Switching on after nine: Black gay-identified men's perceptions of sexual identities and partnerships in South African towns

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Abstract

There is considerable diversity, fluidity and complexity in the expressions of sexuality and gender among men who have sex with men (MSM). Some non-gay identified MSM are known colloquially by gay-identified men in Mpumalanga, South Africa, as "After-Nines" because they do not identify as gay and present as straight during the day but also have sex with other men at night. Based on targeted ethnography, including structured observations, key informant interviews and focus group discussions in two districts in Mpumalanga, we explored Black gay-identified men's perceptions of and relationships with After-Nine men, focusing on sexual and gender identities and their social consequences. Gay-identified men expressed ambivalence about their After-Nine partners, desiring them for their masculinity, yet often feeling dissatisfied and exploited in their relationships with them. The exchange of sex for commodities, especially alcohol, was common. Gay men's characterisation of After-Nines as men who ignore them during the day but have sex them at night highlights the diversity of how same-sex practicing men perceive themselves and their sexual partners. Sexual health promotion programmes targeting 'MSM' must understand this diversity to effectively support the community in developing strategies for reaching and engaging different groups of gay and non-gay identified men.

Keywords

gay men; MSM; sexuality; gender; ethnography; South Africa

Introduction

Queer sexual identities in South Africa are inextricable from the shifting politics of race, class, and gender that have characterized the country's complex history. During Apartheid, sexual intercourse between men was punishable by up to seven years in prison. Yet, homosexuality flourished in the single-gender institutions instituted by the Apartheid government, including mining hostels, prisons, and single-sex schools (Cameron & Gevisser, 1995; Aldrich, 2003; Epprecht, 2008). Until the late 1980s, gay organisations were

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often divided along racial lines and by the larger political question of Apartheid. For men who are not from the European-descended minority population, a specifically 'gay' subjectivity did not emerge in South Africa until the 1980s and was spawned largely by exposure to media from outside the country (Donham, 1998; McLean & Ngcobo, 1995). For these men, the emergence of a specifically 'gay' subjectivity occurred in the context of more racially inclusive anti-Apartheid activism that was also inclusive of lesbian and gay civil and human rights (Donham, 1998), and was primarily expressed in urban settings.

Post-Apartheid political and social transformations created space for public discourse about queer sexualities in South Africa in the 1990s. The synergistic forces of globalisation, urbanisation, news and entertainment media, the solidarities of the anti-Apartheid movement, and subsequently of the AIDS epidemic fostered a blossoming of queer organizing and sexual identities unique on the African continent. The country's 1996 constitution became the first in the world to explicitly protect the rights of sexual minorities (Altman, 2001), outlawing discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, and sexual orientation. In 2006, South Africa became the fifth country in the world to legalise same-sex marriages.

Though impressive, these legal achievements have not yielded widespread public acceptance of homosexuality (Roberts & Reddy, 2008). In 2013, only 32% of South Africans said that society should accept homosexuality (Pew Research Center, 2013). Perhaps unsurprisingly in light of South Africa's heterogeneity, post-Apartheid legal achievements have neither resulted in a unified national gay community, nor in a unified way of understanding sexual and gender variance. Some South Africans with same-sex attractions openly self-identify as 'gay', but many others do not. Reasons for this dis-identification include homophobia, stigma and discrimination, marginalisation (Sandfort, Parker, Gyamerah, Lane, & Reddy, 2012), and the perceived inapplicability or limitations of the label.

Like 'gay', 'homosexual' and 'bisexual', the all-encompassing referent label 'men who have sex with men' (MSM), widely used for HIV/AIDS surveillance, funding streams, and programming, may not convey the diversity, nuances, and fluidity of same-sex desires, behaviours, identities, and gender expressions. This may render the experiences of some men as invisible (Young & Meyer, 2005; Sharma, Bukusi, Gorbach, Cohen, Muga, & Holmes, 2008; Cáceres, Aggleton, & Galea, 2008) and obscure potentially important differences in behaviours. Moreover, the 'MSM' label in public health discourse may establish the link between HIV/AIDS and homosexuality (Reddy, 2006) at the expense of embracing broader sexual well-being and health needs. Finally, 'MSM' may obscure locally popular characterisations of same-sex desires and practices, the nuances of which are critical to effective health programming.

In this paper, we explore the diversity of sexual and gender identities and labels from the perspective of Black self-identified gay men ('gay men') in Mpumalanga, South Africa. We focus specifically on gay men's relationships with a group of non-gay-identified, stereotypically straight-acting men whom they refer to as "After-Nines"—so called because they present publicly as "straight" men, generally express antipathy towards gay men in

public during the day, but make themselves available to gay men for clandestine sexual encounters at night ("after nine o'clock").

Methods

Participants and Procedures

The data analysed here were collected during targeted ethnography (Wainberg et al., 2007) undertaken to adapt Mpowerment, a community-level HIV prevention intervention for young gay and bisexual men of proven efficacy in the United States (Kegeles, Hays & Coates, 1996) to the South African context (known presently as Project *Boithato*). Between March and September 2011, field workers conducted 150 hours of structured observations in "MSM-friendly" venues, eight focus group discussions (FGDs) with 3-8 MSM per group (N=52) and 41 in-depth semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs) in two district municipalities in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa – Gert Sibande and Ehlanzeni. Like other Black South African communities, these municipalities were structurally disadvantaged by Apartheid, and continue to experience significant economic, social, and health disparities as compared to the minority White population in the region.

We used purposive sampling via snowball techniques through social networks to recruit local "experts" on the MSM community, including informal MSM community leaders, proprietors of formal or informal MSM-friendly venues, and health professionals. All FGD participants and 29 of the 41 key informants reported having partners that included other men and were between the ages of 18 and 49. The study protocol was approved by the Committee on Human Research at the University of California San Francisco and the University of the Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics Committee (Medical).

The FGDs and KIIs lasted each approximately two hours, and were conducted either in English, *isiZulu* (Gert Sibande), or *SiSwati* (Ehlanzeni) by ethnographers. The ethnographers were four qualitative social science researchers between 23-27 years of age who were trained at the University of the Witwatersrand. One was a gay-identified man, one a straight-identified man, and two were straight-identified women. They worked in teams of two on FGDs (one facilitating whilst the other took notes) and individually for KIIs. The ethnographers were all at least trilingual, and when needed, could switch between languages during interviews. All FGDs and KIIs were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim; *isiZulu* and *SiSwati* narratives were translated into English.

Prior to data collection, the ethnographers were trained in qualitative research methodology, research ethics, community entry and MSM sensitisation, data management and on standardised interview and group facilitator guides. Familiar with South African urban gay culture, all ethnographers immersed themselves in Mpumalanga's rural and gay subcultures during a six-month period of community entry prior to formal ethnographic fieldwork. The KII guide was developed to cover topics related to growing up as a MSM in South Africa, MSM community formation, sex and relationships in the lives of MSM, HIV/AIDS, how MSM communicate with each other, and ways and strategies to mobilise the MSM community. The FGD guide used a community participatory mapping approach, asking the participants to help the research team understand how the MSM community and

membership is defined, structured, and networked, including identifying venues and events where MSM socialise and find sexual partners. Finally, the FGD participants were prompted to discuss challenges living as MSM in the general community.

Analysis

Initially, we used a thematic analysis approach to the data. Ethnographers and study investigators read a subset of transcripts together (3 FGDs, 6 KIIs) to develop topical codes related to the main study questions about community structure, social life, sexuality and relationships, and health. Grounded theory was used to identify and code emergent themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Coding consensus and refinement of the codebook was achieved through team meetings between the ethnographers and investigators. We used Atlas.ti software to code and manage the data. In this paper, the analysis is based on the topical codes of "sexual identity," "sexual partnerships," and "intimacy" from the FGD and KII data. Two of the authors read the coding reports and developed additional thematic categories within these topical codes.

Results

Two key themes emerged in gay men's narratives with regard to sexual and gender categories and how they are situated in sexual relationships: (1) diversity within gay communities; and (2) relationships between gay men and a subset of non-gay-identified male sexual partners whom gay men referred to as After-Nine men. We did not discern differences between geographic communities or data collection method, and have thus aggregated results.

Sexual and Gender Diversity within Gay Communities

When speaking to self-identified gay men, the ethnographers asked them to define who they considered to be part of the gay community. Participants characterised the community broadly, illustrating the heterogeneity of categories of sexual identity and gender expression. Groups gay men considered part of the larger gay community included gays, transgenders, drag queens, bisexuals, and lesbians. Many also included "After-Nines" and other non-gay identified MSM who had "*not yet accepted that they are gay*".

> *We don't say wena* [you] belong to another kraal, or you belong to another community…. you can be whatever. You belong in the family. You are gay.
>
> To me, whether you are bisexual or "After-Nine", you still fall under the category of homosexual because if you were straight you would not be sleeping with men.

Being 'gay' was described in a number of different ways: as an inner feeling unrelated to physical appearances ("you can look straight….It's basically a feeling, it is something that is internal"); as a gender dysphoria ("*a boy trapped in a girl's body*"); and as a sexual desire unrelated to feminine gender presentation ("you are a man that is interested in another man. So I must keep it like that, dress like a man, walk like a man, do things like a man because I know my identity"). Being the receptive partner in anal sex was often associated with being gay, and vice versa.

> My ex did not want to be called gay. To him, being gay meant that you were a bottom. If you are not a bottom, then you are not gay. This doesn't mean that he is hiding what he is doing. In actual fact, he didn't have a problem with what he was doing, but the name 'gay' didn't sit well with him, because to him, once you use the term 'gay', this means you are sissy-like. He believed you can't be a man and be gay.

Some gay-identified participants expressed tolerance of and preference for unique and fluctuating gender expressions among gay men.

> We are in between the male and the female; we have best of both worlds.

> Men must understand that once you are gay it's obvious that you will be forward and you will be sissy-like. Sometimes we also want to be treated like ladies. In my relationships I demand to be treated like a lady. I tell the guy I'm seeing, 'You are the man, treat me like a lady.'

Whether 'gay' explicitly signified femininity and obligated one to behave in a stereotypically feminine way was a point of contention. For those who self-identified as 'gay', the meaning of the term was open to interpretation. The distinction between 'gay' and 'transgender' was not absolute, nor was 'transgender', a commonly claimed identity. More common were references to being a "drag queen", feeling "trapped" in men's bodies or being "gay women".

> There was not even one gay man wearing pants, and he [a gay man dressed in drag] *said* [to me], *'No, when you are in* [a gay club] and you are gay, you have to drag. And I said, 'No, that's not it. Who told you that?' And he said, 'We were told by the elders such and so and so.'

> Personally, I feel like a woman, but I don't go around telling people I'm a woman trapped in a man's body. By doing that I would be fighting with my creator. He knew that he was creating a gay man. Now why must I fight that. I tell them that I'm not a girl, I'm a woman, a gay woman.

Where some gay men celebrated femininity, others sought to conceal appearances of homosexuality by refraining from what were perceived as overtly gay behaviours and rejecting stereotypically feminine gender expression—at least in public social spaces. Dressing and behaving in conventionally masculine ways were strategies to avoid stigmatisation. Some participants voiced concerns towards gay men who openly embrace a stereotypically feminine expression of their "gayness" and believed that this should only be expressed in the presence of gay friends.

> People know I am gay, but I do not just share that with everyone so that they don't disrespect me and call me "girlfriend" or "girl". Being gay does not mean I am a girl; I am a boy.

> You don't have to show everyone that you are gay. But you can only do that when you are around your friends. Then you can reveal your true gay self. We as gay people like to perform and act gay in public and we should only do that amongst family and friends.

> You will never see me wearing a skirt or a dress. I would be forgetting who I am if I did that. Who I am is a man; the inner me is a woman.…There is a time for mini-skirts and there is a time for everything else.…You can wear a mini-skirt at a party, but not at a funeral.

Gay men who described themselves as feminine voiced desires for relationships with "real men", and expressed little desire for sexual relationships with other gay men who, like them, were perceived to display more female expressions of gender. Moreover, such gay-identified men felt strongly that gay-identified men expressing more fluidity with their gender presentation was undesirable.

> I do not want to be with a girl; I want to be with a real man. So now all of a sudden when [he] turns on me and starts acting feminine, it turns me off and I end up leaving him because he is not what I was looking for.

Participants also described some gay men as "straight-looking gay guys", or "straight gays", meaning men who consider themselves gay but look and act in a stereotypically masculine or straight manner. As such, they were seen as objects of sexual desire. "Straight gays" were described as only having other men as their sexual partners. Nevertheless, some participants characterised them as being in denial about being gay. "These are men who will act like he is straight, but when you pass by him, he will be busy pinching you to get your attention." But more frequently, men in this category were described as sexually desirable.

> You see those gay men understand gays and the way that gay people behave. For example, my husband is a gay man, he is masculine and I am feminine.

> Some guys, they don't want drag queens; they are looking for those straight-looking gays because they don't want to be seen around gay people. When walking with a straight-looking gay guy, they don't feel embarrassed.

"After-Nine" men were distinguished from "straight gays" and described by gay men in various ways: "*dating women*", "*being with a woman and a man*", and "*hiding their sexuality under the table*" to avoid disclosure of their sexual proclivities. "There are people who define themselves as straight but they do sleep with gay men, but at the same time, they do not consider themselves as part of us." These descriptions conveyed that After-Nine men were stereotypically masculine, behaviourally bisexual, and generally the insertive partner during anal sex. However, After-Nine men's masculinity was not always a guarantee that they assumed the "top" role in their sexual encounters with gay men.

> *There are those* [After-Nines] who say that they are straight, but they are also bottoms in bed. So when you are out with him, you need to treat him like a boyfriend and you need to act like a lady because you are gay—but it is a different story when you have sex.

One gay man characterised After-Nine men as not yet accepting they are "gay" or being uncertain about their same-sex desires.

> They can't find a key. Or, they have it, but they are just struggling to open the door and pave their way.

Some gay men did not consider After-Nine men to be part of local gay communities because After-Nine men did not overtly experience anti-gay stigma and discrimination, and even were seen to perpetuate it. However, some gay men still supported including After-Nines as part of the gay community.

> I think that as a gay community we can still do more because even though they are After-Nines, they still need our support because one day their secret will be out in the open and it will be difficult for them.

Gay Men's Relationships with After-Nine Sexual Partners

Despite the fact that many gay men expressed desire to have After-Nine men as sexual partners, many expressed frustration and dissatisfaction with these relationships. They were disappointed by and resented After-Nine men's abrupt switch from pursuing gay men as sexual partners in the evening to avoiding them the next day. Some gay men said, "*During the day, they* [After-Nine men] *act like they hate gay people*".

> You will greet them and they will not respond. They will just walk past you in a passage. All they know is just how to strut, "left, right, left, right", as if there is no one there.

> I think during the day, they do not want to be seen talking to gay men and most of them are very homophobic and do not want to want to be associated with gay men. Because to them this would mean that they are not manly enough. But when no one is watching, they become very friendly toward gay people.

> Then at night, he is the first one to come to you and say 'Baby I love you, I am bisexual.' Then I say, 'But wasn't it you that was swearing at me saying I am gay? You now sleep with gays?'

Some gay men expressed being hurt by After-Nine men's inconsistent behaviour towards them.

> …when After-Nines see a gay man who is out of the closet, they are not happy about that because they are still in the closet. Their time to be out is only at night or whenever they have that opportunity….Sometimes… I will be at a party and sleep with [an] After-Nine. After that night, that particular After-Nine will do all that he can to sabotage and hurt me.

Gay men expect that their After-Nine partners have girlfriends, wives, and other female sexual partners. Not all were upset about this.

> In life I cannot choose for a person. I can't tell them that they shouldn't be with a woman, but be with me only. As long as he satisfies me, then it's fine, because he deserves a vaginal [vagina] *and an anal* [anus]. As long as he is able to satisfy me and keep me happy on my side, just as he has to satisfy his girlfriend as well.

Some gay men expressed desires for public validation of their relationships with After-Nine men. However, they knew that this public validation was reserved for After-Nine men's female partners.

Others, however, expressed a desire for public validation of the relationship with the After-Nine man that was reserved for his female partners.

> …As an After-Nine, you come to me. You keep telling me that you love me, but during the day, you are with your wife. I can't be seen anywhere with you. You know that I am like ecstasy, I'm addictive. You keep on taking me when nobody is looking at you, but on the other hand, I want to be seen out with you.

Sex, gender, power, and exchange

Gay men's relationships with After-Nine men are characterised by exchanges of sex for goods. Gay men buy alcohol for their After-Nine partners in exchange for sex; other items of exchange included food and mobile phone airtime. A less common description of the transactional nature of these relationships was aligned with expected gender roles, manifest by After-Nines providing for more feminine gay men.

> They can say they bought us. He'll be buying you drinks and everything you ask for. He'll buy and you know that at the end of the night, you are going to be going home with him to sleep with him.

It was far more common for gay men to describe providing the material benefits in exchange for sex with After-Nine men.

> After-Nines just think that all you need to do to get a gay guy is tell him you love him and he will just melt and end up buying you beers and sleeping with you.

These types of transactional relationships were frequently based on the reality or perception that gay men were financially well-off and had disposable income. Although the exchange of cash for sex between men was uncommon, some gay men referred to them as "rent boys".

> It's about power and money because people think that gays have money. So After-Nines use gay people to buy them drinks and food.

> They sell their bodies. Even though we do not give them hard cash, the fact [is] *that you buy them alcohol and then* [he is] going to come home with me and eat my food and sleep in my blankets.

> …you will find someone who will say, 'Buy me a beer. I want to go with you'. So in a way I would say, according to my understanding, that man is selling sex--not monetary, but alcohol-wise.

Gay men's narratives about these exchanges frequently conveyed the sense that After-Nine men were opportunistic, and left their gay partners disappointed with the terms of the exchange.

> For straight guys, they only want to ejaculate. That's all. And you can't have sex with them the whole night because after they ejaculate they are done with you.

> *You pick this person up at* [a tavern], you take him home, you sleep with him and as soon as he has reached climax, he says he needs to be somewhere. He has done what he was there for.

One participant articulated the entanglement of material, sexual, and emotional affect that many gay men experienced in their relationships with After-Nine men.

> …The relationship between MSM that do not identify themselves as gay and gay men causes tension because you're telling yourself that you are in a relationship with this person. But in actual fact, this person has other agendas. It could be money or just to have fun and drink alcohol, and the sex is not good. … the one that you find at a tavern, for example, you have basically bought him with alcohol and once you get to your place to have sex, he is only concerned about getting it over and done with. At 11 PM when he is done having sex with you, he'll put on his clothes and leave. It's not true love.

Unrequited desire for intimacy

Emotionally unfulfilling relationships with After-Nine sexual partners were a source of dissatisfaction for gay men. Sexual encounters were frequently described as one-night stands, devoid of commitment or emotional intimacy, and solely centred on achieving sexual pleasure. A common theme in gay men's descriptions of relationships with After-Nine men, whether they were transactional and fleeting, or established over time, was a well-articulated sense of disappointment that they could not achieve any intimacy with After-Nine partners. "One-night stands" were particularly non-reciprocal and had the potential for physical altercations if gay men pursued them further.

Gay men perceived they had no control over the behaviour of their After-Nine partner in public settings.

> It's not nice because sometimes you could be really in love with that person but you are not able to prove how much you love him. The only relations that the two of you will have is meeting up at clubs that weekend maybe on a Friday then the next day he'll disappear. He's basically playing with your heart. But he'll still say that you are his boyfriend amongst your friends.

One participant admonished gay men generally for falling for straight men when the outcome of these relationships was almost never satisfying.

> Some of us, actually most of us, tend to fall in love with straight people. Where are you going to find love from a straight person? … At least if you are looking for someone that is straight-looking, that is okay -- as long as they are gay. But you cannot try and find love from someone who is completely straight. It won't happen; he will never even introduce you as his partner to his family.

The hidden nature of After-Nine men's relationships with gay men was a source of frustration for most and emotionally traumatic for some.

> … Just imagine waiting on the rain. You are basically waiting, waiting for the day that he will come out and be comfortable to be with you. Whereas, on the other hand, you want him badly. Can you imagine how much it hurts? We get hurt; it's a fact. That's why I think there are high cases of suicide amongst gays because you are basically waiting on this one person.

There was also tacit acceptance of the lack of commitment by After-Nine men.

> Sometimes you go into this knowing that it is a no-strings attached relationship, so it doesn't matter if they do not talk to you the next day.

Discussion

Our study provides insight into how Black gay South African men living outside of that country's major metropolitan areas articulate their sense of a community defined by a shared sexuality, and how gay men make sense of their own sexual expression and those of their sexual partners, specifically men that are labelled as "After-Nines". Participants' narratives suggest that they understand that the social and sexual dynamics that exist among various groups within the 'gay community' in Mpumalanga are complex and often marked by tension, particularly with the non-gay identified group of After-Nine men. The data presented here support Young and Meyer's (2005) caution against using MSM interchangeably with gay identity in public health discourse. However, the data also show that the meaning of gay identity is itself contested by gay men in these communities, who frequently articulated an inclusive community identity that incorporates non-gay identified men assexual partners.

Participants primarily characterised gender expression among MSM as a masculine—feminine binary. This gender binary has been reported in other studies of gay and other MSM in South Africa (McLean & Ngcoboo, 1994; Reid, 2005; Lane, Mogale, Struthers, McIntyre, & Kegeles, 2008; Rabie & Lesch, 2009; Sandfort et al., 2012). Gay men associated their own and others' gay identity less commonly with masculine gender conformity than with feminine gender non-conformity. They perceived After-Nine non-gay identified men as well as straight, non-gay-identified MSM, who were the objects of their desire, as masculine gendered. Fluidity in gender expression was described, with participants characterising themselves in terms of being both feminine and masculine. Some categorised After-Nine men as "straight", while others considered them bisexual, or secretly gay. They distinguished After-Nine men from straight gay men in that the former also had sex with women. The inversion of gender roles that gay men described in their relationships with After-Nine sexual partners in Mpumalanga, whereby a more feminine partner attracts and attempts to hold the attention of a more masculine partner by giving material goods, is comparable to the dynamics in gender-stratified homosexual relationships reported elsewhere in South Africa (Masvawure, Sandfort, Reddy, Collier, & Lane, 2015) and in other countries, for example, in Cote d'Ivoire (Brooks & Bocahut, 1998) and Brazil (Kulick, 1998).

Although some participants enjoyed exploring aspects of their feminine feelings, they recognised the need to present publically in a more masculine manner, with a preference for reserving overt female gender expression for private contexts and specifically gay spaces. These gay men consciously embodied a more masculine style as a way to conceal homosexuality, foster public acceptance, and command respect. Whereas gay identity in South Africa has traditionally been associated with feminine gender presentation (Reid, 2005; Rabie & Lesch, 2009), there is some evidence for the emergence of a new form of

identity and desire that is not based exclusively on a binary gender system. Participants' mapping of the diversity of identities revealed that sexuality and gender were not necessarily discrete categories, as Valentine (2007) theorized in his ethnography of the emerging transgender category in New York City. Gay men had a broad conception of anyone not strictly heterosexual and not strictly cisgender as part of the 'gay' community, including individuals who in a western context would likely be identified as 'transgender'.

The exchange of commodities such as sex, alcohol and money between gay and After-Nine men who meet in "gay-friendly" bars and taverns in the towns and townships of Mpumalanga was assumed to be a basic feature in their relationships. Power inequities in these relationships were manifest in two ways. The perception that gay men were relatively affluent gave them advantage for attracting sexual partners, including After-Nine men. Gay men were expected to buy alcoholic drinks, cell phone airtime, and other material goods in exchange for sex and companionship with After-Nine men. At the same time, After-Nine men held power over gay men as objects of their sexual desire. This suggests that within the gay community, normative masculinity is another sought-after commodity, one that all straight-identified MSM possess and that After-Nine men use to their advantage in their interactions with gay men.

Power and exploitation in relationships between gay men and their After-Nine partners can be understood through the lens of a social exchange framework (Emerson, 1976) which considers attributes of the relationship between actors as key, rather than attributes of individual actors. Relations are viewed as a process of reinforcing rewards (financial gains, attention) and minimising costs (exploitation, lack of intimacy). This bi-directional exchange of power allowed for sexual transactions as a social exchange. Gay men desired and longed to be desired by After-Nine men, and believed that After-Nine men sought to reap material benefits from them. However, our data indicate that gay men experienced the transaction as asymmetrical. Despite being perceived as having money to spend, and despite deploying resources in a transactional sexual context, they experienced themselves as nonetheless disadvantaged in getting what many desired from After-Nine men beyond a simple fuck: a relationship that included emotional intimacy and love.

The problematic nature of these relationships for gay men in Mpumalanga must also be seen in the context of the narrow pool of openly gay men in our study communities. The secrecy imposed by After-Nine men was attributed to the closeted nature of their sexuality, which, in turn, was related to homophobia. This social distance between gay and "straight" men was also reported in Lorway's (2006) study in Namibia, with the latter group only socializing and having sex with gay men they met at clubs at night. This covert sexual dynamic also bears similarities to that of "down-low" men in the US context (Sandfort & Dodge, 2008; Bond et al., 2009).

Our study has several limitations. First, our ethnographic sample was composed largely of self-identified gay men recruited through snowball sampling, most of whom embraced binary sexual and gender identities of gay and non-gay identified men, including After-Nine men. Second, the data do not include the perspectives of non-gay identified men. We acknowledge that understanding how After-Nine men perceive their own sexual and gender

identities and their relationships with gay men and other sexual partners is important to fully understanding relationship and sexual dynamics, and their impact on HIV risk-reduction and health-promoting behaviours. Notwithstanding these limitations, the study contributes to the fields of sexuality studies and public health by describing the diversity of homosexual identities and sexualities in the narratives of Black gay men in rural South African townships that, in public health discourse, are generally subsumed under the 'MSM' category.

Fish (2008) points to the need to consider intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1991) and the interconnectedness of the multiple identities of gender, race and class associated with oppression and social inequality among LGBT communities. This is especially salient in South Africa, where such intersections have been the sites of considerable contestation and change in recent decades.

As we continue to consider the utility and limitations of the MSM category, there is a need to interrogate sexual and gendered discourses, vocabularies and identities. Recognising that sexual minority community identities do not map neatly onto public health categories invented to describe them, there is equally a need to understand that sexual behaviour and HIV risk are not bounded by the sexual identity terms that sexual minority communities may employ to describe themselves. Emic terms like 'After-Nines' cannot be adopted wholesale into prevention programming because who, and what behaviors such terms encompass is not static. Moreover, those to whom such labels are applied are likely to reject them as derogatory—particularly if health programmes considered exogenous to the communities from which such categories originate appropriate them.

Conclusion: Implications for HIV Prevention

Non-gay-identified After-Nine men are an integral part of the sexual networks of gay men in Mpumalanga. The social and sexual interactions between gay and non-gay identifying MSM are critical to understanding HIV risk and effective targeting of sexual health-promoting interventions. However, the secretive nature of After-Nine men's sexual relationships with gay men and their antipathy toward overt identification with gay men presents a challenge to community-based HIV prevention approaches to addressing the needs of all men who have sex with men in Mpumalanga. Though difficult to identify and recruit because of lack of organised social networks, our findings underscore the need for future research to explore After-Nine men's perspectives on sexuality, gender, sexuality, and risk to improve HIV programming for men who engage in sex with men. At the same time, sexual risk-reduction interventions with gay men and those who defy strict identity categorisation must assist in building safer-sex self-efficacy to manage challenging circumstances with any sexual partners.

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