios and Cody (1986) argue that gay men often select partners who are physically more attractive than themselves.

However, one of the often researched areas is the influence or impact of age amongst same-sex and opposite sex couples. Studies reveal that men prefer younger women while women prefer older men in heterosexual relationships (McWilliams & Barrett, 2014; Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012; Over & Philips, 1997; Hayes, 1995). Similarly, Jepsen and Jepsen (2002) argue that most gay men prefer to be in relationships with younger partners but age does not matter to women in same-sex relationships. Yet, it has been argued that people are often in relationship with partners in the same age category irrespective of their sexual orientations (Madden & Lenhart, 2006; Jaffe & Chacon-Puignau, 1995).

In his study, Lockman (1984) found that gay men in a cross-racial union were attracted to each other not only because of class issues, but because of particular personal qualities. Lockman observed that blacks chose their white partners based on their socio-economic status while white males chose their black partners because they believed that black men are caring and passionate (Bush, 1981). In addition, Lockman's study revealed that personal qualities (e.g. character) and values hold considerable if not most important value in interracial gay relationships, while socio-economic status, education, eloquence, dress, and skin colour of either partner were secondary. In contrast, Gates and Sears (2005) study reveals that the majority of Asian Pacific Islanders (e.g. Filipinos) in interracial intimate relationships have more white partners with lots of resources than Latinos with few personal

resources. The point being made here is that issues of diversity and 'exchange' have social significance for the way intimate relationships are initiated, developed, consolidated and sustained.

Personal traits and resources- such as age, physique, education, economic status, race and nationality- are less important in the familial arrangements of interracial gay partners that participated in this study. What are more important in the relationship formation are the inner convictions and perceptions of some gay men about their potential partners and this subsequently creates the bond that connects partners together. It should however be noted that some traits in both partners are important in sustaining their relationships. For example, it was observed that there are variations in the economic status of some gay partners that participated in this study. Majority of the older gay men have more personal resources than their partners but this did not have any noticeable negative effect on their initial coming together. Past studies corroborate the finding that, there are larger differences in age, education, and employment status of gay men in intimate relationships (McWhirter & Mattison, 1984; Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Bell & Weinberg, 1978). Also, this study confirms Lockman's (1984) findings that economic status, race, education and so on are less important in interracial gay men romantic relationships while individual personality, such as personal attitudes and attributes, is more important. It should also be mentioned that partners' different racial backgrounds have no effect on their intimacy. Thus it is arguable that irrespective of gay partners' racial backgrounds, they value individuals' personality in forming romantic relationships that transcend colour, age, education, income amongst others.

During apartheid, 'interracial intimate relationships and homosexuality' were frowned upon, but the post-apartheid South African constitution provides freedom for people to intermarry and express their sexual orientations freely- (section 9 of the Constitution of South Africa 1996). Notwithstanding this constitutional guarantee, South African society still discriminates against gay men. In this regard, interracial gay partnerships can be explained as a form of resistance to societal discriminatory practices and an attempt to transcend the problem of racial prejudice that still pervades South African society. The majority of gay men that participated in this study reported that they maintain a close community and they do not see race as a big problem. Individual personal qualities are considered much more valuable in forming romantic relationships than racial backgrounds. However, this does not rule out the possibility of racial discriminations in gay community (Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012).

I think one's class and environment matter in the formation of interracial gay partnerships. It will not be easy for gay men in townships to involve in interracial romantic relationships. Urban centres, such as Cape Town and Johannesburg, present proximity for gay men of different colours to meet regardless of the existing racial segregation in gay community. For example, there are different pubs and bars for white gay men and different pubs and bars for non-white gay men. Despite this, some gay men seek love and transcend race and physique to form long-lasting intimate relationships.

Social Exchange Analysis of Gay Men Intimate Relationships Formation

Several studies have demonstrated that people often enter into interpersonal relationships from which they can benefit. Myers (1993) describes this reward ideology in interpersonal relationships as 'equity and minimax'. Minimax is described as one's ability to minimise costs and maximise rewards in interpersonal relationships, while equity suggests that people engage in interpersonal relationship that is comparative to what they invest in it. From the above assertion of Myers (1993), it is safe to conclude that people engage in relationships that are mutually beneficial and offers fewer costs. This implies that interpersonal relationships involve exchanges.

Exchange theory holds that a relationship is likely to dissolve if costs are more than rewards (Kurdek, 2005 & 1995). This theory is often used to explain relationship formation and dissolution in the conventional face-to-face intimate relationships. In contrast, it has been argued that there is a probability that partners in computer mediated relationships have alternative partners via Internet if the costs in their current romantic relationships outweigh the rewards (Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012; Merkes & Richard, 2000). Conversely, this study found social exchanges to be more prominent in intimate relationships whether such relationships were formed through face-to-face (FTF) or computer mediated relationships (CMR). Rewards and costs are important predictors of relationship longevity in both face-to-face and computer mediated relationships. The rewards might not necessarily be material goods and immediate but the ability of partners to continue to stimulate their partners. What accounts for this stimulation is unknown. For example, in this study, many of the participants do not consider the physical appearances of their potential partners as important while few did. This is because most of these gay men are looking for something beyond the physical appearances of their potential partners. It is safe to conclude that gay men look for different things in their potential partners other than their personal resources (whether tangible or

intangible resources) and racial backgrounds. This is another form of exchange that is in line with the exchange theory.

The social exchange standpoint of understanding the formation and sustenance of intimate relationships is applicable to both face-to-face and computer mediated relationships. Face-to-face interpersonal relationship is different from computer mediated relationships because it is the conventional way of forming romantic relationships through physical encounters (McWilliams & Barrett, 2014). This is not to say that computer mediated relationship does not involve physical encounters, the difference is that whereas computer mediated relationship starts online before initial physical encounter, face-to-face relationship starts with physical encounters. The anonymity that is peculiar to Internet conversations often helps the initial self-disclosure of partners in computer mediated relationships (Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2010; Whitty, 2008; Merkes & Richards, 2000; Kraut et al., 1998; Wysocki, 1998, Cooper & Sportolari, 1997). In face-to-face interpersonal relationships, physical attraction, attitudes and proximity are important (Miller & Perlman, 2009; Merkes & Richards, 2000; Myers, 1993). These predictors of face-to-face interpersonal relationships determine the continuous interactions of people after their first meeting (Montgomery, 1994). People often look for similarities that will eventually influence their subsequent interactions (Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2010; Brehm, 1992). Wysocki (1998) qualitative study reveals that self-disclosure in computer mediated relationships influence partners to share private matters they would not have shared in face-to-face relationships because of the fear of losing the other party.

Conclusion

South Africa became the first country in Africa to legalise same-sex marriages in its post-apartheid constitution. The formally instituted racial and sexual discriminations that dominated during the apartheid period were revised and equality of all citizens, irrespective of their race and sexual orientations, represents one of the key achievements of democratic South Africa. The current constitution gives room for people to express their sexualities freely without being discriminated against. This recognition is bridging the gap of racial and sexual exclusion and inclusion that were created during and before the apartheid era. Despite the legalisation of same-sex intimate relationships in democratic South Africa, evidence suggests that same-sex couples do not have the same freedom as their heterosexual counterparts because ordinary citizens still consider such relationships as unnatural and un-African. Some of them can only display their relationships selectively and in private spaces

due to the prevalence of hate crimes in some townships. Continuous negotiations of gay rights reflect the tensions between rights in the constitution and societal acceptance of such rights. Despite the everyday negative experiences of gay men based on their sexual orientation in post-apartheid South Africa, gay partners persist in their intimate relationships and continue to negotiate their social and constitutional rights. What is interesting at the moment is the increasing visibility of interracial gay partners in this country as a whole. This paper explores how a small group of men of different racial backgrounds assert their constitutional rights through the formation of interracial same-sex intimate relationships that used to be a criminal offence.

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