

**A sociological analysis of the experiences of  
acceptance of Christian gay men within the  
Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) in  
Grahamstown**

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## Abstract

Buffington, Luibhéid, & Guy (2014: 1) argue that “in the contemporary world, our own sexuality and our sense of the sexualities of others colour all aspects of contemporary life, from interpersonal relations to foreign affairs.” In line with this statement, this study provides an account of how a person’s gay sexuality can possibly colour that person’s experience of acceptance by the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) in Grahamstown. Samuel Hill (2008: 6) notes that there is an urgent need to create a dialectic between religious and secular discourse with regards to furthering our understanding of sexuality. Thus this thesis seeks to contribute to the body of scholarship that explores and discusses the disjuncture between one’s homosexual identity and one’s religious identity.

Barton (2012: 2) notes that “gay people are often talked about but seldom listened to; rarely are they asked about their own oppression and the individuals and institutions oppressing them.” While adopting a qualitative approach utilising interviews to explore the stories of the respondents, this study applies Bourdieu’s concepts of field, habitus, social capital and symbolic violence in order to analyse the experiences of acceptance of gay men within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) in Grahamstown. With regard to the use Bourdieu’s concepts in the analysis of the experiences, the following dimensions were considered: i) construction of a gay identity within the field of Christianity as represented by the MCSA in this context, ii) the impact the field has on the ‘gay habitus’, iii) Social capital as an advantageous strategy in constructing a gay identity within the church, and iv) symbolic violence that gay men experience within the church. In analysing the conditions of the acceptance that gay men receive within the church, this study also uses Jacques Derrida’s concept of hospitality.

## Dedication

To my late little brother, Nathi 'Mabhoni' Sipungu, whose tragic passing still haunts me. You live in my heart, always.

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## Glossary of Key Terms

**Gay:** a synonym for homosexual. Sometimes used to describe only males who are attracted primarily to other males.

**Gay and Lesbian community:** groups of gays and lesbians for whom their gay or lesbian identity is central to their personality, and who have grouped together with others for social, counselling or lobbying purposes.

**Gender:** the social and cultural codes used to distinguish between what a society considers 'masculine' or 'feminine' conduct.

**Heterosexual:** a person attracted primarily to people of the opposite sex.

**Homophobia:** intense dislike, hatred or fear of homosexuals and homosexuality (also as adjective: 'homophobic').

**Homosexual** a person attracted primarily to people of the same sex.

**Homosexuality:** sexual orientation towards members of one's own sex.

**Identity:** the sense a person has of his/her own individual nature and personality and of the way this leads the individual to identify with specific groups of people (for instance, by way of nationality, language group or sexual orientation). Most people see themselves as having a set of different identities, for example as women and South African and coloured and teacher. Acknowledging a gay or homosexual identity can mean identifying as a member of a gay or lesbian community.

**LGBT:** lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender; an inclusive term for groups and identities sometimes also associated together as 'sexual minorities'.

**Lesbian:** a female attracted primarily to other females.

**Queer:** often used as a slur in English to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons, the term "queer" has been reclaimed by many people in the US

and other countries as an expression of pride in one's sexual orientation and gender identity.

**Sexual identity:** a person's internal, deeply felt sense of being male or female, or something other than or in between male and female.

**Sexual orientation:** the way in which a person's sexual and emotional desires are directed. The term categorises according to the sex of the object of desire — that is, it describes whether a person is attracted primarily toward people of the same or opposite sex, or to both.

(Adapted from Dunton & Palmberg, 1996; Human Rights Watch, 2003; Li, 2009)

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO STUDY

## 1.1. Introduction

Across the globe the debate over homosexuality continues, with great variation in public opinion about the acceptability of homosexuality, laws regulating same-sex unions and penalties for homosexual sex behaviour (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009: 338, Davies, 2012: 259; de Freitas, 2014). Attitudes toward homosexuality are complex and multifaceted and the debate about homosexuality constantly threatens to tear most churches apart (Le Roux, 2006: 1). Scholars have, over the years, suggested that the issue of homosexuality is the root of a divisive conflict in many religious communities (Germond & de Gruchy, 1997; Judge et al., 2008; Ganzevoort et al., 2011; Epprecht, 2013). Ganzevoort et al. (2011: 209) note that “no matter how one describes the conflict, on every side of the divide we find individuals and communities that try to make sense of their lives and live with integrity towards their own values, towards the people that matter to them, and towards what is sacred in their lives.”

Christian denominations differ in their positions on the issue of homosexuality. These differences range from the condemnation of homosexuality as a manifestation of a depraved nature and a perversion of divine principles; to a conditional acceptance of homosexual people as long as they do not engage in homosexual acts; to a full acceptance of homosexuality as part of the diversity of God’s good creation, which includes the blessing of same-sex unions and the ordination of homosexual ministers.

This thesis will focus on the experiences of six gay men within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) in Grahamstown, South Africa. Methodism is the name given to a breakaway group of the Protestant Church that arose in England in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Although a detailed, in-depth account of all the laws that govern the MCSA is

beyond the scope of this thesis, I acknowledge that spatial values, norms, attitudes and ultimately experiences, are shaped and governed by laws and the accompanying sanctions or rewards. Thus Section 2.5.3 of this thesis makes specific mention to the laws in the Constitution of the MCSA that act to thwart a full homosexual spirituality within the church. All six participants in this study are from a Black Methodist background, which limits the generalisability of this study across cultural, racial and religious borders. This study will situate their experiences within Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework. Its central basis is the belief that individuals as well as communities develop their identities and employ identity strategies in such a way that they can negotiate the conflict whatever conflict they are presented with.

## **1.2. Theoretical Framework of the Study's Key Concepts**

In attempting to situate and order the participants' life history narratives, this study will utilise Pierre Bourdieu's social theory, with particular emphasis on his concepts of habitus, capital, field and symbolic violence.

Bourdieu's theory in short, argues that society is a multidimensional space consisting of fields such as institutions, social groups, work places etc. The individual always has with him/her what Bourdieu calls the 'habitus' when entering any of these fields. Using the selected research respondents, this thesis emphasises the advantages of social capital for the gay men in negotiating their entry and identities within the MCSA. At the core of the concept of social capital is that relationships matter (Field, 2003) and that there are benefits inherent in or that can be drawn from social networks on a micro and macro level (Mukorombindo, 2012).

Bourdieu offers an explanatory power that seeks to link objective structures to subjective experiences (Skeggs, 2004: 21). Furthermore, while Bourdieu "emphasised

class distinctions, his analysis is applicable to other kinds of distinctions and relations (such as gender, race and ethnicity and the like), and his theory has been employed by sociologists to generate nuanced analysis of the relationships between difference, resources and power in diverse social settings” (Heaphy, 2008). Bourdieu (in Heaphy, 2008) proposed a vision of reflexive sociology that could be more useful for comprehending contemporary lesbian and gay life, as it places difference and power at the centre of the conceptual frame.

Bourdieu makes it clear that society comprises a network of relatively autonomous 'fields' which operate according to their own internal logics and dynamics (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 94). Linda Ronnie (2008: 3) notes that “Bourdieu also uses the concept of field to describe the social space within which individuals interact but also the space which embodies the rules of the game.” A field, therefore, is a “structured social space; a field of forces, a force field. It contains people who dominate and people who are dominated. Constant, permanent relationships of inequality operate inside this space, which at the same time becomes a space in which the various actors struggle for the transformation or preservation of the field. All the individuals in this universe bring to the competition all the (relative) power at their disposal. It is this power that defines their position in the field and, as a result, their strategies” (Bourdieu, 1998: 40-41). Bourdieu argues that all fields are characterised by struggle.

This thesis explores the struggles of homosexual Christian men within the MCSA in Grahamstown. According to Bourdieu (1993: 73) “in order for a field to function, there have to be stakes, interests and people prepared to play the game, endowed with the habitus that implies knowledge and recognition of immanent laws of the field, the stakes, interests and so on.” Bourdieu also contends that all the agents involved in a

field share a certain number of fundamental interests, namely aspects linked to the very existence of the field (Bourdieu, 1993: 73). He goes on to argue that each social field has its own rules/doxa, thus when the individual enters a field the relevant social group will evaluate the individual and ascribe him/her a position within the field. In line with this argument, this thesis defines the MCSA as a sub-field within the broader field of Christian religion. Bourdieu saw religion as a field in which the rules of access are faith and dogma (Harker, 1990).

For the purposes of this study the dominant habitus within a church setting is that of heterosexual men and woman within the church. It then follows from this that the habitus provides individuals with pre-disposed, yet seemingly 'naturalised' ways of thinking, feeling, acting and classifying the social world and their location within it (Shusterman, 1999: 49). The available literature that juxtaposes sexuality and Christianity suggests that a major component of the dominant habitus is a negative attitude towards homosexuality within Christian spaces (Germond & de Gruchy, 1997: 40; Van Klinken and Gunda, 2012).

### **1.3. Research Background and Goals of Study**

Vermeulen (2008: 211) notes that “Christians and churches have, throughout history, located themselves or have been placed in positions of social power and thereby became arch supporters – wittingly and unwittingly – of the socio-economic and political status quo”. The theoretical framework (briefly discussed in 1.2 above) observes that the social world is organised along binaries, and also suggests that these dichotomies are then embodied by individuals. Kevin Joubert (1998: 7) in his thesis about ‘queer sexualities’ argues that “when individuals face a divergence – along binaries – between their experience of the world and the presentation of reality

by society and by their culture ... the choice that an individual has in this situation is to deny his experience, to try to change his experience or to defy the societal prescriptions.” The primary goal of this thesis is to study the choices that these individuals (gay men) have to make when entering spaces that are non-affirming of their sexual orientation.

The study provides a sociological analysis of the experiences of gay men within the MCSA in Grahamstown looking at the following research objectives:

1. To analyse ways in which the age-old conflict between organised religion and homosexuality shapes the experiences of acceptance of Christian gay men within the MCSA in Grahamstown and to interrogate the conditions of this acceptance;
2. To explore the life histories and experiences of six homosexual Christian men within the MCSA, Grahamstown with regard to their acceptance by their congregations within the church;
3. In the event that their narratives tell tales of prejudices because of their sexual orientation, to uncover the resist-stances or strategies that these men adopt in challenging or dealing with such homophobia inside their churches;
4. Individuals as well as communities develop their identities and employ identity strategies in such a way that they can negotiate the conflict. This thesis seeks to study the strategies that gay men employ when negotiating their entry and constructing their social identities within the MCSA in Grahamstown.

Furthermore, there is a body of literature that reveals that orthodox religious groups often reject the notion of homosexual identity. Ganzevoort et al. (2011: 2012) goes on to note that these groups may be willing to accept that homosexuality exists, but they deny the right of the homosexuals to claim that as part of their identity. This thesis

analyses how gay men construct their gay identity within the MCSA. It is this study's secondary goal to apply Pierre Bourdieu's conceptual framework to the analysis and exploration of the experiences of gay men within the MCSA, thus further contributing towards the application of Bourdieu's scholarship to the field of sexualities (See for example Moon, 2015).

#### **1.4. The Context of the Study: The MCSA in Grahamstown**

The study used the Methodist Church of Southern Africa in the small town of Grahamstown located in the Eastern Cape, South Africa as the research site. Grahamstown is representative of the diverse and cosmopolitan nature of contemporary South African society because it is home to different people from different cultural backgrounds, both rural and urban, South African and foreign, including people who are temporarily worshipping in Grahamstown on a short-to-medium term basis while studying or working

The MCSA is an important part of the 'Christian landscape' in South Africa, not only because of its numerical dominance but also because of the role it played in the struggle against apartheid (Theilen, 2003: 1). The Methodist Church made statements, and protested and worked against apartheid in many ways between the formal adoption of the ideology in 1948 and its downfall in 1994. Moreover, the Methodist Church also sought to undermine the false theology that supported the apartheid system and the evil consequences that resulted from it. Evidence of the MCSA's role in the fight against the apartheid system can be seen from Nelson Mandela's speech of 18 September 1994 at the Annual Conference of the Methodist Church where he said the following:

“Your Church has a proud record of commitment to the development of Africa`s sons and daughters in more areas than one... Although the dark night of apartheid sought to obliterate many of these institutions (Methodist Institutions), the impact of their academic and moral teachings could not be trampled on”  
(Nelson Mandela, 1994)

Secondly, Theilen (2003: 1) argues that “in post-apartheid South Africa, the MCSA seems to be sitting on the fence between a male and white dominated, oppressive and divisive past and a promising future of mutual respect within South African society.” A detailed and contemporary analysis of the situation of homosexual men and their experiences within the MCSA in Grahamstown will add to a better understanding of the plight of Christian gay men in South Africa today. The gathered information will make it possible to draw conclusions on the development of the MCSA in post-apartheid South Africa as a whole because changes usually start in a city environment whereas rural areas tend to maintain a status quo over a longer period of time.

## **1.5. Chapter Outline**

This thesis will be divided into 5 chapters:

**Chapter 1** introduces the study and locates it within the context of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa in Grahamstown. It also sets the research background and goals of the study and introduces key concepts used in the study.

**Chapter 2** describes the historical and social context of the study. It interrogates the South African Constitution’s impact on people’s attitudes towards homosexuality as well as situates the discussion against the backdrop of notions homosexuality as ‘Un-

African' behaviour within Africa. This chapter also sets out the Methodist Church's stance on homosexuality at 2015.

**Chapter 3** sets out the theoretical context of the research study. It describes Bourdieu's key concepts and their relation to the study as they will be applied. The chapter also links and brings Pierre Bourdieu into the realm of queer sexualities.

**Chapter 4** provides a description of the research methodology and research paradigm within which this study is located. This chapter also sets out the data collection method and the challenges that the researcher encountered while undertaking the study.

**Chapter 5** is the first analysis chapter of this thesis. This chapter deals is divided into 3 sections. The first section [5.2] incorporates Bourdieu's concept of field. It locates the Methodist Church as a representative of the entire field of Christianity. This section looks at identity construction while gay within the MCSA. The second section [5.3] also uses Bourdieu's concept of social capital. It looks at social capital as an advantage to have at an individual level in order to negotiate easy entry and acceptance into church structures. The last section [5.4] of this chapter uses Bourdieu's concept of habitus in relation to gay men's experiences within the MCSA. The section looks at whether a 'gay habitus' co-exists with the dominant habitus within the MCSA. Overall, this chapter uses Bourdieu's concepts of field, social capital and habitus to discuss identity construction and survival strategies of gay men within the MCSA.

**Chapter 6** is the second analysis chapter of this thesis. This chapter is divided into 2 sections. The first section [6.2] uses Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence to map out the invisible, subtle forms of violence that are usually exerted upon homosexual bodies within spaces that purport to be open, accepting and welcoming. The second section [6.3] interrogates the question of being at home within the MCSA. It uses

Jacques Derrida's notion of hospitality to analyse the experiences of gay men within the church. Overall, this chapter interrogates ideas inclusion, acceptance and hospitality received by gay men within the MCSA.

**Chapter 7** is the final chapter of this thesis and it provides a summary of all the arguments made in different chapters and sections of this thesis.

## **CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE STUDY**

### **2.1. Introduction**

The previous chapter dealt with the introduction and setting of the background of this study. This chapter sets out the literature and explains the troubled intersection between homosexuality, religion and cultures within the African continent. Out of this interaction we get labels such as ‘ungodly’ and ‘un-African. The chapter proceeds to deal with the impact of the sexual orientation clause and the South African Constitution’s impact on people’s attitudes towards homosexuality. It also sets out how scholars have grappled with the collision between the constitutional rights to freedom of association and religious freedom on the one hand, and the right to equality and the prohibition on discrimination on the other. This chapter also sets out MCSA’s stance on homosexuality at 2015.

### **2.2. Religion and (Homo)sexuality**

Ganzevoort, Van der Laan and Olsman (2011) note that homosexuality has become a divisive issue in many religious communities. He goes on to observe that “in the midst of the present day conflicts about homosexuality in religious circles, one might easily forget that it is not just an abstract issue that is at stake, but the actual lives of real people” (Ganzevoort et al., 2011: 209). This thesis aims to locate the experiences of gay men – people who, because of their sexual orientation, are usually most affected by this problematic relationship between organised religion and the ‘politics of sexualities’ – within field of religion as represented by the MCSA in this study.

Christian religious groups have commonly legislated strictly on the sexual behaviour of their members. The church has always been a site of contradiction when sexuality

is concerned because it has been less willing to blur the line between the secular and the sacred when it comes to sexuality (Johnson, 1998: 402). “When the church does address sexuality, it does so by exhorting the glories of sexual expression between heterosexuals within the institution of marriage (and usually for the purpose of procreation as opposed to recreation)” (Johnson, 1998: 401). The way in which most churches deal and talk about sexuality was summarised by Schrader (Yip, 2010: 667) when he wrote, “To hear many religious people talk, one would think God created the torso, head, legs and arms, but the devil slapped on the genitals.”

This religiously sanctioned control over sexual behaviour includes for example, the manner of expressing sexual intimacy, the prohibition of sexual intimacy before marriage, the choice of a marriage partner, the date of the wedding and the manner of the wedding ceremony (Ojo, 2005: 3). There is much truth in the observation that the church has generally stamped sexuality with a theological ‘handle with care’ and has not left sexual behaviour merely to personal discretion (Bentley, 2012: 2). “If the church holds a contradictory and duplicitous attitude toward sexuality with regard to its heterosexual members, then it goes without saying that the same would be true for its attitude toward its gay and lesbian members” (Johnson, 1998: 404).

Ojo (2005:3) argues that the control of sexual behaviour by Christian groups has become institutionalised and is the most ubiquitous modalities through which religious groups demonstrate power and exercise social control over their members. Orthodox Christian religious groups have always been conservative in their approach to sexual behaviour and have sought to control the manner and process by which sexual rights can be exercised.

In light of this explicit control upon sexual behaviour of the congregants, those who affirm themselves as members of religious groups are assumed to have submitted their whole being, including their sexuality, to the teachings and the norms of the group. To believe otherwise is to exercise a choice to either leave the group and the moral protection that such religious groups offer or to remain within such a group under more trying circumstances (Ojo, 2005:3). It is the purpose of this research to find out whether being Christian and gay within the MSCA context, taking into account the status quo of homosexuality in South Africa yields the same outcomes or the opposite.

Research on the relationship between organised religion and sexuality shows that religion is often seen as an important predictor of attitudes about homosexuality (Finlay & Walther, 2003; Tsang & Mak, 2008: 380; Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009; Mutambanengwe, 2013; Sherkat et al., 2010: 389; Bhana, 2013: 117). Religion has over the years been an unwavering variable upon which people have felt justified to discriminate against homosexuals. It has been argued that religion denies and questions the morality and existence of homosexuality, with God being the perfect tool to extricate it (Ojo, 2005: 6; Msibi, 2012: 520; Stobie, 2014: 14).

Vermeulen (2008: 210) argues that the contemporary church's refusal to acknowledge and bless same sex marriages is a result of an age-old vexed relationship between political power and organised religion. He argues (Vermeulen, 2008: 209-210) that the problematic relationship between organised religion and political power produced systems of justice which concerned themselves with expunging guilt through divine retribution and that this justice brings very little understanding of the human, social and cultural differences that affirm dignity, respect and equality of the human being.

However, “although many religious institutions still adhere to proscriptions against homosexuality, in recent decades some churches have liberalized” (Germond & de Gruchy, 1997: 179; Anderson & Fetner, 2008: 314). Despite the difference in views when it comes to examining the positions of the churches in South Africa on human sexuality, it is evident that “heterosexism is upheld as normative for Christians, and that deviance from these norms is problematic for Christian self-conception and practice” (Germond and de Gruchy, 1997: 181).

Many have had to turn to Christian churches that openly welcome LGBTI and explicitly reject interpretations of scripture that condemn homosexual orientation” (Epprecht, 2013; 79). These churches include, but are not limited to, the Rainbow Church of God in Nigeria, Other Sheep East Africa in Nairobi, The Hope and Unity Metropolitan Community Church and the Deo Gloria Family Church in South Africa. These churches have re-interpreted the Bible in such a way that homosexuality is viewed in a positive, rather than negative light.

Gevisser (1995) notes that the acceptance of sexual policing by religious leaders and associations as just another aspect of everyday life allows the whole subject to be treated as historically and politically unimportant. It is significant and deeply ironic that religion – specifically Christianity – is used to valorize and give legitimacy to homophobic sentiments in Southern Africa, particularly as Christianity itself is a colonial import, whereas homosexuality is described as Western, decadent and un-African (Li, 2009: 16; Francis & Msibi, 2011: 166). Ironically, the very same Christianity and African traditional healing have been seen as the ‘cure’ for homosexuality in places where it is seen as a disease (Makhubo, 2009: 4).

### **2.3. 'Un-African' in Africa**

Spurlin (2006: 91) argues that in southern Africa, colonial history is appealed to and cited by those strands of African cultural nationalism that see homosexuality as a western intrusion that threatens the collapse of the nation's spiritual domain. Despite the ongoing dialogue and activism, homosexuality remains a taboo subject in most African countries. The editor of the Catholic Church's theological journal *African Ecclesial Review* (AFER) reiterated these sentiments when he wrote: "In most of Africa, homosexuality is a taboo discussed in hushed tones" (Nabushawo, 2004: 293; Mutambanengwe, 2013: 44). Only 11 out of the 54 African countries have legalised or decriminalised homosexuality. Contrary to popular belief in Africa, historic and anthropological research shows that homosexuality has existed throughout history, in all types of society, among all social classes and peoples, and it has survived qualified approval, indifference and the most vicious persecution" (Edwards, 1994: 15; Griffin, 2000: 92; Li, 2009; Mtshiselwa, 2010: 19; Epprecht, 2013: 66). Malloy (1981: 30) argues that this is an indication that homosexuality is not a function of some uniquely Western casual nexus but it is rather rooted in more universal human dynamics.

Since Foucault, we have come to understand sexuality as inseparable from the regimes of power in the sense that those who wield the power are in a position to control, police, influence and regulate sexual identities and formations (Spurlin, 2006: 99; Msibi, 2011: 57; Mutambanengwe, 2014). Epprecht (2013: 77) notes that "throughout Africa there is a group of prominent Christian leaders who have harshly condemned homosexuality and who steadfastly reject appeals to respect sexual orientation either as a human right, or as a God-given attribute." This appearance of a common front across so wide a region as Africa, and between such historically

disunited, if not openly hostile branches of Christianity, is based on thin pickings from the Bible (Epprecht, 2013: 78).

Research shows that only six verses in the Bible (Genesis 1–2, 19:1–9; Leviticus 18:22, 20:13; 1 Corinthians 6:9; Romans 1:26–27; and 1 Timothy 1:10) mention homosexuality and these have been used to support religiously sanctioned homophobia (Miller, 2007; Epprecht, 2013: 78). A literal reading of these texts justifies the rejection of gays and lesbians within religious spaces (Kumalo, 2011:177). The most commonly used of these verses include Leviticus 20:13, which states that “If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them.” Another often cited biblical reference is Leviticus 18:22-23 that states that homosexuality is a disgusting sin, akin to bestiality (Gwamna, 2006; Igboin, 2006). Miller (2007: 57) notes that “churches and other religious denominations use these verses to repudiate same-sex romantic relationships, to devalue homosexual genital experiences, and to refuse ordination opportunities for gay aspirants.”

In spite of all the religiously sanctioned homophobia, many African LGBTI are proudly, happily and deeply religious (Epprecht, 2013: 67). “This religiosity often strikes secular activists and scholars from the West as surprising, not least given how religious leaders are commonly at the forefront of whipping up homophobic hatred: homosexuality is against African traditions, is ‘unIslamic’ or ‘unbiblical’” (Epprecht, 2013: 68; Mutambanengwe, 2014). “In Islam, for instance, male homosexuality stands for all perversions and constitutes in a sense the depravity of all depravities” (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000: 333; Boellstorff, 2007: 2007).

Nkomonde (2006) in his paper discussing African cultures and homosexual relationships attempted to explain the religiosity of many African LGBTI. He goes on to postulate that “in African culture, religion is quite literally life and life is religion” (Nkomonde, 2006: 2). For many people religion gives meaning and a way to understand the world. Religions “provide a guide to achieving harmonious relations between people, and a moral framework to manage or cope with the material world, including the natural environment and individuals’ own physical health” (Epprecht, 2013: 68; Miller, 2007). Thus, the church has always served a dual role within the community: “it has served as place to worship God and a place to address the social and political needs of its constituents” (Johnson, 1998: 400; Miller, 2007).

Justice Sachs (2005: 89-90), of the South African Constitutional Court, acknowledges the importance of religion within the South African context:

“Religion provides a framework for social stability and growth. Religious bodies play a large and important part in public life, through schools, hospitals and poverty relief programmes. They command ethical behaviour from their members and bear witness to the exercise of power by state and private agencies; they promote music, art and theatre; they provide halls for community activities, and conduct a great variety of societal activities for their members and the general public. They are part of the fabric of public life, and constitute active elements of the diverse and pluralistic nation contemplated by the Constitution. Religious organisations constitute important sectors of national life.”

Furthermore, a number of studies have found that religiosity has salutary effects with better mental health outcomes, including less depression and psychological distress,

greater life satisfaction, personal happiness, and psychological well-being (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005; Ellison & Flannelly, 2009; Smith et al., 2012: 505). In addition to religion being a fundamental aspect of many homosexual people's lives, needs theorists such as Maslow and John Burton include in their lists of fundamental human needs such things as belonging, safety, love, identity and participation. When one takes these lists into consideration, it becomes clear that basic human needs are being frustrated in the issue of homosexuality and the church (Beattie, 2011: 13). Coate & Rosati (1988: 53) also note that a person will stay within the bounds acceptable to his/her society in order to fulfil his/her needs. However, if staying within those norms proves futile then s/he will adopt methods that lie outside the bounds of the norm. Even if those methods pose a threat in him/her being rejected or punished by society, s/he will continue.

Holmes (1997: 163) notes that the African cultural nationalism has sought to represent homosexuality as a contamination of black culture, thereby attempting to racially mark homosexual desire and homosexual acts as circumstantial products of colonization and apartheid in the South African context. Spurlin (2006: 96) argues that "homosexual people in Africa often assume that their only choices are to take their African heritage as primary, suppressing their gay sexuality as frivolous, or to openly identify as gay or lesbian while suffering a sense of wounded African identity."

## **2.4. The South African Context**

Unlike other African countries, the optic of sexual rights in South Africa has been advanced: in less than two decades the country went from persecuting and arresting individuals acting upon their same-sex desires, to allowing them equal rights to their heterosexual counterparts. Importantly, in 2006 same sex couples were granted the

right to marry and to adopt children (Tucker, 2009; Li, 2009; Richardson & Monro, 2013; Bhana, 2013: 116; Epprecht, 2013). However, despite South Africa's progressive constitution, attacks on homosexual bodies continue to inundate news bulletins around the country. Bhana (2013: 117) argues that "the continuity of terrible acts of violence on queer bodies and homophobia draw from longstanding notions of moral traditions premised upon heteropatriarchy, religion and culture and are steeped within South Africa's historical trajectories."

## **2.5. The Constitution and Hermeneutical Confusion**

As previously mentioned, the South African landscape of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and intersex (LGBTI) struggle is very different to that of other African countries. South Africa was the first country in the world to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in Section 9 of its Constitution, and the fourth to provide for same-sex marriages (Kruuse, 2014: 4). However, when it comes to the South African Constitution there is a great concern about the apparent disconnect between what is on paper and reality of the lived experiences on those on the ground (Msibi, 2012: 518). Commenting on the disconnect between legal changes and lived realities, Pierre de Vos (2015: 5) goes on to observe that: "these legal advances impact differently on different people, depending on other factors such as the person's class, race, gender and whether he or she lives in a rural or urban setting." Moreover, a body of research (Bilchitz, 2011; Lenta, 2012; Malik 2013; Kruuse, 2014) also reveals that there have been dissenting arguments with regard to the provisions of the Constitution with regard to whether or not religious associations should be allowed to discriminate (against homosexual people for example) on the basis of their religious beliefs. At play in this debate is a collision between the rights to freedom of association and religious

freedom on the one hand, and the right to equality and the prohibition on discrimination on the other.

Scholars have been divided into two camps: those who are pro-discrimination by religious associations and those who are against this discrimination. It is relevant to highlight this debate because it is in line with one of the primary goals of this thesis namely, identity politics. Those who are in favour of the discrimination claim that religious groups should take positions that might otherwise be labelled as discriminatory, because their religious identity needs to be protected.

### **2.5.1. Pro- Discrimination**

South Africa has invested in the idea of toleration of diversity and pluralism as a positive social goal and the Constitutional Court coined the phrase “reasonable accommodation”. The idea behind the principle of reasonable accommodation is for the state not to infringe the rights of religious objectors (amongst other things) in cases where they have religious objections to being associated with homosexual activity (Bonthuys, 2008: 474). In light of the principle of reasonable accommodation, some academic commentators and religious leaders have argued that it should be permissible to discriminate on the basis of freedom of conscience and religious beliefs as stipulated in section 15 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa.

A Supreme Court of Appeal judgment involving the MCSA - *Ecclesia De Lange v The Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa* - has been at the centre of this debate. Reverend Ecclesia de Lange is a fully ordained Minister of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. In 2009, Ecclesia de Lange openly disclosed to her congregation that she intended to marry her long-term lesbian partner. She was later informed by her Superintendent Minister that a charge had been laid against her. She

was subsequently suspended from ministry pending the outcome of a disciplinary hearing. The charge levelled against her in terms of the Laws and Discipline of the Church was:

“That you have acted in breach of paragraphs 4.82 and 11.3 in that contrary to Laws and Discipline and/or Policies, Decisions, Practices and Usages of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa:

You have announced to the Brackenfell and Windsor Park societies your intention to enter into a same sex civil union on the 15th December 2009, it being the Churches “policy, practice and usage to recognise only heterosexual marriages.”

The Methodist Book of Order 2014 refers to “The Laws and Discipline” as the official Constitution of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. It goes on to note: “Laws and Discipline represents the heart and vision of the Methodist people. It is the most current statement of how the people called Methodists agree to live their lives together in this Connexion.” She was tried, found guilty and was dismissed from the ministry, thus losing her job, livelihood, accommodation, and a community of faith to belong to (Kumalo, 2011: 180). Thus, the governing structures of a community that de Lange loved and served rejected her.

Lenta (2012) has been at the forefront of those arguing for a right to discriminate on the basis of religious beliefs. He argues that “a restricted right to discriminate (and to exclude members with beliefs inconsistent with the shared beliefs of the group) permits the religious associations and their members to retain their identity and thereby fosters pluralism” (Lenta, 2012: 435). Those who advocate a right to discriminate are of the

view that forcing religious associations to act inconsistently with their convictions will alienate them from the intended project of liberalism and diversity.

Lenta (2012) argues that the importance of taking diversity seriously requires an approach which, in appropriate cases, allows for religious associations to discriminate. “Taking diversity seriously, for Lenta, entails that the state does not have the right to abolish unfair discrimination in all its forms wherever it might appear” (Bilchitz, 2011: 228). He claims that to disallow a church from discriminating impairs the ability of the religious community of which it forms a key part to transmit its core beliefs – including the belief that homosexuality activity is sinful by example – and may also impair the ability of a church to maintain the religious ethos of its academy, which includes the exemplification of these beliefs in its practice” (Kruuse, 2013: 3).

### **2.5.2. Anti- Discrimination**

Those that oppose discrimination by religious associations argue that “the unfairly discriminatory practices of religious groups will, by their influence on the climate of the opinion, adversely affect members of vulnerable groups by legitimising discriminatory attitudes and beliefs that motivate repression of and violence against members of vulnerable groups” (Lenta, 2012: 439). Bilchitz has been at the forefront of those arguing against discrimination by religious association. Bilchitz is of the view that the realisation of the right to equality should be accorded priority over the right to religious freedom and associational autonomy. Bilchitz (2012: 300) invokes the unique history and context of South Africa, which is emerging from an apartheid past characterised by serious violations of equality and dignity of black people and other groups such as women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people and particularly the fact that religion was used to support to legitimize the

discrimination. He argues that “given that the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa was designed expressly to address this legacy of discrimination in the private sphere, simply referring to freedom of association or religion to defend the continuation of discriminatory practices will not do” (Bilchitz, 2012: 301).

Bilchitz (2012) is of the view that the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa is a remedial constitution which seeks to correct the central injustices which occurred in the past. Gutmann (2003: 87) also argues against such discrimination and points out that “since being a civic equal entails enjoying equal freedom of association, people who are excluded from voluntary associations out of prejudice (i.e. for being gay) are treated as less than the civic equals of their fellow citizens.” Stu Woolman (2012: 302) adds to the debate when he notes that “powerful groupings in society such as religions cannot simply impose the harms caused by their doctrines on vulnerable others”.

Bilchitz (2012: 301) concludes that “when rights and values collide in this context, the balancing process needs to be conducted in a manner that reflects one of the core transformative purposes behind the constitutional order, namely, to move away from the unfair discrimination of the past and ensure substantive equality for all”.

This whole debate stems from the following questions: Should religious associations disregard their doctrines and embrace the philosophies of togetherness and equality as espoused by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa? Should the right to equality and prohibition against discrimination trump the autonomy of religious associations to discriminate based on the freedom of conscience and religious beliefs as stipulated in the in section 15 of the Constitution?

### **2.5.3. MCSA's Stance**

The critical area in addressing the controversy of homosexuality in the MCSA is the interpretation of Biblical scriptures. As it stands, the policy of the MCSA regards Holy Scripture as the supreme rule of faith and practice (Mtshiselwa, 2010: 3). The MCSA's Doctrine, Ethics and Worship Committee (hereafter referred to as DEWCOM) (2003: 21-24) Report acknowledges that homosexual people within the church have felt discriminated against; felt that the Christian faith has caused an intense captivity rather than bringing liberation; and have felt as if they are abnormal. The MCSA is at the stage of wrestling with the issue of homosexuality and there is a wide spectrum of views within the church. The leadership is split between total acceptance, conditioned acceptance and complete rejection when it comes to same-sex issues (Van de Laar, 2003: 12; Le Roux, 2006; Mtshiselwa, 2010:14; Kumalo, 2011; Mtshiselwa, 2011: 273). Van der Laar (2003: 12) observes that these varied stances are a direct reflection of theologies that have influenced the leadership's morality. Bentley (2012: 1) also notes that the response of churches and ministers is largely determined by their unspoken theologies, ideologies and worldviews. The MCSA started the debate on same sex-sexualities at a conference in 2001 (Kumalo, 2011: 181).

The 2001 MCSA conference made a commitment to being a community of love rather than rejection. At the MCSA Conference of 2003, a discussion guide on Christians and same-sex relationships was presented by DEWCOM. This document attempted to engage the issue of homosexuality by making use of scripture, tradition, reason and experience within the Methodist Church (Bentley, 2012: 4). It was adopted as a tool for the church's engagement on the question and was referred to the Methodist congregation for their study and response, to be considered at the Conference of 2005 (Kumalo, 2011: 182; Bentley, 2012: 3). The responses to the 2003 DEWCOM

discussion guide were negative and indicated that the MCSA should adopt a position where all people are welcomed into the church's fellowship, but that same-sex relationships should not be tolerated (Kumalo, 2011: 182; Bentley, 2012: 3).

The 2005 conference invited Methodists to embrace many different and even opposing views on homosexuality (Mtshiswelwa, 2010: 15; Kumalo, 2011: 182). After the passing of the Civil Unions Act in 2006, the MCSA responded by stating that "the church's doctrine of marriage remained based on the teaching of the union of man and woman in such a relationship and that ministers should refrain from officiating at same-sex unions" (Khuzwayo 2011: 27, Bentley 2012: 6). The conflict between civil law and church polity in this regard was neither a novelty nor uniquely an MCSA issue. Lesnick (2010: 321) argues that in most democratic countries, when it comes to considerations for marriage, there are two laws to contend with: "The first is the civil law, which requires certain criteria to be met. The second is church polity, which has its own standards. It is fully possible for a person to be married under the statutes of the law, but that such marriage is not recognised by the church or that a relationship can be blessed by the church, but not formally recognised by the State" (Bentley, 2012: 7).

The MCSA Conference of 2007 declared its determination not to permit different viewpoints around the same-sex debate to further divide the church. It sought "...a way forward that both respects and holds in tension differing views among our ministers and people" (Kumalo, 2001: 183-184). In 2008 MCSA's Doctrinal Committee held a conversation workshop in Paarl in the Western Cape which led to the publication and distribution of a study guide, including a Bible study, on homosexuality and homosexual unions titled *In Search of Grace and Truth*. This book gives both views – for and against. During the MCSA's Conference of 2010, the Church was instructed to

participate in this Bible study with the intention of assisting it in applying its mind on the issue (Kotze & de Lange, 2011: 201). This provided exposure, and awareness was raised within the MCSA around homosexuality. However, “the church did not engage this material and entire sections of the MCSA, specifically black rural communities, refrained from discussing the issue at all, deeming it a white problem which is a taboo in black communities” (Bentley, 2012: 7).

Ironically, the MCSA’s DEWCOM notes that in the history of the Church there are major examples of the Church moving from attitudes and practices of exclusion and rejection to ones of inclusion and acceptance in its approach to and dealings with marginalised groupings. (2003: 18-20). In this regard, reference is being made to the inclusive attitude towards gentiles; inclusion of people who were mentally handicapped in the Eucharist within the medieval Church; inclusion of black people in the South African apartheid regime and inclusion of women in ministry to the level of ordained ministry and Episcopal office.

With regard to membership, the MCSA’s policy (2008: 25) is: “all people are welcomed to be members of the MCSA, if they desire to be saved from their sins through faith in Jesus Christ and show the same in their life and conduct; as well as seek to have communion with Christ and his people.” The incongruity, as mentioned, is that in the MCSA homosexuals are accepted as members of the Church, but they cannot assume leadership offices (Mtshiswelwa, 2010: 20). Therefore the attitude of the Methodist Church is to be characterised by ‘conditioned inclusion’ instead of total dehumanisation, rejection and oppression.

## **2.6. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have set out the social and historical context of this thesis. This chapter has set out the literature that discusses the way in which religion, homosexuality and culture is mostly dealt with within the African continent. However, the South African context is 'supposedly' different because the Constitution explicitly protects the rights of lgbti people. This chapter has explained the disconnect between policy and reality. In this chapter, I have also set out some of the discourse that has emanated from constitutional rights and the MCSA's stance on the issue.

## **CHAPTER 3: BOURDIEU'S THEORY AND THE STUDY OF EXPERIENCES OF GAY MEN WITHIN THE MCSA**

### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter sets out the theoretical framework that informs this research study. Stillman (2003: 1) refers to the theoretical framework as tools shaped by personal experiences and the social context in which they are produced which are used for looking at and analysing the social world. Ronnie (2008: 23) describes the theoretical framework as the 'archaeological foundation' on which the study is built. This theoretical framework informs and runs through each chapter of the study and is presented at this point in the thesis so that the following chapters can be understood in relation to the key concepts presented here.

In this chapter, I discuss Bourdieu's concepts which make up his theory of 'logic of practice' – habitus, symbolic violence, field and capital. Bourdieu developed these concepts to explain the relationship between objective structures and subjective experiences of agents within society. I also discuss the relevance of these concepts to my thesis and the epistemological framework of Bourdieu's theory. According to Bourdieu (2008), a lack of familiarity with the dominant culture (capital) within a certain field, and the absence of the proper disposition that typically comes from such familiarity (habitus) makes it difficult for agents to fully integrate and feel comfortable within that field. The goal of this chapter is to position this current research within Bourdieu's conceptual framework. However, in the discussion of capital I include Putnam's (1995) understanding of the concept of capital.

### **3.2. Bourdieu's Epistemological Framework**

Alison Rooke (2007: 231) argues that "Bourdieu's work offers a fertile interpretative framework for a cultural understanding of the intersections of class, sexuality and gender." She goes on to note that "Bourdieu argues that individuals are born into the world and that, to live in it, they internalize its culture" (Rooke, 2007: 232). This world, Bourdieu argues, is simultaneously objective and subjective (Rooke, 2007: 233). One key disposition, common to Bourdieu's epistemological standpoint, is the disposition to see the social world as structured by fundamental binary oppositions or polarities - dominant and dominated, noble and base, male and female, 'gay and straight', right and left, inside and outside, and the like (McCall, 1992: 857). One of the research respondents alludes to the practice of politics of dichotomies along gender lines by his MCSA congregation with regard to sitting arrangements:

"In my church the males and the females were separated from one another, so if even if I went with both my parents, (uhhm) we would be totally separated from each other within the church."

This epistemological framework is key to my research because gay people are constantly juxtaposed to straight people and measured according to heteronormative standards which creates the gay-straight binary. Moreover, this epistemological framework is particularly relevant because South African history is saturated with a long history of binary positions which continue to mark the legacies of the apartheid government i.e. white and black. Germond and de Gruchy (1997: 194) highlight this when they note that "in a society as practised in the manipulations of binaries as South Africa it is no accident that the binary opposition of homosexual and heterosexual

occupies a central place in social discourse.” Bourdieu also suggests that these dichotomies are embodied by individuals.

Beverly Skeggs (2004: 21) also notes that Bourdieu offers an explanatory power that seeks to link to objective structures to subjective experiences. Bourdieu’s theory of practice is an account of how objective structures produce people, shape their mental representations and their world view (Tanyanyiwa, 2014: 61). Rooke (2007: 233) argues that “Bourdieu’s habitus offers a theoretical framework for understanding how subjectivities are produced and reproduced in everyday life.”

Bourdieu’s (Wacquant, 1989: 43, Murphy, 2009: 186) standpoint is that, what men know, and what they tell about what they know, not only stem from their personal lives, but are intricately linked to social structures. The impact of the MCSA as a social structure that shapes and impacts on lives was mentioned by the research participants during the interviews. **Anele**, for example, had this to say about the importance of church (MCSA) in his life:

“The church is very important to me because that is the fundamental foundation of my life ... The church gives me a sense of belonging, a sense of identity within the Christian faith. And as a matter of I find it also intellectually stimulating because when I joined church I began to realise there was a body of school called Theology that also added value to my Christian identity because it does not only cater for spirituality but it also caters for intellectual stimulation.”

Ronnie (2008: 20) posits that the way “Bourdieu understands the world – his general epistemological framework – must be seen through his theory of practice and as part of his conceptual toolkit.”

Bourdieu interrelates his central concepts (logic of practice) and on this basis he formulates a reflexive approach that uncovers the conditions of the production of the social structures and the cultural reproduction of inequalities (Tanyanyiwa, 2014: 63). Bourdieu eased the subjective vis-a-vis objective tension by arguing that “the task of social science is to understand how the ‘objective’ structures of society (e.g. social norms, roles, institutions) influence subjective behaviour (what Bourdieu referred to as ‘practice’), and in turn how the totality of social behaviour serves to reproduce the reality” (Tanyanyiwa, 2014: 58).

### **3.3. Relevance of Bourdieu’s Concepts to This Research Study**

How are Bourdieu’ concepts relevant and how can assist us in understanding the experiences of gay men within the MCSA in Grahamstown? Kristian Rafuse (2014: 96) argues that “Bourdieu provides excellent conceptual frameworks for analysing contemporary politics of sexuality.” According to Lucey (2011: 232) Bourdieu’s analytical framework, in focusing on the distinct affectivities and dispositions that norms discourses of sexuality produce, avoids “the prevailing tendency in much critical discourse to locate sexuality too exclusively in the psychological realm and to neglect the extent to which it is lived and experienced as a set of evolving cultural forms into which and within which agents move”.

Moreover, Bourdieu “proposed a vision of reflexive sociology that could be more useful for comprehending contemporary lesbian and gay life, as it places difference and power at the centre of the conceptual frame” (Heaphy, 2008: 8). Rafuse (2014: 102) also argues that Bourdieu’s theoretical framework helps us to see that the logic of the sexual field is a product of the history of the struggle to impose or define what is at stake in the struggle for universal recognition.

With regard to this thesis Bourdieu's concepts provide important insight in answering the questions that underpin the study:

- 1) How do gay men experience the religious field as represented by the MCSA in Grahamstown?
- 2) What forms of capital do they use to negotiate their within the MCSA?
- 3) How do the social binaries – dominant/dominated, gay/straight- within institutional structures such as the church affect or shape personal experiences?

In summation, Bourdieu's work has become a significant theoretical toolkit which is used in "identifying the process by which social norms and beliefs come to maintain dominant or hegemonic positions, and furthermore, the ways in which systems of classification, recognition, and categorization maintain their social salience" (Rafuse, 2014: 60).

## **3.4 Bourdieu's Conceptual Framework**

### **3.4.1. Habitus**

Reay (1995: 354) argues that Bourdieu "developed the concept of habitus to demonstrate the ways in which not only is the body in the social world, but also, the ways in which the social world is in the body." Bourdieu goes on to describe the concept as having developed out of an interest in understanding how individuals are shaped and moulded by their social world (Swartz, 2002: 615). The concept of habitus also grew out of Bourdieu's criticism of Levi-Strauss's structuralism. Levi-Strauss's structuralism posited that normative rules in society specify what actors should do in particular circumstances. Bourdieu observed that human beings are not usually simple conformists to cultural norms or external constraints. Rather, they are strategic

improvisers who respond – by either violating, compromising or negotiating the official rules – in terms of deeply ingrained past experiences to the opportunities and constraints offered by the present situation (Swartz, 2002: 625).

Alison Rooke (2007: 232) notes that “the concept of habitus captures the way in which culture is habitually inscribed on the body and the ways in which the individual develops practical mastery of their situation, which is grounded in the social.” In essence, habitus captures the nuances of social norms and expectations that people have to negotiate in dealing with everyday reality. Bourdieu (1990: 53) defines habitus as:

“A system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them.”

The analysis chapters [Chapters 5 & 6] will deal with the various components of this definition and also illustrate the various ways in which the concept can be used as a tool to study social relations with reference to this study. Habitus, according to Bourdieu, is a system of dispositions which integrate past experience and enable individuals to cope with a diversity of unforeseen situations (Chan, 2004: 33; Drewett, 2004: 39). The concept of habitus encapsulates the way in which a culture embodied in the individual is expressed through durable ways of speaking, walking and thinking (Harker, 1984: 118; Reay, 1995: 354).

Skeggs (2004: 84) underscores that “the habitus operates to a relatively coherent logic – what Bourdieu calls the logic of practice – which begins in childhood but which thereafter structures the experiences contained by it.” In essence, the concept of habitus captures the whole history from early socialization of the individual.

Habitus is both a product and reproducer of the social world and in this regard Stan Houston (2002: 157) comments that: “on the one hand, habitus is a structuring structure; that is, it is a structure that structures the social world. On the one hand, it is a structured structure; that is, it is a structure which is structured by the social world.” Houston (2002: 157) argues that the “habitus acts as a very loose set of guidelines permitting us to strategize, adapt, improvise or navigate in response to situations as they arise”. Rooke (2007: 232) also notes that the “concept of habitus is useful for thinking about the moments when subjects do or do not experience a sense of belonging, moments when matters of embodiment, visibility and appearance are at work.”

The concept of habitus is an “open system of dispositions that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in way that neither reinforces or modifies its structure” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 133). According to Bourdieu (2001), our social identities are neither imposed upon us, nor voluntarily chosen, but rather acquired as a result of the experiment of living (what ‘works for us’), an experiment that is not consciously undertaken, but is rather coincident with the practical matter of living in a society. Although I acknowledge that the concept of habitus represents Bourdieu’s attempt to theorize the ways in which the social is incorporated into the personal, I also want to highlight that the habitus equally useful to an analysis of social identity.

Thus in this way the habitus has become known as a 'socialised subjectivity' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2002:126) and it is Bourdieu's way of theorizing a self which is socially produced. It is a way of analyzing how social relations become constituted within the self, but also how the self is constitutive of social relations (Lawler, 2004:111). Habitus is "the product of social conditionings, and thus of a history" (Bourdieu, 1990: 116). An individual's habitus is an active residue of his or her past that functions within the present to shape his or her perception, thought and bodily comporment (Swartz, 2002: 635). Individual histories are vital to understanding the concept of habitus. The habitus is permeable and responsive to what is going on around the individual. In his attempt to capture the effect of socialization on the habitus, Reay (1995: 359) observes that the current circumstances are not just there to be acted upon, but are internalized and become yet another layer to add to those from earlier socializations.

Swartz (2002: 645) also argues that the concept of habitus encapsulates the idea that society shapes individuals through socialization but that the very continuity and existence of society depend on the ongoing actions of individuals. "Bourdieu assumes that – from childhood onwards, in the family, school and world of work – we are taught certain schemata of thinking, perceiving and acting, which generally enable us to respond smoothly to different situations, to solve practical tasks" (Joas & Knöbl, 2011: 13). It is Steph Lawler (2004: 112) who succinctly captures why I have decided to employ the concept of habitus in this thesis when she notes that:

"The habitus is profoundly social; it carries the traces of the lines of division and distinction along which the social is organised. That is, class, race, gender, sexuality, and so on, are all marked within the habitus."

Bourdieu utilised the concept of habitus to explore power dynamics in both ordinary, taken-for-granted situations and those that are much more unusual (Reay 1995: 359). The habitus is also used as a method for uncovering actors' relationships to the dominant culture and the way in which these relationships are expressed in a range of activities (Reay, 1995: 359). Thus with regard to this thesis, the concept of habitus is used because it provides a method for simultaneously analyzing the experiences of social agents and the objective structures which make this experience possible (Bourdieu, 1988).

Additionally, the concept of habitus is useful to this study as Reay (1995: 360) notes that it can be used to focus on the ways in which the socially advantaged and disadvantaged play out attitudes of cultural superiority and inferiority ingrained in their habitus in daily interactions. Bonilla-Silva et al. (2006: 223) expand Bourdieu's definition of the 'habitus' to note that it also "refers to socially acquired tendencies or predispositions that serve as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions, causing individuals to view the world in a particular way." The habitus does not point to individual character or morality, but to the deep cultural conditioning that reproduces and legitimates social formations.

While the habitus does not determine action, it orients action. Thus this thesis interrogates what reaction flows from the habitus of the gay men when they enter the church building. The habitus generates action not in a social vacuum but in structured social contexts Bourdieu called fields (Swartz, 2002: 655). The MCSA in this case represents field within which the habitus of the gay men is at play. Furthermore, Bourdieu argued that human action within these fields not only emanates from habitus but also from capital.

Within this theoretical framework, the MCSA can be understood as one example of a “field of social practice” (Bourdieu, 1990) where “the gay habitus” is revealed or concealed. This research study seeks to understand the experiences of gay men within the MCSA in Grahamstown which means that it will explore the effect of the church environment on gay men’s ways of thinking, their dispositions, tendencies and ways of coping. In essence, the effect or lack thereof, the church has on the habitus of gay men. This study interrogates the influence of the MCSA in Grahamstown upon the habitus of gay men because Jonathan Hearn (2012: 99) notes that each field cultivates and encourages a habitus appropriate to that certain field. Rooke (2007: 244) notes that the concepts of the habitus and field capture the something of the way the body is caught between past and present, shaped by an agent but in a structured field of practice.

A body of research has shown that the habitus of gay men within many different congregations has led to cognitive dissonance. This means that in most Christian spaces homosexual people are caught between the urge to want to belong and believe wholly and the reality that they must belong but not be visible. Sallie Bingham in her autobiography *Passion and Prejudice (1898)* where she narrates the invisibility of black slaves to white people writes, “Blacks, I realized, were simply invisible to most white people, except as a pair of hands offering a drink on a silver tray.” Using this line of argument, one could come to a similar conclusion about the invisibility of homosexuals in many religious spaces and that is: homosexual people are simply invisible and should remain invisible to most of the congregation, except as a number in church, a voice in the choir or as server etcetera. One could easily argue that homosexuals negotiate their way into these spaces by suppressing any predispositions which might expose their sexual proclivity. This argument confirms

Segdwick's (1990: 3) definition of the closet as the epitome quintessential structure for gay oppression and a fixed heteronormative space where homophobia is produced.

This suppression of predispositions or pushing of homosexuals into closets is succinctly explained by another of Bourdieu's concepts known as 'symbolic violence'. The concept of habitus is also interrogated because some scholars have written up on what they specifically call the gay habitus. This study intends to find out what happens to that gay habitus within the church building in the MCSA in Grahamstown: does it get transformed? Because fields cultivate habitus that is 'appropriate' to them, does the gay habitus get encouraged or discouraged? Does it get concealed? These are some of the questions that this thesis will seek to answer in relation to the concept of habitus.

### **3.4.2. Symbolic Violence**

Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence has its roots in the sociological discourse that concerns itself with critiquing various forms of domination in society and it also identifies the forms of domination that emerge from the repressive functioning of social order and the ways in which subjects are regulated as objects of social processes (Colaguori, 2010: 398). Colaguori (2010) argues that this concept is confirmation that violence is also about the dominant rationality that maintains other forms of destruction, including the destruction of life, of personal liberties, of freedom of action and conscience.

Bourdieu (2001: 1-2) defines symbolic violence as "a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition, [more precisely, mis-recognition], recognition or even feeling [and which] grasps the logic of domination exerted in the

name of a symbolic principle.” Morgan and Björkert (2006: 441) note that the concept refers to the processes and mechanisms through which symbolic interactions, behaviour and modes of conducts sustain and nurture structured inequalities in our everyday lives and interpersonal attitudes.

Bourdieu saw symbolic violence as embedded in institutional structures from state agencies to religious organizations designed to secure the consent of subjects to accord with the dictates of operational practices of that particular social structure (Colaguori, 2010: 389). This form of violence may “involve the moral imposition of irrational beliefs on others that work against their own capacity for freedom of thought, as in the ideologies of a group, a religion or a cult” (Colaguori, 2010: 389).

Bourdieu’s ‘symbolic violence’ (2001:33) can be understood in relation to Foucault’s ‘normalization’ (1979: 185). Symbolic violence is similar to normalization because it is a strategy of power that produces ‘disciplinary control’ at the institutional level and ‘docility’ at the subjective level. Foucault’s analysis is relevant to an understanding of symbolic violence because it is also an examination of power that is enmeshed in the very same practices that are also socially functional (Colaguori, 2010: 395).

Bourdieu (2001: 40) argues that this “symbolic power cannot be exercised without the contribution of those who undergo it.” However, in referring to ‘consent’ and ‘submission’, Bourdieu is not suggesting that individuals are willingly putting themselves in positions where they may be vulnerable to this violence (Morgan & Björkert, 2006: 446). Bourdieu (2001: 171) elaborated that the “the state of compliance is not a voluntary servitude and the complicity is not granted by a conscious deliberate act; it is the effect of a power, which is durably inscribed in the bodies of the dominated, in the form of schemes of perception and dispositions (to respect, admire, love etc.)”

Most religious institutions treat gayness as an illness and the only way they deal with it is exorcism of the gay individual. Moreover, the fact that most gay Christians have to choose between staying in the closet within the church, and abandoning the closet which usually leads to abandoning the church too, due to the homophobia inside the church is in itself an act of 'soft violence' against them. This thesis will investigate the ways in which the MCSA in Grahamstown exerts 'symbolic violence' upon their gay congregants.

### **3.4.3. Field**

Bourdieu argues that the world is made of fields of action that are both symbolic and material. Fields confer status and legitimacy on sets and values, beliefs, and practices (Rooke, 2007: 240). Bourdieu uses the concept of field to describe the social space within which individuals interact but also the space which embodies the "rules of the game" (Ronnie, 2008: 3). Bourdieu employs the analogy of a 'game' in order to explain the concept of field. Peillon (2000: 215) argues that "society as a whole forms a field, which is structured according to relations of domination." Peillon (2000: 215) goes on to explain that society is made up of a range of fields and that it should be seen as the paramount field, from which other fields are never fully separated. Bourdieu (1998) explained it more succinctly when he wrote, "a field is a microcosm set within the macrocosm."

Swartz (2002: 655) argues that "Bourdieu thinks of society as a complex arrangement of many fields, such as the economic field, the artistic field, the religious field, the legal field, and the political field." Bourdieu saw religion as field in which the rules of access are faith and dogma (Harker, 1990). Swartz (2002: 665) also notes that fields offer constraints and opportunities independent of the resources brought in by the actors to

situations. “The driving force of habitus is mediated by fields, and the constraints and the opportunities imposed by the fields are mediated the disposition of habitus” (Swartz, 2002: 665).

According to Bourdieu, “it is not useful to analyse the behaviour of individual actors in isolation, as many theorists of action do without further reflection, unless one also determines an actor’s position within such a field, in which action becomes meaningful in the first place” (Joas & Knöbl, 2011: 8).

Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 97) defines the field as a representation of a:

“Network, or configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.).”

Bourdieu presents the field as a battleground where interests, power and prestige all operate. “Every field, for Bourdieu, is an arena of conflict; social life itself is a constant struggle for position, as actors seek (consciously and unconsciously) to weave around the formidable constraints that social structure sets against them” (DiMaggio, 1979: 1463). In order for a field to exist, there have to be stakes and people prepared to participate, endowed with the habitus that implies knowledge and recognition of the immanent laws of the field, the stakes and so on (Ronnie, 2008: 3; Shange, 2013: 21).

With regard to the Christianity and homosexuality debate, the stakes point back to the identity of the church due to the value-based nature of the church. In the same way that hegemonic masculinities view male homosexuality as a threat, the church also views it as a threat to the identity of the church. Beattie (2011: 9) points out that “anyone, be it church, individual or organization that has, or even perceives to have its identity threatened is primarily going to react from a protective, defensive position.” All agents that are involved in a field share a certain number of fundamental interests, namely everything that is linked to the fundamental existence of the field (Bourdieu, 199: 73).

Joas & Knöbl (2011: 14) argue that people are socialised into a field, where they learn how to behave appropriately; they understand the rules and internalise the strategies indispensable to playing the game successfully. “The aim of these strategies is to improve the player’s position within a particular field or at least to uphold the status quo” (Joas & Knöbl 2011: 14). Bourdieu’s discussion on how social structures within fields socialize agents can be explained using Berger’s ‘plausibility structures’. Berger (1967) invented the term ‘plausibility structures’ to explain how social structures such as the nuclear and extended family, schools, or churches socialize individuals into a particular worldview and inculcate in them a certain subjective reality.

Mohr (2000: 6) argues that “every field is a site within which some type of capital operates and, thus, each field includes a fundamental metric according to which any given individual (or group or profession, or class fraction) can be assessed vis-à-vis others according to their relative possession of field specific capital. It is this which determines their likelihood of having power and success within that sphere.” For Bourdieu, the outcome of the struggle will be determined by the amount of capital (or

resources) possessed by competing actors in a given field (Houston, 2002: 158; Shange, 2013; 22).

#### **3.4.4. Capital**

Bourdieu deployed the term capital, which originated in 'bourgeois' and Marxian economics, but he extended its meaning and distinguished between different forms of capital (Joas & Knöbl, 2011: 15). In line with Weber's theory of social class, which distinguishes between class, status, group and party, Bourdieu employed the concept of capital to show that key goods and resources cannot be directly reduced to the economic (Hearn, 2012: 99). Capital may be thought of as the resources individuals possess that give them power within a field. The central proposition of social capital theory is that networks of relationships constitute a valuable resource for the conduct of social affairs (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998: 243). Capital is significant as possession gives rise to power and privilege thus determining social positions (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Gilbert et al., 2011: 349).

"Social capital is traditionally construed to include two factors: the networks of affiliation to which people belong (family groups, friendship ties, networks of professional colleagues and business contacts, membership of formal and informal associations and groups) and the informal behavioural norms individuals and groups rely upon in establishing, maintaining, and using those networks" (Bexley et al., 2007: 19). Social capital has a wide scope of application (as an analytical, empirical and theoretical concept) in social exchange theory because it acts as glue that holds society or people together in a reciprocal or dependent way (Bourdieu, 1986: 241; Grossman, 2013: 6).

Bourdieu focused on three forms of *capital*: economic capital (financial wealth), cultural capital (culturally validated consumption patterns, skills, attributes, tastes and objects) and social capital (networks of relationships used for advancement) (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Ronnie, 2008: 29; Grossman, 2013: 7). The ability of an agent to accumulate various forms of capital, and to define those forms as legitimate, is proportionate to their position in social space (Thorpe, 2009: 493). This research study seeks to find out whether or not gay men within the MCSA equip themselves with some form of capital in order to negotiate their entry and stay within the church.

In his summary of the three forms of capital, Bourdieu wrote that:

“A general science of the economy of practices that does not artificially limit itself to those practices that are socially recognised as economic must endeavour to grasp capital, that ‘energy of social physics’... in all of its different forms... I have shown that capital presents itself under three fundamental species (each with its own subtypes), namely, economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 118–9).

Bourdieu argues that Individuals accumulate capital from different fields whilst forming their habitus (Houston, 2002: 158; Swartz, 2002; Sarimana, 2011: 114). “Capital is not randomly distributed within populations and different forms of capital afford individuals some advantages relative to other players in the same fields. The different resources or forms of capital that are available to social agents act as a form of personal power (as a means to an end) in the pursuit of different objectives and are transformed through strategic investments and conversions that allow the individual to move from one field to another” (Sarimana, 2011: 114). With regard to forms of capital, this

research study focuses solely on social capital as a resource that gay men acquire in order to negotiate their entry and existence within the MCSA in Grahamstown.

### **3.5. Relation of Social Capital to the Study**

The concept of social capital is relevant to the current research study because social capital has been described as a way for social researchers to refocus attention away from the individual and toward social constructs, and to do so in a way that does not demote agency (Grossman, 2013: 4). However, this thesis gives equal attention to both the individual and the social construct as represented by the MCSA in Grahamstown. Grossman (2013: 4) encapsulates the importance and relevance of social capital when he notes that the concept has become “increasingly popular because it captures our sociological imaginations and allows us to socialize the economic concept of capital.”

Social capital promises to yield new insights with regard to how individuals navigate spaces, achieve social mobility, and deal with discrimination and how they cope with different social circumstances (Burt, 2000: 346). The current thesis seeks to uncover how gay men within the MCSA in Grahamstown acquire and employ social capital in order to navigate and negotiate their existence within the Church.

This concept is particularly relevant to this thesis because social capital is a rich concept focusing on social resources embedded in social relationships. The concept of social capital offers a beneficial conceptual toolkit with which to analyse the experiences of gay men within the MCSA in Grahamstown and the ways such men use the relationships they build in order to garner acceptance and inclusion in their faith communities. Thus the experiences of gay men within the MCSA in Grahamstown can only be studied through thoroughly interrogating the social relationships within the

church to which all the social resources are tied. Moreover, social capital has a wide scope of application as an analytical, empirical and policy solution in social exchange theory because it acts as glue that holds society or people together in a reciprocal or dependent way.

### **3.6. Social Capital Explained**

Bourdieu defined social capital as “the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 119). From the Bourdieusian perspective, social capital becomes a resource in the social struggles that are carried out in different social arenas or fields (Siisiäinen, 2000: 2). The use of the concept of ‘capital’ to describe the stakes in social fields alerts us to Bourdieu’s use of an economic metaphor to understand social life (Jenkins, 1992: 86). Siisiäinen (2000: 2) further observes that Bourdieu’s concept of social capital puts the emphasis on conflicts, power, and the social relations that increase the ability of an actor to advance her/his interests.

This study will recognise social capital as a resource that is connected with group membership and social networks. In line with this facet of social capital, this research study will interrogate whether gay men within the group membership of the MCSA in Grahamstown acquire and employ social capital to create strong connections within the church which can be used to support their acceptance and normalise their ‘gayness’. Siisiäinen (2000: 13) notes that “membership in groups, and involvement in the social networks developing within these and in the social relations arising from the membership can be utilised in efforts to improve the social position of the actors in a variety of different fields.” In this way, social networks (friendship, civic, family, work

colleagues/associates) can be understood in a structural or functional sense (Crossley, 2005: 352). Looking at social capital from this perspective is in line with John Field's (2003: 1-2) main argument that the core of social capital theory is that 'relationships matter'. By looking at social capital in this way, this research study is also in line with Joy Owen's (2011: 37) assertion that "focusing on relationships, rather than certain forms of social capital one is able to assert that even a dyadic can lead to the acquisition of social capital." This then means that the relationships my participants create and build with other congregants within the church space lead to the accumulation of social capital.

While Bourdieu (1986) uses social capital explicitly in order to explain the reproduction of inequalities of power and accumulation of benefits Robert Putnam (2000) has popularised a reading of social capital that focuses on the ubiquity of social networks across society. Putnam argues that social capital is located in the social tie between two actors or is inherently found within a community network of relation and he likens social capital to other forms of capital in that social capital will grow with use and dissipate with disuse (Grossman, 2013: 12). Putnam also believes that trust is a key indicator of social capital, because of its link to the norm of reciprocity as well as the broad and localised benefits that are derived from social or generalised trust (Grossman, 2013: 12). Both Bourdieu and Putnam focus on the virtues of network membership and the assets individuals can access through their associations with others.

### **3.7. Bourdieu on Queer Sexualities**

Pierre Bourdieu's research focus was largely on education and hardly on the sociology of sexuality. As a result, this research study adds to the literature that seeks to bring

Bourdieu's concepts into the study of sexualities. Bourdieu directly tackles the same-sex sexualities for the first time in an appendix entitled "some questions on the gay and lesbian movement" which is contained in his last book, *Masculine Domination*. Despite Bourdieu not researching sexualities, there are some similarities between his epistemological framework and that of queer theorists. In this regard Elizabeth McDermott (2011: 68) observes that both sets of theories posit that the social world is organised along binaries, and also suggest that these dichotomies are then embodied by individuals.

Moreover, Manuel Sheri (2005: 5) alludes to more similarities between Bourdieu and same-sex sexualities theories when she notes that "Bourdieu's theories on structural restraint are exemplified by the premise of queer culture perceived of as a purely Western construction dependent on pre-existing categories strict sexuality classifications for its inception prior to LGBT identity formation." Here I intend to show that although Bourdieu did not theorise sexualities, his theories bear similarities to queer theories and thus can be used to explain and analyse same-sex sexualities as is the aim of this research.

In his attempt to grapple with the politics of the gay and lesbian movement Bourdieu came to note that homosexuals count as a sexual subaltern within society. Srila Roy (2015: 2) defines the sexual subaltern to refer to "persons and groups that are positioned as subordinates or inferiors within relations of sexuality, patriarchy and gender." Bourdieu's observation of the gay and lesbian movement was: "homosexuals are marked by stigma which, unlike skin colour or female gender, can be concealed (or flaunted), is imposed through collective acts of categorization which sets up significant negatively marked differences" (Bourdieu, 1998: 119).

Reviewing Green's *Sexual Fields: Toward a Sociology of Collective Sexual Life* which attempts to bring the Bourdieusian fields approach to sexuality, Dawne Moon (2015: 1272) notes that bringing Bourdieu's theoretical framework into sexuality – a realm long conceded by many sociologists – to be fundamentally individual, stands to advance sociology as a discipline. By bringing Bourdieu's conceptual framework to explain the negotiation of one's sexuality in certain spaces represents somewhat of a paradigm shift in the field of sexuality which has been dominated by scripting theory.

### **3.8. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I introduced Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, symbolic violence, field and capital. In this study, Bourdieu's theory and conceptual framework enables an enquiry into institutional conditions that impact (Tanyanyiwa, 2014: 90) on the experiences of gay men within the field of the Christian religion as represented by the MCSA in Grahamstown in this case.

## **CHAPTER 4: THE RESEARCH PROCESS**

### **4.1. Introduction**

The single most common characteristic of research is that it begins with some fundamental philosophical assumptions, methodological guidelines or paradigms and it follows from this that it is important to outline these philosophical assumptions in order to conduct and evaluate any research (Mabuda, 2006: 291; Shange, 2014: 57).

This chapter considers the research process and design which includes the research methods, procedure, techniques, and the challenges faced while doing the research.

### **4.2. Research Methodology**

For this particular research, a qualitative research methodology was the most suitable approach to access the experiences of the respondents and to address questions concerned with developing an understanding of the meaning and experience dimensions of respondents' lives and social worlds (Fossey, Marvey, McDermott & Davidson, 2002: 717; Babbie, 2010: 295). The qualitative approach endeavours to view the world through the eyes of those participating in the research. A qualitative methodology was chosen because this study endeavours to explore and understand the experiences of gay men within the MCSA in Grahamstown.

Creswell (1994: 1) defines qualitative methodology as “an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting.” As is the case in this study, researchers using qualitative methods, normally study a relatively small number of individuals in order to preserve the individuality of each of these in their analysis (Maxwell, 2005: 22).

### **4.3. Research Paradigm**

Willis (2007: 8) defines a paradigm as “made up of the general theoretical assumptions and laws, and techniques for their application that the members of a particular scientific community adopt.” This study is located within the auspices of the interpretive research paradigm. This paradigm was most suited for this study because it posits that humans behave the way they do in part because of their environment and that they are influenced by their subjective perception of their environment — their subjective realities (Willis, 2007: 6).

Interpretivism enables the researcher to understand the subjective thoughts of the participants and make sense of those (Durrheim & Terre Blanche, 2006: 7; Thomas, 2010: 296). Tanyanyiwa (2014: 95) comments that “from an interpretive perspective, human actions have reasons, which are preceded by intention and may be accompanied by reflection.” By taking this approach I wanted to understand and make sense of the subjective realities of gay men within the MCSA in Grahamstown.

### **4.4. Research Design**

Wahyuni (2012: 72) explains the research design as the overall plan that connects the methodology and an appropriate set of research methods in order to address research questions and/or hypotheses that are established to examine social phenomena. Thomas (2010:308) notes that the research design serves to “plan, structure and execute the research to maximize the validity of the findings.” This study followed an exploratory and contextual design to explore the subjective realities of gay men within the MSCA in Grahamstown.

Robson (2002: 59) argues that “exploratory studies serve as great tools to find out what is happening, to seek new insights, to ask questions and to assess phenomena in a new light.” Exploratory research is the most appropriate research design for research studies addressing a subject about which there are high levels of uncertainty and ignorance, which is certainly the case with homosexuality.

The purpose of descriptive research is to provide an accurate and valid representation of the factors that are relevant to the research question. Descriptive studies are used to document a phenomenon that is of interest to the researcher in the most accurate and real way (Marshall & Rossman, 1995: 41). The experiences of gay men within the MCSA in Grahamstown are described in this study. This study is also contextual in the sense that it focuses on the experiences of gay men within the MCSA in Grahamstown.

#### **4.5. Data Collection Method**

Wahyuni (2012: 72) suggests that qualitative researchers should get involved in a communication process with their respondents in order to better understand the current state of real-world practices. I have used in-depth interviews as the tool for data collection, because this method provides participants with the opportunity to fully describe their experiences. Munyuki (2015: 26) is of the view that “interviewing can inform us about the nature of social life. We can learn about the work of occupations and how people fashion careers, about cultures and the values they sponsor, and about the challenges people confront as they live their lives. We can learn also, through interviewing about people’s interior experiences ... We can learn the meanings to them of their relationships, their families, their work, and their selves. We can learn about all the experiences, from joy through grief, that together constitute the human condition.”

Wahyuni (2012: 73) argues that the “main feature of an interview is to facilitate the interviewees to share their perspectives, stories and experience regarding a particular social phenomena being observed by the interviewer.” The use of interviews as a data collection method begins with the assumption that the participants’ perspectives are meaningful, knowable, and can be made explicit, and that their perspectives affect the success of the project. As suggested by Atkinson (1998: 33), in-depth interviews are particularly appropriate when they include situations involving complex highly sensitive subject matter. Through the use of in-depth qualitative interviews, it was anticipated that the researcher would need to ask for examples or more explanation on the answer given in order to gain a deep understanding of the issues.

The snowballing technique was used as a method of recruiting participants for this research study. Atkinson and Flint (2001: 2) define snowballing as a technique for gathering research subjects through the identification of an initial subject who is used to provide the names of other actors. These actors may themselves open possibilities for an expanding web of contact and inquiry. The snowballing technique was perfect for this study because, as Atkinson and Flint (2001) further note, this strategy has been utilised primarily as a response to overcome the problems associated with understanding and sampling concealed populations such as the deviant and the socially isolated. In the case of this research, I was dealing with some members of the gay community who are not out of the closet.

However, the snowballing technique has been criticised as likely to yield a biased and unrepresentative sample because there is the possibility that the entire sample will be drawn from the same circle of friends (Munyuki, 2015: 30). Although all of the research participants were black, they came from different segments of the community and were in very different stages of their lives. Their ages ranged from early to late twenties. I

believe that the fact that the research participants were of varying ages and were in different stages in the lives and careers allowed for difference in perspective.

### Research Participants

Pseudonym	Race	Occupation
Chris	Black	Clerical Intern
Anele	Black	Intern Psychologist
Sipho	Black	Student
Keenan	Coloured	Student
Mzamo	Black	Manager
Sango	Black	Cashier

The interviews lasted between an hour and an hour and a half and were carried out in private at a location chosen by the participants in order to allow them to be comfortable enough to speak openly. Upon explaining the purpose of the study to the participants, I asked them to sign the interview protocol form, which clearly acknowledges that the information is strictly for research purposes. The interview protocol forms also asked participants if they wanted me to use their real names in my data analysis. Thus in line with confidentiality I have created pseudonyms for all the participants who wished to stay anonymous. Two of the participants (**Anele** and **Chris**) agreed to use their real names in my data analysis.

I asked for the participants; permission to audio tape the interviews and they all agreed. The interview questions traced the participants; introduction into the church – from Sunday school – until the time they realised their gay sexuality and whether or not their experience of the church changed upon realisation of their sexuality and the

cause thereof. I would then go on to transcribe the interviews verbatim as soon as the interview was completed while their stories were still fresh on my mind. I adjusted the speed of the audio recording to 'very slow' which allowed me fast and easy transcribing. Once the interviews were transcribed, I would then read and re-read the interview looking for relevant themes. Munyuki (2015: 28) notes that "thematic analysis is a search for themes that emerge as being important to the description of a particular phenomenon and that this form of analysis requires an active role by the researcher in identifying important themes that can be reported from the data itself."

#### **4.6. Research Ethics, Validity, Reliability and Generalisation**

Sutrisna (2009:12) sees ethical issues of research as concerning the appropriateness of the researchers' behaviour in relation to the rights of the subjects of the research or those who are affected by the research. According to Li (2009: 91), research ethics are essential to rapport building. I informed all the participants in this research about the full details of the research. I also informed and guaranteed all the participants of informed consent and confidentiality and anonymity before, during and after the study has been completed. In honouring confidentiality and anonymity, the interviews were conducted in a location chosen or agreed upon by each participant. The participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point if they so wished.

Patton (2001) states that validity and reliability are two factors that any qualitative researcher should be concerned about while designing a study, analysing results and judging the quality of the study. Reliability in the context of this research study refers to credibility, consistency and dependability of the information gathered, and validity refers to quality, rigor and trustworthiness of the findings of the study (Golafshani, 2003: 601). In light of producing reliable and valid research findings, I sought to

eliminate all bias while I was in the field collecting data. For instance, I relied on the guidelines provided by Herek, Kimmel, Amaro & Melton (1991) on how to eliminate heterosexist bias in research. They define heterosexist bias as “conceptualizing human experience in strictly heterosexual terms and consequently ignoring, invalidating, or derogating homosexual behaviours and sexual orientation, and lesbian, gay, and bisexual relationships and lifestyles” (Herek et al., 1991: 1). In this regard, I made sure that neither my conduct nor the research question devalues or stigmatises gay people, ignores or denies the lived realities of gay people, or reflects cultural stereotypes of gay people (Herek et al., 1991). I also made sure that I did not ask the research respondents leading questions and I accepted whatever response they offered as their valid experience of the church. I also asked follow up questions when I wanted research respondents to expand on something interesting that they raised.

The questions I asked speak to both validity and reliability because they traced each participant’s development in church from Sunday school through to the time they realised their sexuality up until now. I also allowed research respondents to express themselves in isiXhosa if they wanted to. In this regard Murray and Wynne (2001: 4) note that “while participants may be able to communicate adequately in a second language for much of the time, the extra effort required, especially when emotional or sensitive topics are involved, can result in impoverished accounts as well as making the grounded accuracy and value of the data uncertain.” Squires (2009: 269) goes on to argue that “allowing participants to respond in their primary language will increase participant comfort level with the data collector or their participation in the study. The researcher may also obtain richer data from first language responses.” In line with Munyuki’s assertion (2015: 39) I treated “the participants’ stories as a rendition of life

experiences within a certain context as perceived the tellers themselves and not as an accurate reconstruction of life events.”

While doing the research I kept it in mind that the generalizability of this study is limited because only six narratives are being explored. However, Munyuki (2015: 37) rightly points out that while a relatively small sample of narratives does not speak for all in the community, “it can be considered to provide evidence that can be used to create an understanding of the inter-subjective meanings that are shared by the whole community.” Similar to Munyuki’s (2015: 37) thesis, the participants’ experiences in this study provide a valuable voice because they “occupy a precarious social position as a result of their sexual identity.”

#### **4.7. Challenges Faced and Lessons Learned**

The first challenge that I experienced was recruiting enough (six gay men) participants for this study despite being given names and contact details of other people who might be interested by the initial participants. Due to the personal nature and sensitivity of the research, many of those I was referred to were either not interested or “uncomfortable with the whole thing”. Most of the people I was referred to were not completely out of the closet – in the sense that they are out in certain circles and pass as straight in other circles – thus I suspected that they feared that a study of this nature would out them despite the participants being informed about confidentiality. Some of the people that had expressed an interest in participating when the study was in its formative stages were no longer interested to take part by the time I was collecting data.

Another challenge I had to grapple with was that once I added the people I was referred to on Facebook or any other social network some would start sending

flirtatious messages. One participant asked me, “What is in it for me”? Once I set the record straight and maintained the researcher-participant relationship some prospective participants would immediately lose interest. I also had to deal with one participant deciding to pull out of the study during the initial stages of my data analysis. The consent form that the participants signed clearly states that they are allowed to withdraw from the research at any time. This meant I had to start recruiting another participant in order to fill up my study.

With regard to lessons and observations made, I realised that there was great value and benefit in starting the interview with the kind of questions that did not immediately ask about the participant’s sexual orientation. For instance, questions about Sunday school, how they were introduced into church, and the importance of church in their lives, put the participants at ease and they were thus able to answer later questions about their sexuality openly. Furthermore, I believe that these kinds of questions that followed their growth from Sunday school until today provided me with a glimpse into the participants’ lives and I got to know them better in the hour that we spent together. The lesson here is to start the interview with less invasive questions in order to make the participants comfortable.

I also learned that some participants want to tell you, as the researcher, what they think you want to hear. Some of the participants asked, from the start, what is it that I want to find out. In this regard, I would inform the participants that I am interested in learning their experiences of being in the church. I also realised that I got a lot more out of the participants when I rephrased the key questions and asked them more than once. When I felt that the participants did not understand the question in English I would rephrase it and then ask it again in IsiXhosa. Rephrasing questions sometimes encouraged participants to provide longer answers than they had initially given.

## **4.8. Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the qualitative research methodology used in this study with regard to the epistemology and ontology of the study. I have discussed how the research participants were recruited, how the data was collected, transcribed and subsequently analysed. I have also discussed the ethical code that I observed as a researcher in the field throughout the duration of the research study.

## **CHAPTER 5: IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND SURVIVAL STRATEGIES OF GAY MEN WITHIN THE MCSA**

### **5.1. Introduction**

This is the first data analysis chapter of this thesis. In analysing the experiences of acceptance of gay men within the MCSA in Grahamstown, this chapter deals with the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> objectives [Section 1.3, page 8] of this thesis. With regard to the secondary goal of this thesis which is to apply the scholarship of Bourdieu to the experience of gay men in the MCSA, this chapter tackles questions 1, 2, and 3 [Section 2.3, page 33]. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section interrogates identity construction within the Christian field as represented by the MCSA in this thesis. The second section deals with social capital as a valuable resource or a strategy in negotiating a gay identity within the MCSA. The third section discusses gay habitus concealment or transformation as another strategy to negotiate a gay identity within the MCSA.

### **5.2. Field: Constructing a Gay Identity Within the Religious Field as Represented by MCSA**

“Christian and ‘gay’, intrinsic descriptions of who I am, are two aspects of my life that mould me. Now tightly integrated with my personality to promote life, they previously formed discordant and debilitating tensions which were leading me to dissolution” (Lamont, 1997:127).

This section focuses on the narratives of the six research participants from different congregations of the MCSA in Grahamstown and examines the strategies they have used in order to negotiate their sexual identity within the church. Erving Goffman (cited in Liu 2015: 109) refers to identity as the “way in which the individual his or her self-image and performs to the expectations of others in everyday life”. In this regard, I

borrow from Eminov (2007: 5) when he notes that “identities are socially constructed through performance, political struggle and compromise and that they [identities] may be used as strategies by which to adapt to a variety of social situations and to produce and support effective self-concepts.” Writing about the identity construction of Chinese migrants in the diaspora, Shuang Liu (2015: 110) defines identity negotiation as “a transactional interaction process whereby individuals in an intercultural situation attempt to assert, define, modify, challenge and/or support their own and others’ desired self-images.” Thus, this thesis seeks to find out how gay men define, modify and challenge their gay identity within the MCSA. Moreover, this extends from current literature which shows that homosexual people have to employ certain strategies in order to negotiate their entry into spaces such as cultural spaces (Hunter, 2005; Gresham, 2009; Li, 2009), educational spaces (Butler, 2004; High & Ellis, 2004), professional spaces (Croteau, 1996; Kerfoot & Rumans, 2009) and religious spaces (Germond & de Gruchy, 1997).

Using the narratives of the six research participants as a point of departure, this section seeks to use Bourdieu’s theory of fields to interrogate gay identity formation within the religious field as represented by the MCSA in Grahamstown. However, throughout this section Bourdieu’s theory of fields will only be used as a guideline to delineate the ‘space’ within which this identity is formed because Bourdieu never theorised identity formation. Using Bourdieu’s field theory is my way of setting boundaries and confining myself to only interrogate identity formation within those set boundaries.

The theoretical paradigm which I use, within the religious field parameters, to theorise the formation of sexual identity among these men is Social Constructionism. On this basis, it is important to mention, as Jeffery Weeks (cited in Beasley, 2005: 144) notes

that, “Social Constructionism is a designated label for a particular group of thinkers in Sexuality studies (as against social constructionism written in lower case, which refers to a broad anti-essentialist stance).” Beasley (2005: 144) notes that Social Constructionism offers a position somewhere between gay/lesbian identity politics and communities.

I have chosen to interrogate gay identity formation within the MCSA in Grahamstown by using Social Constructionism because this paradigm, to borrow from Bridget Stark (2004:97), “understands that the essence of a person’s identity or selfhood is a central aspect of their culture and interaction with others within that culture.” Stark (2004: 15) further observes that “social context impacts the meanings that are attached to the conversation and ultimately impact the construction of our identities.” Shotter (in Stark, 2004) also notes that as living, embodied beings it is impossible not to be receptive to the world around us. The world around us is divided into different fields and these fields afford us different identities. Because people live out different identities in different social contexts (Stark, 2004: 31), I am interested to find out how gay men live out their sexual identity within the MCSA in Grahamstown.

I have decided to use the Social Constructionist paradigm because all the research participants are black gay men from dominantly African congregations of the MCSA in Grahamstown. In this light, I have borrowed from Mkhize’s (2004) argument that the “African conception of the self as a social entity fits with the Social Constructionist view that truth is created through relations with others.” Lovegrove (2014: 38) goes on to argue that “the emphasis on the role of the communal world of the African in understanding who he is, is congruent with the Social Constructionist perspective that

truth (person or identity) is constructed through relationships and engagement with others.”

I am interested to find out how the research participants construct their homosexual identity within the MCSA in Grahamstown because current literature (Germond & de Gruchy 1997; Msibi 2012; Epprecht 2013; Mutambanengwe 2014; Stobie 2014) describes homosexual people within religious spaces as ‘space invaders’. Puwar (cited in Vincent, 2015: 39) employs the term ‘space invaders’ to “invoke the idea of dissonance that ensues when people who have been historically and conceptually excluded from a space arrive in that space.” Vincent (2015: 40) observes that:

“Some bodies are deemed as having the right to belong, while others marked out as trespassers, who are, in accordance with how both spaces and bodies are imagined (politically, historically and conceptually), circumscribed as being out of place.”

Borrowing from Vincent’s (2015) and Puwar’s (2004) argument about the connection between certain bodies and certain spaces [fields], I intend to use Bourdieu within the constructionist paradigm to argue that this connection, “which is built, repeated and contested over time” (Puwar, 2004: 8) is due to the *nomos* that governs the field and *doxa* that gets normalised by the field.

### **5.2.1. Nomos**

Bourdieu’s concept of *nomos* refers to the central, regulative, and objective principle of praxis within a certain field. *Nomos* is one of Bourdieu’s lesser-known concepts but for Epstein (2012: 165) it plays a vital role in addressing some of the shortcomings of the constructivist norms research. Bourdieu (1997: 96) defined *nomos* to mean the

“irreducible, foundational, ‘fundamental law’ that structures a field”. Epstein (2012:170) strengthens my argument about the exclusionary effect of the *nomos* on certain bodies when he observes that “the *nomos* is first and foremost a principle of inclusion and exclusion that sets the boundaries of a certain field.” In line with *nomos* that define the MCSA one of the research respondents, **Anele**, said:

“I’ve come to realise that church will never change or bend its rules or it will take a long time for them to do that. So, like divorce used to be an issue within the Methodist church, it took years for them to say anyone who has been divorced can come to church without being ‘punished’/reprimanded. So I guess there will come a stage but after decades that Methodist church will reform its stance about homosexuality. It will take time and it will require people like us to tell the church what should be done.”

The *nomos* can also be defined a historically shaped view that reflects the interests of the groups that hold dominant positions in a field (Chopra, 2003: 427). Available literature on the intersection of religion (Christianity) and sexuality (Liddle et al., 2001; Schooner, 2006; Hecker et al., 2010; Olsman et al., 2011;) shows that throughout history the dominant *nomos* has gained its influence from a literal interpretation of the Bible. Section 5.4 of Chapter 5 shows that the *nomos* of the MCSA reflects a culture that is steeped in heteronormativity, which by its very nature is exclusionary to homosexual identities.

### **5.2.2. Doxa**

The *doxa* corresponds to *nomos* on the side of the actors as its subjective aspect. This concept is Bourdieu’s way of asserting that there are structures that shape the character of a particular shared environments (Chopra, 2003: 425). The *doxa* can be

described as a habitus that corresponds to the given field. Section 5.3 of Chapter 5 discusses how the dominant habitus within the MCSA is exclusionary on homosexual bodies. Chopra (2003: 426) strengthens my arguments when he comments that there are thus “limits to the possibilities ‘allowed’ by the conceptual framework corresponding to any habitus. What sets this limit, and lies beyond it, is what Bourdieu terms the *doxa*.”

### **5.2.3. Social Constructionism**

This section uses Social Constructionism as a point of departure as the researcher intimates that how gay men form their sexual identity within religious spaces is largely shaped by their social interactions within that space. Freedman & Combs (1996: 97) propose four main ideas that can be linked to Social Constructionism: firstly, identity is socially constructed, secondly, identities are constituted through language, thirdly, identities are organised and maintained through narrative, and finally, there are no essential truths. Raskin (2002) promotes the idea that the Social Constructionism paradigm theorises about and investigates how human beings create systems for meaningfully understanding their worlds and experiences.

Influenced by White & Epstein, Imrie (2002: 27) situates Social Constructionism as a research paradigm that challenges the idea of a stable, coherent self and replaces it with the self-as-narrative, the self as a social construction. Imrie (2002: 32) argues that one of the key assumption of a Social Constructionist inquiry is that it is “principally concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live.” She goes on to posit that this paradigm challenges the ontology of mind in Western culture and

proposes a critical examination of the social, moral, political and economic institutions that sustain and are maintained by our assumptions regarding human inquiry.

Gergen (1985: 271) simplifies our understanding of Social Constructionism when he states that this paradigm's answer to the question 'why' is not with a psychological state or process but with consideration of persons in relationships.

#### **5.2.4. Social Constructionism and Bourdieu**

Epstein (2012: 165) argues that both Social Constructionist writers and Bourdieu are driven by a common concern to understand the ways in which the actors and the structures mutually constitute one another within the realms of interaction. This approach is in line with Bourdieu, as Beasley (2005: 135) notes that, according to this approach gender and sexuality are not simply a matter of identity differences but of hierarchical social division analogous to class and founded upon concrete material oppression.

#### **5.2.5. Social Constructionism and Sexual Identity**

This interrogation of sexual identity formation within the church through a Social Constructionism prism is in line with Burr's (1995) contention that "instead of fixed, single and unified selves, we could possibly see ourselves as being fragmented with a multiplicity of prospective selves that may not inevitably be consistent with each other, but are experienced as equally real." This section adds to the research such as Li's (2009) thesis which interrogates the disjunctures within conventional knowledge of black male homosexual identity in contemporary South Africa, Weeks (2010) and other literature (Eminov, 2007) that situates identity as a socially constructed phenomenon. Jeffery Weeks is one of the world's leading sociologists on sexuality.

Weeks (2010:21) posits a constructionist understanding of sexual identity when he argues that “sexuality is not a given, it is a product of negotiation, struggle and human agency.” Schooner (2006:45) also argues that a gay sexual identity is formed through a process of negotiation and re-negotiation by the individual depending on the social context.

Writing about identity construction within the context of parental alcoholism, Stark (2004: 97) observes that identity can thus be interpreted as the result of the impact of relationships and conversations between people. This view strengthens the Social Constructionist view that the world in which we live impacts the way we construct our sense of self. Eminov (2007: 2) further argues that “people locally define and construct their identity according to their own experiences and perceptions, in interaction with and in relation to members of neighbouring groups, and in relation to official state definitions.”

One of the key assumptions of the Social Constructionist paradigm is that there are no determined ways in which people construct their identities thus there are multiple ways that individuals choose to construct their personal identities. Social constructionism resists any set or fixed content to identities (Beasley, 2005: 13). This paradigm is in line with my already intimated approach because, as Beasley (2005: 136) observes, it concerns itself with a critique of notions of essentialism in sexuality studies. Rather than challenging any continuing basis for set identity, social constructionist writers focus on refusing simple or singular accounts of identity. Social Constructionist writers like Jeffrey Weeks (1985) offer a culturalist or social nurture argument for formation of human sexuality.

In situating these gay men's' narratives within the Social Constructionist paradigm I borrow Schooner's (2004) and Brekhus's (2003) model of ideal types of gay identities in order to locate my participants into four primary negotiation strategies. Schooner (2004: 46), interrogating gay Jewish identities incorporates the Social Constructionist paradigm, and uses Brekhus's (2003) ideal types of gay identities, where "the *gay lifestyler* carves out specialised social enclaves to devote their lives to a celebration of being 'all gay, all the time, the *gay commuter* moves in and out of gayness as a temporary status, performing a gay identity only in specific gay environments, and the *gay integrator* combines a gay identity with other identities (ethnic, religious, other) so that no one attribute defines the core self." However, I have modified these categories in order to fit the Methodist Church context of my thesis.

#### **5.2.5.1. Gay Methodist Lifestyler**

Brekhus (2003) defined lifestylers as those who treat their 'gayness' as a noun, foregrounding it as their core ingredient of self at all times and in all places and immersing themselves in identity-specific enclaves and social networks. These are the people who treat their 'gayness' as one of the key defining features of who they are despite the anti-gay sentiments that are casually expressed every now and then by those around them. Schooner (2004: 50) notes that "gay lifestylers do not wish to dilute their gayness by placing importance on other aspects of their social identities." In this context, a lifestyler's Methodist identity is significantly de-emphasised and is seen as an identity that can be discarded at any time. A lifestyler's gay identity would trump their Methodist identity.

Two of the research respondents exhibited signs of a gay lifestyle. **Sipho** reported his disinterest in being religious and also spoke about his readiness to discard his church going habits:

“I am not really feeling church right now. I am not religious anymore. I just want to be my own person. I don’t want to be reduced to this person, you know... but I go to church, like I said before, because I am pleasing my parents and the moment I am out of their roof I don’t think I will attend church anymore.”

Other research respondents de-emphasised their Methodist identity because they realised that it was conflicting with their gay identity. They spoke about how when they realised that their gay identity and their religious identity were conflicting they submerged the religious identity and stopped going to church, As **Keenan** stated:

“For a long period of time I didn’t go to church because I felt that it was 2 (two) conflicting interests. I could not be both at the same time.”

Similarly, **Mzamo** revealed that:

“... At the time I never thought I belonged. It was not a... look inasmuch as no one was violent but I just didn’t think, because of the reasons I’ve specified; that the different kinds of homophobia and it was a very subtle one in church. I’m the kind of person that if I’m not needed then I don’t have to stay.”

#### **5.2.5.2. Gay Methodist Commuters**

A commuter usually refers to someone travelling from one place to another. Brekhus (2003) defines a gay commutes someone who moves in and out of ‘gayness’ as a temporary status, performing a gay identity only in specific gay environments.

Commuters compartmentalize their intersecting identities. Brekhus (2003) characterize commuters as those who treat their 'gayness' as a verb, foregrounding their 'gay self' in a few places, times, and social networks, but submerging it and foregrounding 'other selves' at other times and in other places and networks. Schooner (2004: 51) observes that by completely compartmentalizing their identities in this way, these commuters are able to enjoy their intersecting identities while keeping them separate and free of intersection. One of the research participants, **Sango**, perfectly sums up how he moves between these two identities while keeping them free of intersection. He says,

“Firstly, ndikhulele pha ecaweni [I grew up in church] my relationship with God... I never felt uba [that] I am not worthy uba ndikhonze [to worship]. Ndakhula ndihleli ndine [I grew up with] belief esi strong ba uthixo ngowethu sonke [that God is for all of us]. It was never about church so into yecawa and me being gay never clashed.”

In this context, borrowing from Schooner (2004: 51), gay-Methodist commuters would travel freely between gay-specific and Methodist-specific spaces, but would be careful to enact the appropriate identity while submerging the other.

**Sipho** narrates how social networks became the only space where he would live out his gay self. He talks about how online anonymity allowed him to enact his gay identity and also served as a platform for him to meet other gay men:

“... We met on 2go<sup>1</sup>. There is a chat room for gay guys there and you know obviously when you are on 2go you change your name. So I had changed my

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<sup>1</sup> 2go is a mobile social network

name and he had changed his name and we were chatting there. So we were chatting and he didn't know it was me... and I didn't know it was him. So we were chatting you know... are you top or are you bottom?... so, let's meet. We decided to meet by the garage that is at the corner of a street we both knew."

**Sipho** goes on to explain why he submerges his gay identity when he is in church:

"Like, if I tell one of the men in church I won't be *umzalwane*; that guy they go to. They will treat me differently. They will never look at me the same way."

The *nomos*, *doxa* and the dominant habitus of the church do not allow him to be openly gay and still be a proud *umzalwane*. Brekhus (2003) uses the metaphor of a chameleon to explain commuters. Chameleons share a deep connection to their identity and are adept at 'turning' them off or on depending on context. Another research respondent exhibited this 'chameleon-like' tendency of turning off or on his gay identity at different times and spaces:

"I'm a Wesley guildler. Obviously because of that I can't live my life as a gay man within the church."

Hendrick (2013: 5) notes that the commuter does not necessarily inhabit a marked identity all the time, but that identity is present within the individual and does appear when it is appropriate based on social location.

### **5.2.5.3. Gay Methodist Integrators**

Schooner (2004: 52) defines identity integrators as those who view themselves as being made up of a multiple of attributes, where no one social identity assumes a role of 'master status' around which his or her life is organised. Integrators value a balance

of characteristics within an individual and effectively write off auxiliary characteristics as some form of flair or unnecessary markedness (Hendrick, 2013: 7). Integrators would rather be defined by their 'humanity' more broadly, than any one identity specifically. In his writing about the intersection of gay and Jewish identities, Schooner (2004: 53) observes that gay-Jewish integrators challenge the traditional Jewish position that forbids sexual relations between those of the same gender.

One of the research respondents, **Anele**, while narrating his experiences of being in the MCSA in Grahamstown, spoke about how his being obviously gay challenges the accepted norms and ways of being within the church:

“It is a very good experience because it helps me to challenge some of the things. Even though I may not be involved in conference debates but it helps other people to come out as well. I have seen it! People suddenly realise that gay people exist in church and they then decide to come out, too.”

Schooner (2004: 56) also argues that gay-Jewish integrators who were traditional Jews discussed the idea of using their sense of “Jewish values” to help guide them in their everyday gay lives.

A few of the research respondents exhibited this strategy of using their own values to guide them in their everyday lives and in the process of forming of their gay identities.

For example, **Sipho** says:

“I am not religious anymore. But, I am a spiritual person. I believe that there is a higher being and what I have done with my own spirituality....I took the parts that I like from Christianity and formed my own religion and I believe that the

main religion that everyone should have is acceptance, tolerance and kindness.

Those are the 3 (three) most important things for me.”

Schooner (2004: 53) similarly found that another common strategy of ‘gay-Jewish’ integrators is to challenge the traditional Jewish position that forbids sexual relations between those of the same gender. Some of the research respondents to this study reported similar sentiments. For example, **Anele** speaks about how he confronts scripture:

“...And confronting such scriptures like in Romans when Paul speaks of an abomination for men to sleep together. So I have to find a way to say that: Paul, I am gay now...”

However, upon successfully constructing an identity – be it a lifestyler, commuter or integrator- that each of these men is comfortable with, they still need to acquire enough social capital through building friendships within the church. The acquiring of social capital serves as a strategy that familiarises fellow church people with the gay identity that has been constructed.

### **5.3. Social Capital Acquisition**

The literature on social capital can be summarised in two words: “relationships matter” (Briggs, 1997: 2; Field, 2003: 1). The idea of relationships mattering is in line with Durkheim’s study on anomie whereby he emphasised the power and influence of groups, relationships and shared values (Mukorombindo, 2012: 22). One of the focus areas of this section is to position ‘social capital’ as a valuable resource in negotiating the construction and entry of gay identities into the MCSA in Grahamstown. Alejandro Portes (1998: 2) notes that the concept of social capital highlights the simple but crucial point of “how non-monetary forms of capital can be important sources of power and

influence.” Bourdieu noted that capital not only appears in tangible and economic forms; he spoke of a “capital of social relationships which will provide, if necessary, a useful support system” (Bourdieu, 1977:503).

However, it must also be noted that Bourdieu saw social capital as a network of relationships which served as currency for higher positions and reproducing inequalities. However, in this section I only aim to look at social capital as a social advantage that makes life easier rather than a currency for higher positions. In agreement with James Coleman (1988), I criticise Bourdieu’s use of the concept in this regard for being limited because he saw it as only valuable for attaining superiority. Coleman developed the concept of social capital when he argued, contrary to Bourdieu, that the benefits of social capital were not limited to powerful positions but that social capital could also convey real benefits to poor and marginalised people (Mukorombindo, 2012: 23).

Martin Van der Gaag (2005: 2) also notes that “most of the emotional goals in life can even be achieved exclusively with the help of social capital, such as keeping each other company, having a good time together, sexuality and procreation, but also discussing personal problems or comforting each other during a crisis.” The general idea that relationships with other people can be seen as openings to collections of available resources, in addition to or as a substitute for personal resources, is what is at the basis of this dissertation.

Van der Gaag (2005: 15) refers to Lin (2001) in observing that social capital can be mobilised in two categories of actions: *instrumental actions*, and *expressive actions*. Instrumental actions are aimed at obtaining resources initially not owned by an individual, such as finding a house, a job, material wealth, and status attainment in

general. Expressive actions are aimed at the maintenance, consolidation and defence against possible loss of resources already owned; returns from such actions are for example the reception of personal support, and the sharing of sentiments. This section concerns itself with the expressive actions such as personal support received by gay men within the MCSA in Grahamstown through their access and use of social capital. My point of departure is in line with Van der Gaag's (2005: 15) idea that individuals invest in social relationships with a certain rationale: "they actively try to produce a good life and improve their life-chances, and in so doing employ their resources accordingly, either by applying their personal resources, or by investing in relationships with others".

Social capital measurements have often been employed to study certain populations such as: university students (Ronnie, 2008; Tanyanyiwa, 2014), immigrants (Owen, 2011; Gordon & Maharaj, 2015), nations (Putnam, 1993), survival strategies of poor elderly women (Sidloyi, 2011), HIV & AIDS patients (Mayekiso, 2008; Sesane, 2014) etc. From these studies, the literature on the theory of social capital highlights a number of advantages that accrue to individuals when they possess the required social capital. These advantages include social capital influencing career success (Adler & Kwon, 2002: 17) and assisting workers to find jobs (Granovetter, 1973; Adler & Kwon, 2002: 17). Very little research has been done on the advantages of social capital as a survival strategy for gay men and this section serves as a tentative effort to fill this gap in literature and also to develop the scholarship around social capital theory.

Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible (Raffo &

Reeves, 2000: 151) — in the case of this research study, the opportunity to negotiate an entry and construction of gay identities into and within the religious field as represented by the MCSA in Grahamstown. De Souza Briggs (1997: 2) highlighting the advantages of social capital, refers to social capital as “the stuff we all draw on all the time, through our connections to a system of human relationships, to accomplish things that matter to us and solve everyday problems.” He goes on to note that the lasting rewards of social capital depend on making regular deposits and withdrawals into a system of relationships, some of them quite casual, others very intimate (De Souza Briggs, 1997: 3).

### **5.3.1. Individualizing Social Capital**

In his thesis on social capital, Van der Gaag (2005: 6) notes that social capital operates on both the individual (micro) level (investments, relationships, reciprocity, resources) and collective (macro) level (trust, norms, cohesion). Furthermore, the opportunities it produces can also occur at different levels of social structure. This is what Keming Yang (2007) calls the different faces of social capital. Yang (2007: 21) goes on to argue that “if there is nothing intrinsically wrong with talking about something with two faces, then it will be truly confusing if we don’t specify which face we are talking about.”

I have decided to focus on an individualised system of social capital in order to develop a more holistic understanding, within the framework of Bourdieu’s sociology, of how each of the research respondents within the MCSA in Grahamstown understand, experience and navigate their entry and stay in the church. Raffo and Reeves (2000: 148) note that an “individualised system of social capital is a dynamic, social, spatially, culturally, temporally and economically embedded group, network, or constellation of social relations”, which has the person/people being studied rather than the whole

community at the core of the constellation. They further note that this way of studying social capital recognises that systems of social relations both support and constrain individual actions and outcomes. Similar to Raffo and Reeves (2000), the argument being made in this section is that homosexual people's Individualised transition into religious spaces, identity construction in those spaces, "incorporating elements of agency, resistance and accommodation, are conditioned to a large extent by the evolutionary and adaptive characteristics of their Individualised systems of social capital, rather than by prescribed social characteristics" (Raffo & Reeves, 2000: 148). Flap (in Van der Gaag & Snijders 2003: 3) argued that individual social capital is defined by three dimensions:

- 1) "The number of alters<sup>2</sup> in the individual's social network;
- 2) The resources these alters give access to; and
- 3) The availability of these resources from alters to the focal individual, of which the willingness of alters is a major component".

Looking at social capital from an Individualised standpoint concurs with Beck's (1992: 97) argument that people's social networks are not necessarily based on prescribed relationships, and are individualised in the sense that they are different for each individual within their constellations of social relations.

I have also chosen to individualise the study of social capital because it takes into account the nuances and complexities of the biographies of those studied and the different typologies of the social capital that they might possess (Raffo & Reeves, 2000: 153) and the different strategies that they employ in order to access this capital.

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<sup>2</sup> Alters refers to network members.

Research shows that the nuances of different Individualised systems of social capital can provide for a variety of responses to similar structural constraints (Raffo & Reeves, 2000; Van der Gaag, 2005). Raffo and Reeves (2000) came up with four different typologies of individual social capital that individuals might possess and these are: strong, weak, fluid and changing.

An individualised system of social capital also takes into account that people are different and thus do not possess the same abilities when it comes to building up their constellations of social capital. As Raffo & Reeves (2000: 153) also highlight that: “the ability to choose and maintain one’s own social relations is not an ability everyone has by nature. It is ... a learned ability which depends on special social and family backgrounds”.

Furthermore, individualised systems of social capital concur with Bourdieu’s concept of habitus in two interrelated ways: Firstly, this perspective accepts that the socioeconomic environment in which a person is situated does influence, to a certain extent, the nature of their Individualised system of social capital, which in turn conditions the person’s perceptions and appreciation of their subsequent experiences. Secondly, it shares a common characteristic with habitus, in being implicitly capable of generating practices and behaviours within the individual which are not regulated or explicitly institutionalized, but which are the product of a collective process of inculcation (Raffo & Reeves, 2000: 150).

However, the theory of individualised systems of social capital also transcends Bourdieu’s theory of habitus in the sense that Bourdieu sees habitus as predetermining an inescapable destiny, while the notion of Individualised systems of

social capital conceives of a more open-ended future for the people being studied (Raffo & Reeves, 2000: 151).

Social capital scholars have observed that through the process of “developing social capital through trustworthy reciprocal social relations within Individualised networks, people are provided with an opportunity to gain information, observe, and then confirm decisions and actions with significant others and peers” (Raffo & Reeves, 2000: 151). Berger & Luckman (in Raffo & Reeves 2000: 151) have argued that the individualised system of social capital enables individuals to overcome some of their everyday tasks and, at the same time, facilitates their development of self-esteem and identity.

However, I also acknowledge that an individualised analysis of social capital has been criticised for its over-instrumental or over-rational focus on human relationships, and the absence of attention to unproductive, constraining and even more negative effects of social relationships (Van der Gaag, 2005: 6-7).

### **5.3.2. Dimensions to Social Capital Acquisition**

Malebo Sesane (2014: 38) observes that social capital is a complex concept with many different dimensions. For the purposes of this thesis, I will only look at the following 3 dimensions to social capital acquisition below:

#### **5.3.2.1. Trust and Reciprocity**

Coleman (1988) contends that a system of mutual trust is an important form of social capital on which future obligations and expectations may be based. Putnam (1993) regards trust as a source of social capital that sustains economic dynamism and governmental performance. Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) treat trust as a key facet in the relational dimension of social capital.

The body of research that explores social capital theory reveals that trusting relationships generate social capital. Similarly, Field (2003) argued that “in order for people to cooperate to achieve their goals, they need not only to know one another, but also to trust each other so that they will not exploit or cheat in their relationship, and can expect truly to benefit from their cooperation” (Fu, 2004: 1). Most of the participants of this research mentioned that they have come out to people within the church who they trust. **Anele** reflects on his journey of coming out to few people within the church and mentions that trust played role in who he came out to.

**Anele:** I have come out to a few people in church. I started coming out to my friends and church friends.

**Me:** What made you come out to the people you came out to in church?

**Anele:** It is people I am close to. People I trust. The journey of coming out has not been easy but it also goes back to the fact that you need a comfortable zone with ‘comfy’ people that you know won’t be judgemental to you; that you know will give you a space that is different from what you get from another person.

In her thesis about coming out stories of lesbians in a historically white university, Gibson (2010: 25) cites Cass’s (1979) six-stage model which represents the process that people undergo in order to identify as gay men or lesbians and eventually come out to other people. Gibson argues that when a person has undergone all the stages in the process he/she “may decide to disclose to people s/he trusts; yet, s/he will still be aware of the incongruence between his/her own acceptance and

society's negative view towards any non-heterosexual identities" (Gibson, 2010: 25).

**Keenan** reflecting on his awareness of this incongruence said:

"You can never really know how the person you come out to is going to react. Is he going to accept me? Is he going to tell other people? Should I come out or not? You ask yourself all these questions but in the end you trust that that the rapport and trust you have in them is strong enough."

With regard to reciprocity, Coleman (1990: 306) argued that social capital mobilization is dependent on what he called "the level of trustworthiness in a society", which means that obligations will be repaid. Furthermore, Fu (200: 12) influenced by Newton (1997) argues that reciprocity can bind the individuals within a community via shared interests, and also create an environment that encourages voluntary collective behaviour and generate the good will necessary for peaceful co-existence. Certainly, Fu (2004: 15) notes that "the sociological literature conceptualizes trust as either the property of individuals, social relationships, or the social system with disproportionate attention to behaviour based on actions at the individual level."

### **5.3.2.2. Social Networks and Friendships**

Carolin Gomulia (2006: 8) defines networks as "a set of interconnected nodes where one person interacts with two or more persons. In relation to social capital, an exchange or flow of information and interaction takes place at these nodes." A number of studies in the past have illuminated the nature of social support networks among gay men and women (Berger & Mallon, 2015). Yang (2007: 24) notes that sociologists (Stinchcombe, 1990; Smith-Doerrand Powell, 2005) have identified the instrumentality

of social networks to obtain other types of benefits. He goes on to argue that the function of social networks relies on what flows through the social ties. Barret et al (2015: 132) argue that friendships are integral to building social networks. Van der Gaag (2005) argues that social capital exists by virtue of the presence of social relationships. He goes on to note that relationships are the “channels through which social resources may become available from one individual to another” (Van der Gaag, 2005: 20).

Degenne and Forse (cited in Licamele & Getoor, 2006: 2) trace the idea of social capital back to Hobbes who said “to have friends is power”. Interviews with the participants in this research also suggest that friendship networks act as a “protective buffer and support mechanism in the face of social exclusion” (Reynolds, 2007: 385) and discrimination based on sexual orientation. A broad range of friendships and social groups provide important support networks and a sense of social connection. In his thesis about social capital, Van der Gaag explains that: “in the social networks and social capital literature, network members are referred to as ‘alters’, whereas the focal actor under consideration is referred to as ‘ego’; social relationships are generally indicated as [social] ties, denoting any kind of social relationship, in any context, between two network members of any kind” (Van der Gaag, 2005: 22). April Guasp (2011: 9) notes that the friendship networks from which social capital is drawn may include and may be afforded the status of family. **Keenan** mentioned that he joined a men’s ministry group that:

“provides brotherhood in fellowship . . . you end up making friends with all the guys in there and they end up getting used to you....and it’s like you’re family.”

Yang (2007: 23) postulates that being a member of a particular group or organization may be desirable in terms of making new friends, developing a sense of belonging... or obtaining supporting references. Similarly, **Keenan** noted that friendships were important “because those are the people who will always have your back”. Another participant also said:

“Church was family. That relationship transcends outside of the church. I have made friends from that.”

In line with **Keenan’s** reflection on the value of friendships, Grigoriou (2004: 4) referring to previous research (Weston, 1991; Nardi, 1992a, 1992b, Nardi & Sherrod, 1994; Weinstock, 1998; Weeks et al., 2001) argues that research and relevant literature on gay men’s friendships has revealed that friendship is salient for gay men, as it can be a central organising element for their identity and their emotional well-being. Grigoriou (2004: 4) goes on to suggest that friendship networks “can be considered family for non-heterosexual people, as friends provide them with support and reassurance regarding their stigmatised identities and relationships.”

Some of the participants in this research also reported that the only people they have come out to within the church are their friends. **Mzamo**, for instance, said:

“Well, some of the people knew. Uhhh, I wouldn’t say coming out but they sort of knew. Some were friends so I would say I came out to them.”

Similarly, **Sango**, said:

“*Jonga nhe* [look here] I wouldn’t say I’m out even now cause the people *abayaziyo* [who know], like my friends, cause ke we do everything together but even at home I haven’t come out ‘*uya understanda* [do you understand?]. So

people *abayaziyo* are my close friends and *nabo* [even them] they saw it *yabangabo abaza kum uba hayi maan suzisokolisa* [They came to me and told me that they know and I shouldn't trouble myself] '*uya understanda*'.... And *ke ngoku* one of them happens to be gay *naye itshom yam pha ecaweni* [he is my friend in church], so *ke ngoku* he is the one person *esikwaziyo uncokola* [that I am able to talk to about] everything coz *naye* he is gay.”

However, in contrast to the large body of scholarship about the interplay between social capital acquisition and homophily, most of the research respondents built relationships with people who do not have a lot in common with them. The scholarship (Van der Gaag, 2005; Yuan & Gay, 2006) on social capital suggests that 'homophily' is a key factor in the process of attaining and building one's repository of social capital. Yuan and Gay (2006: 1063) define homophily as “the theory that predicts that people are more likely to interact with individuals similar to themselves in respect to a variety of qualities and characteristics.” The participants in this research study reported to have made connections and networks with a variety of people regardless of sex (female/male), gender (masculine/femine), age and ranking within the church structure of the MCSA.

Van der Gaag (2005) goes on to argue that the existing friendship networks can also be a source of new ties. This process illustrates 'transitivity' because friends of friends can be friends. Van der Gaag extends this idea to social capital and argues that: “alters not only give access to their personal resource collections, but also form a stepping stone to their social networks and social capital” (Van der Gaag, 2005: 25). Shank & Toynebee (in Kazadi, 2014: 8) sum up this dimension to the acquisition of social capital

when she states that “social capital derives not so much from what you know as who you know (and who knows you).”

### **5.3.2.3. Involvement and Participation in Activities**

One of the main components of social capital is participation in various social activities. In the spirit of Putnam’s (1995) and other social capital theory scholars’ conceptualization of social capital, I want to add that participation in activities within the church contributes to each of the research respondent’s repository of social capital. Sixsmith and Boneham (2003) in their case study analysis of the relationship between social capital, gender and health, suggested that the role of participation was crucial in the development of social capital for some members of the community.

When I asked about involvement in church activities, **Sango** said:

“Firstly I am... ndiyi secretary ye society yam ye guild and I’m a church leader. So I attend all the meetings *ezikhona*. I’m very much involved.”

He went on to talk about benefits of being involved such as:

“You build a reputation for yourself and ‘*utsho waziwe*’ [people get to know you]. From a skills perspective, to be able to lead people, to be able to be part of the team and organise and plan things. Those are some of the positives.”

According to a study by the World Bank (2011) high levels of participation and involvement in activities help to generate social capital in the following ways:

- “Frequent interaction cultivates norms of reciprocity through which actors become more willing to assist one another;

- Improved coordination and communication facilitate information sharing that increases mutual trust.” (World Bank, 2011)

Volunteerism is often mentioned in the context of social capital. The scholarship on volunteerism reveals that there are two ways in which social capital and volunteerism are related. Firstly, social capital promotes volunteerism and volunteerism is an intrinsic part of social capital. Secondly, volunteerism itself fosters and enhances social capital.

Boeck, Makadia, Johnson, Cadogan, Salim, & Cushing (2009: 7) conducted a research study on the effect of volunteering on social capital acquisition and they highlighted that giving up one’s time to take part in activities on a voluntary basis is a key factor to social capital acquisition. Boeck et al. (2009: 14) write that some of the benefits reported to have resulted from participation include: “building strong, positive relationships with other people in the group, having fun, and increased confidence.” **Chris** reflects on how he is always willing to volunteer his time and his services whenever the church needs people to do things:

“... if they [Church] need someone to give a devotion in church like in June we had a Youth day and it also happened to be a father’s day and I was asked to give a devotion for fathers; Just to write a speech and give to fathers but then they appreciated it anyway.... sometimes I would receive calls that ok Chris could you please come and help this society sing. Say for example that particular society is having a funeral and they have few choir members...”

However, in the process of acquiring this social capital, the gay habitus which is not in harmony with the norms and doxa of the church has to be either suspended, dislocated

or concealed. In other words, the so-called 'gay markers' have to be turned off so that the capital is easily accessible.

#### **5.4. Habitus: Durable Dispositions Transformed**

The main purpose of this thesis is to study and analyse the experiences of gay men within the MCSA in Grahamstown. However, in order to analyse these experiences one has to also interrogate the strategies that these men employ in order to navigate their existence within that same space. Doan and Higgins (2009: 30) note that "navigation can be considered a kind of walking practice that enables an individual to make sense of space and overcome alienation." This section expands this study's main purpose by interrogating gay men's senses of 'belonging' within the MCSA in Grahamstown. If belonging to a place can be understood as a form of territorialisation, and out of that belonging a sense of identity can be forged (Leach 2009), then how do gay men form this identity within the MCSA in Grahamstown? Does the formation of this identity require that they transform their some aspects of their habitus? This section also builds and expands on Lee and Kramer's (2013) research that the habitus is open to transformation in certain fields and under certain conditions.

In this section, I use Bourdieu's concept of habitus because it resolves the conflict between the objective principle of determination by environmental conditions and the subjective principle of freedom. Bourdieu developed this concept in order to grapple with what he called a "ruinous opposition" (Jenkins, 1992:50) between subjectivism and objectivism (Tanyanyiwa, 2014: 68). In relation to this thesis, I have decided to analyse Bourdieu's construct of the 'habitus' in relation to gay men because it is a "strategy generating principle which enables agents to cope with ever-changing situations" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 18) and thus could be seen as one of the

strategies that gay men employ to navigate difficult spaces. For example research (Sass, 2006; McDavitt *et al* 2008; Mkhize, Bennet, Reddy & Moletsane, 2012) shows that homosexual people consciously attempt to ‘turn off gay markers’ also known as ‘minimizing obviousness’ as a tactic/strategy to escape the violence that ‘gay bodies’ have come to expect when entering spaces deemed as ‘violent’. Skeggs (2004: 26) also notes that lesbians and gay men have learnt not to just to occupy positions of ambiguity but also to deploy ambiguity to resist the forces of power and violence by making oneself unrecognizable, difficult to read, or making oneself abject in a non-pathological way.

Bourdieu (1984: 125) states that agents move across social spaces using their habitus to form coping strategies in two ways: i) “reproduction strategies designed to maintain and improve the agent’s social position depending on the amount of capital that they possess; and ii) re-conversion strategies corresponding to the habitus of the particular social spaces.” The latter strategy involves changing, concealing and transforming the habitus of the agent to match the habitus of the field in order for the agent to maintain and improve social position. Moreover, this study is premised on the notion posited by Doan and Higgins (2009: 1476), that the “habitus of gay and lesbian populations offers a means of understanding individuals’ more or less enduring dispositions as a set of internalised possibilities that enable a person to orient himself or herself in the social world.”

With this section, my intent is to add to the available body of research on gay habitus (Sender, 2001; Doan & Higgins, 2002; Papacharissi & Fernback, 2008) in order to expand Bourdieu’s construct of the habitus by including sexuality as one of the variables that should be taken into account when looking at the formation of habitus.

Sender (2001: 74) argues that “Bourdieu’s use of habitus extends the term ‘lifestyle’, by developing it beyond the superficial and trivializing connotations (as in ‘gay lifestyle’) to suggest an intimate connection between ways of living and one’s sense of class, gender, race, sexual orientation and other forms of cultural belonging.” Ultimately, this section employs Bourdieu’s construct of the habitus to trace how structure and agency are evoked and reconciled in everyday practices.

Research has shown that individuals with same-sex desires approach religion with apprehension and an expectation of rejection, and that they are often met with condemnation which makes them feel like outsiders (Germond & de Gruchy, 1997; Van Klinken & Gunda, 2012; Mutambanengwe, 2013). Drawing on previous sections, this section seeks to gain a better understanding of the different strategies that gay people employ in order to enmesh their ‘gay habitus’ into the culture of the MCSA in Grahamstown focussing on the narratives of the six participants who took part in this study.

De Klerk, Klazinga & McNeil (2011: 115) observe that “the habitus of the dominant tends to pervade the social system, making it difficult for those with an alternative habitus to participate as equals.” With regard to the possessing a habitus that is not in sync with the dominant habitus of the church **Sango** says:

*“Icawa necawa inendela eyenza ngayo izinto zayo uya understand? [Each Church has its way of doing things, you understand?] Inemithetho, nemigaqo [there are rules] and so on. So xa uzazi uba [when you know] you’re not obeying one of the rules uba na la feeling ikwenza ube [you get that feeling that makes you] uncomfortable uyaqonda. But ke uThixo ngowethu sonke [God is for us all] at the end of the day.”*

One is then led to ask, does the dominant habitus of the field within which the MCSA is positioned make it difficult for gay men to participate as equals? While attempting to interrogate whether or not gay men's habitus gets transformed or dislocated in the MCSA, this section will also shed light on the following questions: (i) is there a dominant gay habitus in South Africa? (ii) Is this dominant gay habitus compatible with the norms of the church? (iii) If not, what happens to this habitus? (iv) Does being somewhat comfortable and feeling integrated to the MCSA community in Grahamstown require gay men to conceal, hide or transform their gay habitus?

#### **5.4.1. Can the Habitus Be Transformed?**

Fields or social spaces limit what we can do, make some actions more possible than others, or encourage a certain bodily deportment rather than another, but there is often an opportunity to 'play the game' in more than one way (Adams, 2006: 515). Gilbert, Farrand and Lankshear (2011: 349) refer to Crossley (2009) in observing that crisis arises when habitus falls out of configuration with the field in which it operates; a disjuncture normally negotiated through reflexivity. This disjuncture between field and habitus can generate not only change and transformation, but also disquiet, ambivalence, insecurity and uncertainty" (Reay, Crozier & Clayton; 2009: 1105).

With regard to certain spaces possessing a habitus that is in complete disjuncture with the habitus of certain bodies **Mzamo** talked about how the Student's Methodist Society [Rhodes University Methodist Society] was more accepting and created an environment within which he felt like he belonged and could be himself. He said:

"Look, I was quite involved. I think at a 'varsity level I was quite involved. Even *ndanxitywa* and what not. And when I made those realisations I decided to pull back. And remember I was going to church with my peers

at varsity level and we would visit the societies in the township and that when I would be most uncomfortable. It was quite uncomfortable for me.”

Bourdieu’s theory of practice and the notions of habitus and field make it possible to problematize common sense practices that are frequently taken for granted. Bourdieu’s habitus represents the ways of acting, speaking, walking, talking, thinking, feeling and being, gained from our cultural history that generally stays with across contexts (Tanyanyiwa, 2014: 68).

Despite Bourdieu describing the habitus as a set of “durable dispositions”, he was the first to argue that the same habitus is endlessly transformed either in a direction that reinforces it or in a direction that transforms it (Bourdieu, 1990:116). Lehman (2013: 2) observes that “our dispositions are shaped in significant ways by our social milieu; in turn, leaving a social environment in which we are comfortable to enter a new field has the potential to cause confusion, conflict and struggle.” Bourdieu (2004: 111) describes that experience of transitioning and holding two habitus at once as ‘cleft habitus’. Most of the research that has been done to show that the habitus can be transformed focuses on educational institutions (Lee & Kramer, 2013; Jo, 2013; Lehman, 2013). However, Jo (2013: 3) argues that “if the transformation of habitus is to be conceptually generalizable as previous research suppose, the habitus change should be possibly observed not only in educational institutions but also in non-institutional mundane lives.” It is in this light that I have decided to use the habitus in this context.

Indeed, Lee and Kramer (2013: 20) describe the habitus as a “fluid set of dispositions that are constantly changing as individuals go through different experiences and interact within and with new fields”. Furthermore, Doan and Higgins (2009:1745) argue

that the “habitus is not static but conditioned by a recursive relationship with the field shaped by structural systems of practices.” Lee and Kramer (2013) go on to claim that one’s habitus changes without conscious effort or knowledge.

Baxter and Britton (2001:99) describe this process of transformation of the habitus as ‘habitus dislocation’, an experience they define as “a painful dislocation between an old and newly developing habitus, which are ranked hierarchically and carry connotations of inferiority and superiority.”

#### **5.4.2. Is there A Dominant Gay Habitus in South Africa?**

Before interrogating whether or not the MCSA transforms or dislocates markers of a dominant gay habitus, I will examine if, according to available scholarship on Bourdieu, there is such a thing as a ‘dominant habitus’ among a group. When I have interrogated the existence of a dominant habitus’, I will then examine, based on the narratives of the research participants, if there is a “dominant South African gay habitus.” A ‘dominant habitus’ refers to a predisposition that populates a certain social group or environment. For example, Bourdieu described the dominant habitus among linguists as the “set of socially constituted predispositions that imply the propensity to speak in certain ways and to utter determinate things as well” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 142).

From a Bourdieusian, perspective one could argue that the research that has been done on the experiences of gay people within the religious field highlights the struggles that follow from not possessing the right capital and habitus and the immanent symbolic violence that follows as a result thereof. This is proof that sharing a dominant habitus with one’s fellow community members makes it easier to connect and build

relationships. Using the narratives of the six research participants as the point of departure, I examine if there are prevalent dispositions among gay men.

However, while studying commonalities among the six participants I will avoid essentialising gay identity or reducing it as though there is a set of attributes which are necessary for its formation. Sender (2001: 75) exploring the 'gay habitus' in the context of gay magazines advertising observes that "it is clear that there is no single gay habitus: at the very least, gender, gender identity, race, class and generation segment the gay community, its tastes and practices, into a number of discreet and overlapping clusters."

In his attempt to establish the existence of a gay habitus, Sender (2001: 75) argues that "if class identification and belonging enables and requires members to cultivate a certain habitus, so too does belonging in what we might call the 'gay community'." Sender (2001:75) goes on to note, as an example, that 'gaydar', gay people's supposed heightened ability to recognise other gay people through subcultural cues, points to a shared understanding of gay habitus. Sender (2001: 75) expands this argument and our understanding of gay habitus when he argues that "camp, kitsch, dress and grooming, awareness of gay-relevant current affairs, and star gossip all function as gay-specific subcultural capital, producing consumer tastes that collectively form a gay habitus." In his thesis about the invisibility of black men in contemporary mainstream gay cultures in South Africa, Theo Sonnekus (2004: 94) writes that "in the process of consuming specific products, services and media, as well as frequenting particular social establishments, the queer community creates a so-called 'habitus' that articulates their distinct way of life."

South Africa has a liberal constitution that acts as the foundation for homosexual acceptance. The result of having such a liberal constitution is that homosexuals proudly participate in forms of self-expression, such as the Gay and Lesbian pride parades, and they openly engage in homosexually orientated township events (Akermanidis & Venter, 2014: 5). It is through such events and homosexual advertisements that the distinct ways of life of the South African queer community are seen. The Gay Pages, for instance, a longstanding glossy South African magazine that has successfully targeted the homosexual niche market has, to a certain extent, revealed the dominant gay habitus in South Africa. However, this publication has been criticised for endorsing homosexual advertising largely dominated by white homosexual imagery, which imagery fails to represent black homosexual identity in advertising (Sonnekus, 2008; Akermanidis & Venter, 2014).

Gay pride, homosexually orientated events and homosexual advertising in South Africa depict the gay community as more fashion conscious and more focussed on their physical appearance than their heterosexual counterparts (Schofield & Schmidt, 2005; Ahmad & Bhugra, 2010; Akermanidis & Venter, 2014). Other scholars (Papacharissi & Fernback, 2008: 3) have described the habitus of queerness as a habitus that lies in its opposition to heteronormative culture, reinforced over time in gay culture, and it produces a 'naturalised' conception of public asexuality or hidden sexuality.

Because I do not intend to provide an essentialist account on the "ways of being" gay, I have decided to select two dominant themes from the narratives provided by the participants in the interviews. These themes represent conscious and unconscious practices and predispositions that these men have come to define themselves by.

While I am cautious of essentialising gay identity I am also aware of the fact that the habitus is as individualised as it tends to reflect a shared cultural context.

#### **5.4.2.1. On Being Different**

Stuart Hall (1987: 44) argued that all identity is formed across recognition of difference. This especially holds true in the case of how gay men tend to see, think and feel about themselves and how they describe their ways of being (Flowers & Buston, 2000; Li, 2009). Reflecting on the formation of a gay identity across difference Li (2009:101) also notes that “for many gays and lesbians there is often a strong sense of difference.” These feelings of difference among homosexual men gesture towards the symbolic violence of compulsory heterosexuality. The participants in this study also alluded to feelings of difference as being central to their first understanding of being gay. For example, **Anele** said:

“I have always been referred to as a moffie because I was different to other boys. I didn’t play soccer; always at home and nerdish and all those kinds of things.”

This comment echoes Flowers and Buston’s (2009) observation about difference being a dominant way of being among gay people. Flowers and Buston (2009: 55) go on to argue that “the growing perception of being different and the consequences of that difference for the self, or for identity, foster a growing awareness of the links between difference and a gay identity.”

This difference disrupts the norm and poses a threat to the accepted ‘ways of being’ (habitus) of compulsory heterosexuality and thus the church frowns on it. This is so because heteronormativity thrives in ‘sameness’ “in terms of what constitutes ‘normal’

feminine (female) and masculine (male) behaviour” (Donaldson, 2012: 45). In essence, all men must be the same and all women must be the same. Those who deviate from accepted norms are requested to either conceal their difference, conform to the norm or leave the church.

#### **5.4.2.2. On Being Feminine**

In line with not universalizing any traits about homosexuality I would like to state that I have only picked up ‘femininity’ because most of the research participants said a thing or two about femininity. Kite and Whitley (1996) observed that society’s evaluations of homosexual people are influenced by a generalised gender belief system. According to this model, people's expectations about gender reflect the belief that gender-associated attributes are bipolar; that is, people expect someone who is described by stereotypically masculine traits also to possess stereotypically masculine physical characteristics and to adopt stereotypically masculine roles. Bourdieu (2001:53) argued that manliness can be seen as an eminently relational notion, constructed in front of and for other men and against femininity, in a kind of fear of the female, firstly in oneself.

During the interviews it became apparent that this masculinization of the male body and the feminization of the female body pressurises effeminate gay men to turn off their ‘feminine predispositions’ when they are inside the church. This requires a constant fashioning and re-fashioning of the self among gay people (Reay *et al.*, 2009:1103). This masculinization of the male body and the feminization of the female body has resulted from the controlled, engrained habitus of performative identity over time (Papacharissi & Fernback, 2008: 3). Research shows that gender violation is taken more seriously when the deviant is a man. Lamar and Kite (1998: 193) argue

that this gender-role rigidity among men creates pressure for men to avoid expressing feminine traits or engaging in feminine activities and to reject others (e.g., gay men) who are perceived as gender-role deviants.

One of the research participants **Keenan**, explained how the church environment made him feel uncomfortable about possessing feminine predispositions:

“My church didn’t say I was not welcome but I never felt comfortable because everything in my church went against the idea of being close to feminine. As a feminine boy I was surrounded with complete masculine energy so I immediately felt off.... For a long period of time I didn’t go to church”.

Another participant, **Chris**, said:

“I realised that some elders in the church could notice my behaviour. That it was feminine. Then I felt I was being stared at then I didn’t feel comfortable at that time so I shifted. I moved. I shopped for a better church. I left Methodist church and joined one of these born again churches”.

Didier Eribon (2004: 80) similarly argues that “masculine domination can be understood as the domination of a masculine principle over a feminine principle, and thus a heterosexual man over a homosexual one, to the extent that homosexuality is filed under femininity in the unconscious of our societies.” The dominant habitus of gayness appears to be in ruinous opposition with the habitus of heteronormativity which pervades the church.

## 5.5. Conclusion

This chapter has interrogated the clash between one's religious identity and homosexual identity usually causes a conflict that can shape how a man constructs his homosexual identity. In the first section of this chapter, I have borrowed from the theoretical model of Brekhus (2003) that was expanded by Schooner (2004), which classifies gay men into ideal types of *gay lifestylers*, *gay commuters* and *gay integrators*. Schooner (2004) goes on to argue that these identities are continually negotiated and re-negotiated. I have discussed these models as some of the strategies that gay men use to negotiate their entry into the church. I have also modified these models to fit the MCSA context in Grahamstown.

In this chapter, I have also discussed the basic idea about social capital that: the people one builds relations with - family, friends, associates and acquaintances – are an important asset. Social capital in this thesis is presented as an asset that one can tap into to navigate difficult spaces and in identity construction. The participant's narratives have, to an extent, elucidated the benefits of social capital for gay people negotiating their identity into non affirming spaces.

This chapter has also discussed the disjuncture between the habitus of gay men and the habitus of the field within which the MCSA is positioned. This mismatch between the habitus of the church and that of gay men causes gay people to mimic the dispositions, tastes and the behaviour of straight men. The respondents in this study also described avoiding certain topics or styles of speaking in order to present themselves in a different and more acceptable light. Reflecting on how being in church means turning off gay markers, one of the participants, **Chris** said:

“When I am around the people from my church I have to speak and do things in a certain way. For example, I cannot be saying, “hey girl” when talking to my girlfriends because people will raise eyebrows. I also have to constantly watch who is around before I can talk about certain things such as boyfriends and stuff, you know.”

In this regard, Finlay and Walther (2003: 371) argue that “as a result of the broad support of anti-homosexual attitudes in the churches and in the larger society, gay men and lesbians are often fearful and thus typically avoid displaying their sexual orientation in public or within the churches, instead maintaining a closet of secrecy.” For these gay men in the MCSA in Grahamstown, their gay habitus continues to be ‘restructured, transformed in its makeup by the pressure of the objective structures within the church.

## **CHAPTER 6: EXPERIENCES OF INCLUSION, SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE AND HOSPITALITY**

### **6.1. Introduction**

This is the second analysis chapter of this thesis. This section unpacks the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> objectives [Section 1.3, page 8] of this thesis. With regard to the secondary goal of this thesis which is to apply the scholarship of Bourdieu to the experiences of gay men in the MCSA, this chapter deals with question 1 [Section 2.3, page 33]. This chapter is divided into two sections. In both of these sections I use the narratives of the research participants to question the kind of ‘welcome’ and acceptance that gay people receive within the MCSA. The first section [6.2] deals with the culture of heteronormativity within the church and the resultant symbolic violence upon gay men. In the second section [6.3] I use Jacques Derrida’s notion of hospitality to discuss ideas of belonging, inclusion, home and hospitality for gay men within the MCSA.

### **6.2. The symbolic Violence of Religious Heteronormativity**

The idea of having to ‘turn off gay markers’ or transform the gay habitus in order to fit into a context is laced with notions of stigma, being devalued, seeing yourself only denigrated, victimized, and it essentially culminates in what Bourdieu called ‘Symbolic violence’. This section reflects on the norms and normalization, as suggested by heteronormativity and uses Bourdieu’s concept of ‘symbolic violence’ as a point of departure in order to discuss and analyse the violence of ‘normality’ upon gay men within the MCSA in Grahamstown. In her thesis, Van der Laar (2003) argues that the MCSA does not hear, accept nor validate the experiences of gay spirituality within the church because that faith community is primarily constituted by heterosexual spirituality. Thus, this section seeks to understand, from a Bourdieusian perspective, the effect of the heteronormative gaze on the narratives of the six gay men from the

MCSA in Grahamstown who were participants in this study. Research (Yep, 2003; Franck, 2002; Dreyer, 2007) shows that homophobia and anti-homosexual hostility is an element of the heteronormative system. Tatiane Morttele (2014: 2) argues that the concept of symbolic violence sheds light on devices of heterosexist and heteronormative discourse.

### **6.2.1 Bourdieu's Symbolic Violence**

Bourdieu (2001: 1-2) defines symbolic violence as, “a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition, [more precisely, mis-recognition], recognition or even feeling [and which] grasps the logic of domination exerted in the name of a symbolic principle.” Morgan and Björkert (2006: 441) note that the concept refers to the processes and mechanisms through which symbolic interactions, behaviour and modes of conducts sustain and nurture structured inequalities in our everyday lives and interpersonal attitudes.

Most religious institutions treat gayness as a sin and the only way they deal with it is usually exorcism of the gay individual. Van der Laar (2003: 148) writing within the context of MCSA, contributes that “one could fill a library with stories of Christians who have been undergone shock therapy, exorcism, psychotherapy and drug treatments in order to be 'cured' of their same sex attractions”. Moreover, the fact that most gay Christians have to choose between staying in the closet within the church, and abandoning the closet which usually leads to abandoning the church due to the homophobia inside the church, is in itself an act of “gentle violence” against them. This effect of this gentle violence is that those upon whom this violence is meted out feel uncomfortable and recognise that a part of their identity is pathologised. One research

respondent, **Sipho**, reported that he left the church because he felt uncomfortable whenever homosexuality was preached about. **Sipho** says:

“Well, I was comfortable for the most part. But there were times when I wasn’t comfortable especially when there was a sermon you will find those pastors who will talk about homosexuality and they will be attacking it. They say, in our days the world is coming to an end. You find men sleeping with other men and men being attracted to men so the world is coming to an end. The devil is taking over our children, you know. Things like that. Then that’s when I would begin to be uncomfortable.”

In line with **Sipho’s** assertion, Ward (2005: 498) notes that “in many other black faith communities, unmistakably homophobic rhetoric is an everyday part of the communal life. The pastor or senior minister often sets the tone through sermons of condemnation from the pulpit, as well as through informal conversations with church members.” This section investigates the ways in which the heteronormative culture of the MCSA in Grahamstown imposes this ‘gentle violence’ upon their gay congregants which in turn denies them a core part of their identity.

Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic violence has its roots in the sociological discourse that concerns itself with critiquing various forms of domination in society and it also identifies the forms of domination that emerge from the repressive functioning of social order and the ways in which subjects are regulated as objects of social processes (Colaguori, 2010: 398). Colaguori (2010) takes his argument a step further by noting that this concept is confirmation that violence is also about the dominant rationality that maintains other forms of destruction, including the destruction of life, of personal liberties, of freedom of action and conscience.

Bourdieu saw symbolic violence as embedded in institutional structures from state agencies to religious organisations designed to secure the consent of subjects to accord with the dictates of operational practices of that particular social structure (Colaguori, 2010: 389). This form of violence may “involve the moral imposition of irrational beliefs on others that work against their own capacity for freedom of thought, as in the ideologies of a group, a religion or a cult” (Colaguori, 2010: 389).

Bourdieu’s ‘symbolic violence’ (2001:33) can be understood in relation to Foucault’s concept of ‘normalization’ (1979:185). Symbolic violence is similar to normalization in that it is a strategy of power that produces ‘disciplinary control’ at the institutional level and ‘docility’ at the subjective level. Foucault’s analysis is relevant to an understanding of symbolic violence because it is also an examination of power that is entangled in the very same practices that are also socially functional (Colaguori, 2010:395).

Bourdieu (2001: 40) argues that this “symbolic power cannot be exercised without the contribution of those who undergo it.” However, in referring to ‘consent’ and ‘submission’, Bourdieu is not suggesting that individuals willingly put themselves in positions where they may be vulnerable to this violence (Morgan & Björkert, 2006: 446). Bourdieu (2001: 171) elaborates that “the state of compliance is not a voluntary servitude and the complicity is not granted by a conscious deliberate act; it is the effect of a power, which is durably inscribed in the bodies of the dominated, in the form of schemes of perception and dispositions (to respect, admire, love etc.).”

Morttele (2014: 5) argues that gay men and lesbians recognise symbolic violence not only because of their everyday experience but also because of the power of subjectification of anti-homosexual hostility, that is, how it shapes the way gay and lesbian people understand their own identity. The very act of defining oneself as gay

in a society so deeply characterized by violence on homosexual bodies comes with an expectation of victimization. This expectation of violence in itself constitutes violence as Gail Mason (2002: 79) illustrates when she argues that “violence does not have to be experienced to have repercussions, it is the knowledge that violence embodies – knowledge of pain, fear, danger, disorder and the like – that oppresses individuals.”

### **6.2.2. Heteronormativity**

After engaging with the writings of Hopkins (1998) and Kimmel (2005), one comes to see homosexuality as a threat to traditional gender roles and the social dominance of heteronormative discourse, and additionally that the very content of heterosexual norms contributes to violence. According to Foucault (1997), discourses create regulatory spaces in which identities are formed, reinforced and reproduced. These discourses, comparable to an omnipresent disciplinary regime, are employed as a means to maintaining social control over conceptions and practices in gender and sexual identification to guarantee that identities are suited to heteronormativity (Hatzfeldt, 2011). From Judith Butler (1990), one is able to understand both how the process of gender normalization contributes to violence, and additionally, how the objectivity of gender suggests an openness to violence (Rafuse, 2014: 65). Yep (2008: 18) maintains that although this process of normalization is experienced consciously or unconsciously it is always a site of violence in the lives of minority sexualities and women.

When it comes to the South African context, Li (2010:79) argues that the victory of the sexual orientation clause (Section 9) in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa was accomplished at the expense of an unchallenged heteronormativity. Heteronormativity can be understood as the “the institutions, structures of

understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality not only coherent that is, organised as a sexuality but also privileged and is also contingent on maintaining a belief in a stable sex expressed through a stable gender that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality” (Marx, 2011: 6).

Gibson (2010: 10) takes this issue further by arguing that in South Africa heterosexuality has been normalised as “natural, unproblematic, taken-for-granted, ordinary phenomenon.” The social life of heterosexual cultures is constructed on the assumption that all people are heterosexual, thereby making homosexuality socially invisible” (Röndahl, 2005: 11). Röndahl (2005: 12) also argues that “normalisation of heterosexuality as a compulsory sexuality is a symbolically, discursively, physically, psychologically and materially violent form of social regulation and control.”

Gibson (2010:10) goes on to argue that the result of this heteronormative state of affairs is that same-sex relationships are ignored or denied both on a social and institutional level and that homosexual people living in South Africa continually have to negotiate their sexuality within the confines of this heteronormativity. People across the sexual spectrum are compelled to regulate themselves to conform to the heterosexual norm and going against this taken-for-granted heterosexual norm, especially in South Africa is seen as flirting with violence (Gibson, 2010: 10).

Jacqueline Marx’s (2011) thesis, which discusses the politics of homosexual visibility in dressing up, cross-dressing and drag performance, also speaks to the threat of violence upon homosexual bodies in heteronormative spaces. She argues that a “homosexual person ‘passing’ as straight by dressing and behaving can be seen as managing the threat of violence in heteronormative space” (Marx, 2011: 265).

Yep (2003) argues that heteronormativity is everywhere, already present in individuals and collective psyches, social institutions, cultural practices and knowledge systems. Heteronormativity in society and within the MCSA is reproduced in two ways. Firstly, it is reproduced on an institutional level, for example the church's refusal to officiate gay marriages. The previously related story of Ecclesia de Lange (Kumalo, 2011), the minister in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa who was charged, suspended, disciplined and discontinued as a Methodist Minister for marrying her same-sex life is a classic example of how the church supports and upholds heteronormativity at an institutional level.

Secondly, Gibson (2010: 86) reveals that heteronormativity is also reproduced on an "interpersonal level, in everyday mundane interactions, for instance, a person's assumption (albeit 'innocent') that another person's partner is the opposite sex." Yep (2003: 22) also notes that heteronormativity is so powerful that its regulation and enforcement are carried out by individuals themselves through socially endorsed and culturally accepted forms of 'soul murder'. 'Soul murder' is a term that Yep (2003) uses to emphasise the violence of heteronormativity and the result of which is a deliberate attempt to eradicate or compromise the identity of another person (Yep, 2003).

A consequence of normalization of heteronormativity in this way is that homosexuals are addressed and treated like heterosexuals and that from the heteronormative lens gay men are failed men (Yep, 2003). In the following extract **Keenan** spoke to the issue of being assumed to be heterosexual. He says:

"I remember being asked whether I actually had any girlfriend and I would always just play along. It is quite an awkward question for me to answer

because I feel like people can see that I am gay. It does not really bother me. I am pretty much okay with it.”

Foucault (1990) takes the reproduction of heteronormativity on a personal level a step further when he argues that the coming out (which he terms as ‘confession’) about one’s sexuality is a result of heteronormativity because homosexual people constantly find themselves compelled to ‘confess’ their ‘abnormal sexual identity’ and then they have to regulate their behaviour in accordance with the heterosexual norm. With regard to coming out **Anele** said:

“I guess being gay you come out every day. You have to always justify yourself. But I started coming out to my friends and church friends. People I am close to.”

During the interview process a dominant theme of ‘silence’ surrounding issues of same-sex sexuality emerged. One could easily argue that when it comes to upholding a heteronormative space within the MCSA the absence of talk about the minority sexual identity is as meaningful as the presence of talk about the majority identity. This absence of talk is a deliberate act of discursive violence because it not only fosters invisibility but also propels the belief that homosexuality is “unnatural” and therefore should not be spoken about. **Sango**, aptly captures this when he says:

“Icawa [my society] yam is very silent about homosexuality.”

Yep (2002) defines discursive violence to refer to words, gestures, tones, images, presentations, and omissions used to differentially treat, degrade, pathologise, and represent lesbian and gay subjectivity and experience. This relates to Van de Laar’s (2003: 71) thesis, which deals with pastoral care for Christian gay women in a

Methodist congregation. She notes that “one of the saddest 'practices' of exclusion is the practice of invisibility.” She goes on to explain that this invisibility occurs when people have no real influence on the decision-making structures which affect their lives (Van de Laar, 2003). Because gay voices are not heard, many churches, as local institutions, feel that it is acceptable to ‘do nothing’ about gay Christian people, because they believe there aren’t any. The extract below is taken from an interview I had with one of the research participants, **Keenan** and it highlights the absence of talk about his sexual identity within his church.

**Me:** How did you come to know of the church’s position regarding homosexuality?

**Keenan:** Through my family members and through other fellow people who are of the same faith as me.

**Me:** Is this position announced publicly during church, preached about or is it written down?

**Keenan:** I think it is written down but it is never mentioned inside the church. I think it is mentioned in doctrine regarding the church. It was never actually said in my church but it was the view that was taken on everyone who is part of that community of faith.

Jacqueline Marx (2011: 266) also discusses heteronormativity as a benchmark of the degree to which homosexuality can be visible. During my research process, for instance, a number of participants spoke about their church (MCSA) not publicly rejecting homosexuality but frowning upon those who ‘display’ their “homosexual habitus”. Reflecting on the issue of ‘coming out’ or being visible as a gay person within

the MCSA, Van der Laar (2003: 72) notes that “knowing the certain condemnation that will follow their coming out in church, many gay people choose to rather leave the church, and some never join it in the first place.” One of the research participants, **Chris**, narrated how his femininity and being visibly and openly gay attracted the ‘heteronormative gaze’ to him and how that made him uncomfortable to a point where he left the church for a period of time.

**Chris:** I realised that some elder fathers in the church could notice my behaviour. Then I felt I was being stared at then I didn’t feel comfortable at that time so I shifted. I moved. I shopped for a better church. I left Methodist church and joined one of these born again churches.

**Me:** What do you mean when you say they could notice your behaviour? What behaviour are you talking about?

**Chris:** They could see that I was very feminine and I associated with girls all the time and I think they didn’t like that. They would always stare at me, you know? So I decided to find another church but I came back to the Methodist church after some time.

Dreyer (2007: 6) similarly notes that “heteronormativity inherently limits who is ultimately counted as a citizen and the ways in which a citizen can participate in democratic citizenship”. **Sango** also commented on how the heteronormative culture within the church limits what he can and cannot do because of his same-sex sexuality.

He reported that:

“... I feel like it’s those elders, like daddies, that I feel like they are judgmental.....

That makes me uncomfortable in the sense that the church says if you are

supposed to take a leading position you would have to be heterosexual and have an opposing sex. Because of that state I feel like the elders, male specifically, are being judgmental. I feel judged by elders not by women and the rest of the congregation.”

Reingardé (2010), writing within context of heteronormativity in working environments, discusses how the heteronormative discourse symbolically puts the dominated discourse of homosexuality under pressure to be silenced, suppressed and eliminated and also simultaneously acts as a mechanism of power and control that limits the ability of gay and lesbian people to talk and construct their own identities at work. Reingardé (2010: 94) employs Butler’s (1990) terminology when he argues that the dominance of heteronormativity suppresses the ‘performativity’ of the minority sexual identity and legitimates their invisibility. Another dominant theme during the interview process was that of gay men feeling that they were being forced to stay invisible within the church. In his thesis about the representations of black gay men in visual cultures, Sonnekus (2004: 4) notes that “the predicament of not quite ‘fitting in’ or ‘appearing’ anywhere ultimately steers towards an exploration of how black gay men are not only silenced, but also rendered invisible.”

Telling, suggesting or implying that gay men should not to come out is a symbolically violent act that reaffirms and reproduce the stereotype that gay people are of a lower status in social and sexual hierarchies. Reflecting on the issue of being forced to stay in closets within heteronormative spaces, Eve Kosofsky (1990) argues that the closet is the defining structure of homosexual oppression. The extract below is taken from an interview I had with one of the research participants to highlight how the MCSA symbolically violates gay men by forcing them into closets.

**Me:** Are there any occasions when being gay has a negative or positive impact on church activities you are involved in?

**Sipho:** “Yes, I remember there was this guy. Naye maan he was too flamboyant about it. Everyone could see that he is gay. So, in my church there is this choir and if you are female there are only two parts you are expected to sing; you can sing soprano or alto. You can’t sing anything else! If you are male you have to be tenor or bass. That’s all! And there are two rows. The soprano and alto stand in first row and tenor and bass stand in the second row. Soprano and alto, they dance to a certain way. And men dance differently. So, that guy he will stand in line with women and sing soprano and he had the sharpest voice ever. He would sit there with his hair done in a certain way. So, he was called aside and told not to do that. He must act like a man and sing either tenor or bass. He refused to and he was asked to leave the choir.”

Reingardé (2010: 94) writing about being in the closet within working environments argues that “living a double life can have a tremendously negative impact on both an individual and organization because the homosexual employees spend a disproportionate amount of energy in developing and maintaining coping strategies to manage their identities.”

### **6.3. Aliens and ‘Absolute Others’: Narratives of Hospitality Within the MCSA**

“The church can choose either to embrace us and accept the blessings we bring, or else reject us and lose that dimension of life which we offer. We cannot forever remain aliens in the house of God” (Torr, 1997: 68).

In section 2.4.3 of this thesis I made the argument that, based on the literature and the narratives of those interviewed, the relationship between the MCSA and homosexual persons within the church is one characterized by 'conditioned inclusion'. One research respondent narrative, **Mzamo**, illustrates this conditioned inclusion.

“Well, I mean they won't chase you away but there are certain things that you might not necessarily be able to do if you're openly gay. You might just be an ordinary member, but if you want to become a priest, a reverend you might not be allowed because of your sexuality. So it's yes, they won't chase you away but like you won't be fully accepted you will be very limited in what you can do.”

In previous discussions [sections 5.2, 5.3, 5.4] I proceeded to make tentative arguments, based on the narratives of the research respondents that show how gay men employ strategies to negotiate and make peace with this conditioned inclusion in a bid to belong or make the MCSA more homely. The core of this thesis is about ideas of belonging and home. Minesh Dass (2014: 5), following Samuelson, notes that that the “trope of 'home', [belonging] and habitation has led to questions of intimacy and violence, belonging and exclusion, hospitality and 'hostipitality'...” Dass (2014) goes on to argue that the many forms of conditional hospitality designate a kind of violence because they all work by prescribing, determining and knowing the guest only in terms of the host. In section 5.4 of this thesis I made the argument that gay men are expected to conceal their gay habitus or transform it to fit in with the dominant habitus within the church.

For Derrida, the term 'hospitality' also entails a contradictory sense of hostility toward the 'other', given the possibility of the other's failure or refusal to meet the expectation

of the condition (Nielsen, 2008: 606). That is what is meant by 'hostipitality'. The limits and conditions that exist even within concepts of 'open hospitality' result in hostility to those that are excluded from recognised categories; the absolute others. Anastasia Tataryn (2013: 185) notes that hospitality draws back to a condition of exclusivity, where hospitality is extended to some but not all. Dikeç, Clark & Barnett (2009: 1) nicely point out that "the theme of hospitality in the humanities and social sciences reflects a shared concern with issues of belonging, identity and placement that arises out of the experience of social life."

Similarly to Minesh Dass's (2014: 6) work on the kind hospitality extended to marginalized and/or othered identities in spaces of higher learning, in this section I would like to borrow from Jacques Derrida's writing and theories to argue that hospitality can usefully be employed - 'in a much more sustained way' (Dass, 2014: 6) - to consider the challenges facing gay men who would like to inhabit religious spaces. In her paper about the meaning of hospitality, Elena Nikolakopoulou (2013: 1) observes that "Derrida deals with the notion of hospitality, which becomes an action both at a social level, in a private house, and at a political level, in the state and the borders that it imposes." Rebecca Fasselt (2014: 99) argues that "hospitality is thereby taken beyond a merely social practice between individuals in the private home to describing and informing the relation between 'newcomers' and an entire community." This section seeks to discuss hospitality at an institutional level as the MCSA has become an institution. I also acknowledge that the concept of hospitality is usually used to explain an ethical or political approach toward the 'foreigner' or 'stranger' (Dass, 2014). 'Strangers' and 'foreigners' refer to 'othered' identities in this context.

In previous sections [section 5.2] I have discussed how gay men negotiate identity construction within the MCSA in Grahamstown. Mark Westmoreland (2008) argues that from a phenomenological standpoint, one could claim that one's identity is only understood in relation to others. It is in these relations to others within the MCSA that I would like to explore the hospitality of those who've been taken to belong against those who have been 'othered'. "Citizens understand themselves in relation to others, to foreigners. We are not those sorts of people. We are citizens" (Westmoreland, 2008: 2). Writing about the conflict of being gay and religious, Ganzevoort et al. (2011: 213) note that when conflicting groups [us and them] define, for example, one of the elements as part of identity and denying the other that status, both groups bolster their own position and undermine the position of the 'other'.

For example, the MCSA is arguably bolstering its position by refusing to marry same-sex partners. However, the other side of the coin is De Lange bolstering her position and identity as a lesbian woman within the MCSA by taking the church to the Constitutional Court for its refusal to recognise/marry same-sex partners which ultimately led to her suspension within the church. While reflecting on his experience as a gay man within the MCSA, **Anele** said: "It is a very good experience because it helps me to challenge some of the things. Even though I may not be involved in conference debates but it helps other people to come out as well. I have seen it! People suddenly realise that gay people exists in church and they then decide to come out, too."

I have already established that questions about the nature of hospitality are relevant as they flow from previous discussions in this thesis about subtle (symbolic) violence and matters of inclusion and exclusion [section 6.2] (Boersma, 2003: 163). Boersma

(2003: 163) also observes that “in order to overcome this violence and exclusion, Derrida believes we must be absolutely radical in offering our hospitality to the other.”

### **6.3.1. Bourdieu Meets Derrida**

Both Bourdieu and Derrida were post-structuralist theorists in that they rejected Levi-Strauss’s structuralism. I have decided to use Derrida in this section because similarly to Bourdieu, he shares an understanding of the sense of distance that one can experience from the dominant culture of the institution (Calhoun, 2002: 7). In Bourdieu’s terms, this distance from the dominant culture of an institution occurs when one possesses a habitus that is in conflict with the dominant habitus of the institution. However, in Derridean language this distance occurs when the institution in question offers the individual a kind of hospitality that comes with conditions, restrictions and limits. Both are aware of the influence of objective structures upon subjective experiences. Derrida writes about ‘hostipitality’ while Bourdieu writes about ‘symbolic violence’ and both of these refer to the subtle violence imbued in certain relations and spaces that individuals find themselves in.

### **6.3.2. Conditional Hospitality**

This section uses Jacques Derrida’s ideas about hospitality to describe orientations towards gay men within the MCSA while showing the scale of values and meanings that inform the conditions required by the ‘host’ in exchange for hospitality toward the gay men ‘outsider’ (Nielsen, 2008; 606). Westmoreland (2008: 1) sees conditional hospitality as a kind of hospitality that “concerns itself with rights, duties, obligations.” I have also decided to explore the concept of ‘hospitality’ in relation to the experiences of gay men within the MCSA, because “encounters between self and other tend to be conceived of in spatial tropes of openness and closure, inclusion and exclusion”

(Dikeç, et al., 2009: 4). As such, this discussion of conditional hospitality flows from Miness Dass's (2014: 102) question: what is it to welcome another in, but only on the condition that they speak and look and behave as you do?

Kevin O'Gorman (2006: 51) notes that Derrida made a distinction between unconditional hospitality, which he considered impossible, and hospitality which in his view was always conditional. In line with the ideas about conditioned inclusion discussed previously in this study [section 2.4.3], I will focus on Derrida's ideas about conditional hospitality. I have also taken up this concept because in a 2001 conference that grappled with homosexuality within the church, the MCSA made a commitment to being a community of love rather than rejection.

Westmoreland (2008: 2) argues that conditional hospitality involves an exchange of obligations, conditions and restrictions and sums it up by stating that there is also an exchange of subtle violence in the process. Chapter 6 [section 6.2] of this thesis discusses the symbolic violence of religious heteronormativity upon gay men within the MCSA. Moreover, "hospitality is also defined as a culture" (Westmoreland, 2008: 3) and section 6.2 of this thesis sets out how the culture within the MCSA is exclusionary to homosexual bodies. The host sets restrictions that may violate the guest's personal freedom. In this case, one could argue that the MCSA has set the restrictions as follows: "As my guest, you must agree to act within the limitations I establish. You cannot be openly gay when you are in church." Dass (2014: 102) argues that "these conditions of hospitality ensure that it is always, in some sense, an exclusionary gesture and that our attempts to welcome others are always premised on something quite unwelcoming."

**Sipho** speaks to the conditions and restrictions imposed on people by the church:

“Churches are there to develop people’s spirituality and that’s what they should do. They should not cross that line...the moment they tell people that this is wrong; you can’t do this. Obviously, there are things like common law like the thing that: ‘don’t murder people’... But things like people’s lifestyles. I don’t think it is the church’s place to decide what kind of lifestyles people should live. If you are a woman and you want to marry another woman then that’s your own choice and as an adult you should have the choice to do what you want to do.”

Westmoreland (2008: 2) goes on to note that any law, restriction or condition that the ‘guest’ is obliged to abide by would impose on hospitality and would cause it to no longer be absolute, or unconditional. Gideon Baker (2010: 88) notes that the “importance of hospitality for Derrida, and why for him hospitality is ethics, is that it is precisely an unconditional welcome of the stranger in all his strangeness or the foreigner in all his foreignness.” The law within the MCSA that forbids same-sex individuals to marry [section 2.4.1] is a clear interruption of absolute hospitality. I acknowledge that there are laws, conditions and restrictions imposed upon heterosexual persons in the MCSA. However, the focus of this thesis is on an analysis of the experiences of gay men within the church. When one looks at the policy that claims that the MCSA is a community of love rather than rejection and the law that forbids same-sex unions one begins to see a disconnect between the promise of welcome and love and the reality. One of the research respondents, **Anele**, spoke to this disconnect when he said:

“Anyone who is homosexual is welcomed, accepted into the body of Christ. Because we are led by the principles of grace. That grace extends to everyone

and we have no grounds of limiting others from experiencing it. People are allowed to go to church and worship. So it's principle but in reality it does not apply.”

Jesse McConnell (2013: 46) sums up this disconnect in Derridean language when she cites Kearney's (2000: 258-59) discussion of Derrida's hospitality with regards to aliens and others by describing the political organization of the world:

“The world belongs to everyone, yes, but within the borders of nation-states it belongs to some more than to others. Granted, some form of immigration/emigration laws are inevitable. That's the law and Derrida accepts this; but he goes on to argue that there's something beyond the law. Namely, justice. And justice demands extra, perhaps something that is ultimately impossible: unconditional hospitality to the alien.”

Interestingly enough, Tataryn (2013: 185) also notes that the idea of hospitality is intrinsically gendered. She goes on to explain that “home and welcome bear strong associations with mothering and care traditionally carried out by women, yet most often contained within a patriarchal structure”. Reflecting on the hospitality of the environment within the church, **Chris** reports that he feels somewhat welcomed within the structures of the MCSA. However, he goes on to say:

“...I feel like women are not judgmental and the rest of the congregation, I feel like it's those elders like daddies that I feel like they are judgmental...I feel judged by elders.”

**Sango** also expressed similar sentiments about mothering and hospitality within the church. He said:

“I don’t feel less of... especially when I’m around the females. Females are very welcoming *uyabazi mos omama* [you know how mothers are] and some guys ke.”

Limitations in hospitality are not welcoming because they fail to include the other in the most radical unconditional hospitality there is to offer. For **Anele**, the MCSA’s

“Stance that all sexualities are allowed to be at Methodist to worship but there is a huge boundary that you cannot offer for ministry if you are gay. So there are those kinds of limitations with being gay that one has to constantly negotiate.”

Dass (2014: 105) also notes that the principal work of limited hospitality is to preserve the world of the host.

### **6.3.3. Unconditional Hospitality: The Impossible Ideal**

In *Deconstructions in a Nutshell*, Derrida (1997: 110) comments that “for hospitality to occur, it is necessary for hospitality to go beyond hospitality. That requires that the host must, in a moment of madness, forgo the conditions, restrictions and laws between him and the guest.” Westemoreland (2008: 4) extends Derrida’s argument when he notes that “absolute hospitality can only exist as unlimited, as not being within the parameters of laws and concepts. The conditions for such hospitality are both the conditions for its possibility and its impossibility.” O’Gorman (2006:52) argues that Derrida endorsed Lévinas’ view that absolute hospitality requires the ‘host’ to allow ‘guests’ to behave as they wish; there must be no pressure or obligation to behave in any particular manner.

While going through *Deconstructions in a Nutshell* I came across this comment by Derrida which for me is illustrative of an attempt of absolute hospitality and I also thought that it sums up the position that the MCSA has found itself in with regard to the issue of homosexuality. The MCSA has said 'yes' to gay people as a starting point. "Yes, you are welcome to join the church." That first 'yes' is the moment of origin. The comment goes as follows:

"When I say 'yes' to the other, in the form of a promise or an agreement or an oath, the 'yes' must be absolutely inaugural... I say 'yes' as a starting point. Nothing precedes the 'yes'. The 'yes' is the moment of institution, of the origin; it is absolutely originary. But when you say 'yes', you imply that in the next moment you will have to confirm the 'yes' by a second 'yes'. When I say 'yes', I immediately say 'yes, yes'. I commit myself to confirm my commitment in the next second, and then tomorrow, and then the day after tomorrow. That means that a 'yes' immediately duplicates itself, doubles itself. You cannot say 'yes' without saying 'yes, yes'. That implies memory in that promise. I promise to keep the memory of the first 'yes' (Derrida, 1997: 27).

The MCSA has said 'yes' to gay people joining and being members but one would then argue that it has not committed itself to confirm its commitment in the next second, and then tomorrow, and then the day after tomorrow. Thus, when homosexual people want to take up a position or get married it betrays its promise of the first yes by denying them these privileges. One of the research participants **Chris** said:

"My state of church about homosexuality is that they do accept a same sex can't render the marriage.... They can't make the marriage official by themselves. So you can go get married outside but then you can come and

become a church member, and also if you are married to same sex I think you will not be given a higher position like a priest because a priest in my church is regarded as a someone who has to have a wife with 'iqhiya' (doek). But then some people in other provinces are still discussing this.”

However, Derrida was always aware that unconditional hospitality is impossible. “Unconditional hospitality, which Derrida argues is the only one worthy of the name, by contrast, insists on the impossible: that we respect the infinite unknowability of the other at the cost of any sense of our home as comfortable, safe, or inviolate” (Dass, 2013: 5). “In trying to imagine the extremes of a hospitality to which no conditions are set, there is a realisation that unconditional hospitality could never be accomplished. It is not so much an ideal: it is an impossible ideal (O’Gorman, 2006: 52).

Lastly, I would like to highlight that, despite the inevitable impossibility of unconditional hospitality, Derrida does note that this kind of hospitality merely signals a desire for openness to a future which we can absolutely not say anything (Boersma, 2003: 166). In light of desire for a future promise of pure hospitality I asked my respondents a question that required them to look into the future. Their answers reveal a yearning for a future MCSA that offers them the kind hospitality that resembles certain aspects of pure hospitality.

**Me: What do you think the ideal situation would be in terms of your church’s approach to gay men?**

**Chris:** The church should accept all types of people whether you are homo, disabled, ex-offender or something like that. Now that the South African Constitution allows same sex marriage, I think the church should also follow the constitution and legalize the same sex marriage because the problem now is the marriage

and positions. So those two need to change in the church's official position so that openly gay people can also get positions in the church

**Anele:** ...but I still feel that church as an institution needs to open space for people to be...

**Sipho:** I don't think it is the church's place to decide what kind of lifestyles people should live. If you are a woman and you want to marry another woman then that's your own choice and as an adult you should have the choice to do what you want to do. So, I think that's the policy my church should have towards homosexuality. But, that will never happen. I know my church.

#### **6.4. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I argued that heteronormativity within the MCSA in Grahamstown symbolically violates, annihilates and silences gay men and suppress their gay identities. I argued that the silencing of gay voices, the rendering invisible of gay bodies and the stern heteronormative gaze upon those who deviate from the norm are all forms of violence upon gay men.

Fundamental to experiences of a space such as the MCSA in this case, and intrinsic to the hospitality therein, is the question of what is home, and who is able to claim such a place, space and belonging (Tataryn, 2013: 191). A hospitality that comes with conditions and restrictions is a limited hospitality and comes with a certain subtle violence on the guest. Hospitality, as discussed by Jacques Derrida, challenges us to think of our relation to each other—to the stranger, the foreigner, even to the one without a name—in reference to a limit or a border (Tataryn, 2013:184). However,

Derrida also notes that it is impossible to attain a hospitality to which no conditions are attached. Thus unconditional hospitality becomes the impossible ideal.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

### 7.1. Introduction

“Despite living in the first country that constitutionally guaranteed equality for citizens on the basis of sexual orientation, Igbtiq (lesbian, gay, bisexual, intersex, queer) people in South Africa “belong” differently to the national polity than heterosexuals” (Van Zyl, 2011: 335) and in most social spaces they have to ‘pass as straight’ if they want to create a sense of belonging for themselves. Li (2010: 189) notes that “the church is the first obstacle: for many black gay men to be excluded from their church means to be ostracised from their community. The problem here is not Christianity itself, but the manipulation of Christian standards....” He goes on to argue that gay Christians of any race or ethnicity are subjected to the church’s vocabulary of motives that labels homosexuality as unacceptable (Li, 2010: 189).

This thesis focuses on the experiences of gay men within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa in Grahamstown. In order to study and analyse the said experiences this study follows the narratives of six gay men who identify as Methodist and captures the clash between their religious and sexual identity and how they manage and negotiate two contrasting identities. In terms of the theoretical framework used to study and analyse their experiences this study begins by using the scholarship of the French sociologist and philosopher, Pierre Bourdieu, and ends off with the incorporation of another French philosopher, Jacques Derrida. This concluding Chapter seeks to provide a summary of the entire thesis.

## **7.2. A Sociological Analysis of the Experiences of Acceptance of Christian Gay Men within the MCSA in Grahamstown: A Summary of the Thesis**

My starting point in Chapter 2 paints a picture of the complicated intersection between religions, 'Africanness' and homosexuality. Van Zyl (2011: 339) writes that "in the postcolonial project of rebuilding African culture, based on heterosexual and male privilege, precolonial African same-sex practices have been erased in the claim that homosexuality is un-African". Louise Vincent (2014: 479) perfectly captures this complicated intersection when she argues that there is a symbiosis in the discursive strategies of Christian churches and traditional leaders through which they characterize gay marriage as 'ungodly', and as 'un-African' and how both groups focus on the 'immorality' of the act which finds itself being construed as actively parasitic on these frequently imagined 'unchanging' and a priori moral universes that both of these groups make claim to.

Despite South Africa's Constitution containing a very clear sexual orientation clause (section 9) the discourse surrounding whether or not religious institutions should be allowed to discriminate on the basis of their religious beliefs is very polarised. Above all of this, the disconnect between what the constitution guarantees and the lived realities of many is concerning. The MCSA is currently grappling with the issue of accepting homosexuals but has not come up with a clearly defined policy or stance. Therefore, the attitude of the Methodist Church at the moment is to be characterised by "conditioned inclusion" of homosexual people instead of total dehumanisation, rejection and oppression. In this regard Li (2010: 189) observes that the "church functions to maintain pre-existing social order, and homosexuality is a challenge to that order".

This thesis has contextualised the experiences of gay men within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa in Grahamstown with the use of Bourdieu's theoretical and conceptual framework. Chapter 3 is a discussion of Bourdieu's theoretical and conceptual framework which underpins the bulk of this study. In this Chapter Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, symbolic violence, fields and capital are discussed in order to lay a foundation for the analysis. The relevance of these concepts to this study is explained. Chapter 4 discussed the research process and the corresponding methodological foundations and design of the study.

Chapter 5 is the first analysis chapter and is divided into 3 sections. The first section [5.2] relates to the concept of fields and interrogates gay identity construction within the field of Christianity while using MCSA as a representative of that field. This section borrows ideas from the Social Constructionist school of thought with regard to gay identity construction. While within the Social Constructionist school of thought I borrowed from the theoretical model of Brekhus (2003) which classifies gay men into ideal types of *gay lifestylers*, *gay commuters* and *gay integrators* and applied these to the MCSA context based on the narratives of the respondents.

The second section [5.3] of discusses the concept of social capital which proves itself a useful resource for gay men to own especially when it comes to negotiating their entry into the church. Based on the narratives of the respondents I argued that social capital is a necessary asset in order for one to survive a crisis, navigate difficult spaces, identity construction, or just enjoy life more advantage. The third section (5.4) applies and analyses the concept of habitus to the research study. The concept of Habitus encapsulates the way in which a culture embodied in the individual is expressed through durable ways of speaking, walking and thinking. This section

discussed the concept of habitus in relation to the scholarship (Sender, 2001; Sonnekus, 2004) that discusses the 'gay habitus'. In this section, I have relied on available literature (Papacharissi & Fernback, 2008: 3) to argue that the habitus of queerness lies in its opposition to heteronormative culture. Armed with the knowledge that fields cultivate habitus that is appropriate to them, I sought to find out what then happens to the gay habitus when these gay men enter the church. Does it get transformed or concealed? In this regard, I used the examples of how femininity in boys is frowned upon by men in the church to illustrate how gatekeepers of spaces will attempt to transform any habitus that is not in line with the dominant habitus.

Chapter 6 is the second analysis chapter of this thesis and it is divided into 2 sections. The first section [6.2] conjoins the concept of symbolic violence with heteronormative culture that is bred within the church and discusses the effect thereof on gay men's experience and spirituality. Symbolic violence refers to "gentle violence" – a form of violence that is not physical – that may be imperceptible and invisible even to its victims. I argued that the heteronormative culture bred within the church legitimises heterosexuality as "natural, unproblematic, taken-for-granted, ordinary phenomenon". This in turn renders invisible homosexual persons and propels the idea that homosexuality is unnatural and should not be spoken about. One participant captures this phenomenon of invisibility and silence of homosexuality when he says, "Icawa [my society] yam is very silent about homosexuality." The idea that only certain bodies matter enough to be spoken about symbolically annihilates those who are considered to not matter. Furthermore, Yep (2010) argues that the consequence of normalization of heteronormativity in this way is that homosexuals are addressed and treated like heterosexuals and that from the point of view of the heteronormative lens gay men are failed men. In this section, I argued that violence does not have to be physical in order

to have repercussions. The expectation of gentle violence is violence in itself. Based on the narratives of the respondents I argued that the silencing of gay voices, the rendering invisible of gay bodies and the stern heteronormative gaze upon those who deviate from the norm are all forms of violence upon gay men.

The second section [6.3] of Chapter 6 draws this study to its end by bringing in Derrida's notion of hospitality. This section rests on the premise that even though the MCSA welcomes everyone on paper, the kind of welcome given to homosexual people comes with conditions and restrictions with regard to what they can do and who they can be when they are inside the church. In this regard, Westmoreland (2008: 2) argues that any law, restriction or condition that the 'guest' is obliged to abide by would impose on hospitality and would cause it to no longer be absolute or unconditional. Additionally, the research participants also reflected on how they see the laws that preclude homosexual from enjoying certain privileges as a sign of the conditioned 'welcome'/hospitality that the church extends to them. For instance, **Mzamo** aptly described this when he said:

“Well, I mean they won't chase you away but there are certain things that you might not necessarily be able to do if you're openly gay. You might just be an ordinary member, but if you want to become a priest, a reverend you might not be allowed because of your sexuality. So it's yes, they won't chase you away but like you won't be fully accepted you will be very limited in what you can do.”

This chapter ties in with the argument I made at the beginning of this thesis about “conditioned inclusion” of gay people within the MCSA.

### 7.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, it is important to note that I acknowledge that the MCSA is currently grappling with the issue of homosexuality within the church and the leadership of the church may in future come up with a definite policy that embraces gay people and homosexual spirituality. However, that time has not come now. On the basis of the above argument, one then comes to the conclusion that the current policy of the MCSA that proclaims to “welcome all people and characterises the MCSA as a community of love rather than rejection” (Kumalo, 2011:181), cannot be fully validated when one takes into consideration the lived realities of the six gay men interviewed for this study. This is a call for the MCSA and other institutions that play a role in shaping human lives to start the process of transformation of not only their policies but also the culture and attitude that is exclusionary towards certain bodies. Li (2010: 189) succinctly captures this where he writes:

“We must recognise that an image of the individual and society based on maintaining our given institutions is wretched. Therefore, the church must change; and so must the family, since these two units are in close co-operation in the black community of South Africa. Here I am not calling for a radical reform of the church or the family. Rather, I am calling for people who are involved in those institutions to update ‘their worldview’”.

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## Appendix 1: Interview Protocol

### Interview declaration:

The use of this information is strictly for research purposes, and the interview is conducted in private. This information stands as the proof of my actual interview, which will be part of my data analysis and report. The further use of this information will be the final submission of my thesis.

Thoko Sipungu

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Interviewee's personal information:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Race: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like me to use you real name in my data analysis? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 2: Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me about the time you first got involved in Church? Was it through Sunday school?
2. How old were you?
3. Could you tell me about the experience of being in church at that time?
4. How important is church to you and why?
5. Can you tell me about the time you realised you were gay?
6. Have you ever told anyone about your being gay? If so, could you explain the circumstances (who, when, where, just once or more often than that).
7. When you first realised that you were gay were you comfortable in church? (Could you please elaborate?)
8. If you didn't feel comfortable, how did you negotiate the discomfort?
9. Have you come out to any of the church people? If yes, what was their response? If no, could you talk about why you have not done so?
10. Were you aware of your church's opinion/stance on homosexuality at the time you first became aware that you were gay? If yes, what was it? Please elaborate.
11. Are you aware of your church's current official position on same sex relationships? Please elaborate.
12. How did you come to know of the church's position in this regard? Is it announced publicly/preached about/written down?
13. Do (did) you as a gay man feel completely welcome and at home within the church?
14. From your experience of the church, do you think one can be openly gay and still feel completely welcome and at home?

15. Would you say your church's official position on homosexuality is homophobic? Why?
16. Are you actively involved in church activities? If no, why?
17. Are there any occasions when being gay has (had) a negative or positive impact on church activities you are (were) involved in?
18. Have there been instances of homophobic behaviour directed at you or someone else within your church (and then follow this up with – and outside the church)? Could you please provide some examples?
19. If yes, how did you deal with it?
20. What do you think the ideal situation would be in terms of your church's approach to gay men?