

The homonormalisation of white heterosexual leisure spaces in Bloemfontein, South Africa

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Abstract

The paper comprises a response to the overwhelming lack of geographical research into South African gay male leisure space development and augments the first detailed analyses of white gay leisure space development in this country by redirecting the geographic focus to a smaller provincial city. The image of gay leisure space that emerges in Bloemfontein is different from those identified and described in large metropolitan complexes. What emerges in this city is the development of gay-coded spaces in which heterosexual leisure spaces are queered, but not with the intent or outcome of generating exclusively gay spaces. Homonormalised spaces are created. It is contended that much of the current debates approach the so-called homonormalisation of gay leisure space from an unhelpful “gay/queer-disempowered” perspective which is inadequate to explain the development of a range of leisure spaces certain gay/queer cohorts created and/or seek out. It is suggested that homonormalised spaces are far more than heteronormativity infiltrating the gay (leisure) world through a range of consumption-led processes/events, or gay male capitulation to such normative hegemonies. It is argued that “homonormalisation” should be understood more reflexively.

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1. Introduction

In the field of geography, the relationship between space and identity has become a key research focus, with the role of space in the construction and expression of sexuality comprising one of the main debates (Collins, 2006; Gorman-Murray, 2006; Holt and Griffen, 2003; Godfrey, 1988; Mort, 1998). Issues surrounding the spatialities of gay male life (Bell et al., 1994; Blunt and Wills, 2000; Binnie, 1995; Forest, 1995; Godfrey, 1988; Gorman-Murray, 2006; Holt and Griffen, 2003; Ingram et al., 1997; Kirkey and Forsyth, 2001; Valentine, 1993) have received considerable research attention, with gay leisure space development being a particularly strong focus (Collins, 2006; Hughes, 1997; Pritchard et al., 2000). This work has lately been extended through research focused on gay leisure tra-

vel (Cox, 2002; Hughes, 2002; Sanders, 2002; Link, 2002; Oswin, 2005; Rushbrook, 2002; Stuber, 2002; Want, 2002). Gay male leisure space expansion in developing world cities has not, however, generally formed part of these debates (for some exceptions, see Jackson and Sullivan, 1999; Lim, 2006; Sanders, 2002). Whilst the paucity of such engagements might be explained in terms of the fact that many societies in the developing world are intolerant of homosexuality (cf. Lim, 2006), not all of these societies are equally oppressive in respect of so-called “deviant” sexualities. In fact, at least from a statutory point of view, the rights of homosexual persons in some of these countries are on an equal footing with those in Europe – South Africa is undoubtedly a leading example (Lind, 2005).

The paper considers an increasingly dominant claim concerning the relationship between sexual identity and leisure space through the South African urban context: the normalisation of gay male identities, the apparent demise of truly “gay/queer” spaces, and the generation of homo-

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normalised spaces. Turning the investigatory focus away from the textured life of gay men in large cities, or in the isolation of rural areas in counties such as Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom or the United States, this investigation focuses on gay men in a moderately sized South African city – Bloemfontein. In doing so the paper augments the still negligible body of research into the post-apartheid development of gay male leisure space, whilst some parallels between Anglo-American scholarship on gay male leisure space development and those in Bloemfontein are highlighted. However, the investigation also contends that current debates on gay leisure space, and particularly those focused on heteronormativity/sameness/homonormalisation, do not adequately explain the gay spaces many gay men in the city frequent. Unlike current debates seeing normalisation of gay/queer male leisure space as the de-gaying of queer spaces of leisure/identification/aspiration, the evolution of the spaces investigated here calls for a different interpretation.

It is contended that the current debates largely approach the homonormalisation of leisure space from an unhelpful “gay/queer-disempowered” perspective which is inadequate to explain the development of a range of spaces in which gay/queer people seek leisure. Homonormalised spaces are far more than heteronormativity infiltrating the gay world through a range of consumption-led processes/events, or gay male capitulation to such normative hegemonies. It is argued that “homonormalisation” should be understood far more reflexively. Drawing on the gay male cohorts that are most empowered to acquire and develop gay leisure spaces, but also currently consistently characterised as having “normalised” to heteronormative “expectations”, the investigation provides an insight into gay leisure use of heterosexual spaces. It is shown that there is no attempt to establish dedicated gay leisure space. It is argued that some leisure spaces are claimed by both hetero- and homosexual identities, simultaneously “gayed” and “straightened”, which this investigation contends is a better way in which to understand the concept of homonormalising/homonormalisation.

These issues are addressed through five sections of material. Attention is firstly focused upon the general contours of debates concerning gay male leisure space development and their reflection in the South African academic experience. Following an outline of the methodology employed in this investigation, the focus turns to a detailed empirical investigation in which the historical and current development of gay male leisure space in Bloemfontein is elucidated. The final section of material links the main findings of the empirical part of this investigation to broader debates concerning linkages between gay leisure, gay identity and the homonormalisation of leisure space.

2. Gay identities, gay leisure and urban space: some international debates

Binnie and Valentine (1999) have argued that the role of sexuality, the consumption of space and its role in the con-

struction of identity first featured in research that sought to map the most visible gay and lesbian spaces within North American cities. Subsequently, research on the links between sexualised cultures of consumption and the production of sexualised space has received much attention (Collins, 2006; Puar, 2006; Richardson, 2005). Rushbrook (2002: 200) points out that geographers’ use of the term gay/queer space has generally aimed to theorise it as disruptions of the heterosexing of space. A growing body of geographical investigation focuses on the (hetero)sexing of space and examines how the so-called power relations of everyday life normalise space as asexual (to heterosexuals) and as heterosexual (to nonheterosexuals). Rushbrook (2002: p. 200) notes that stylized, repetitive acts actively produce and naturalise public space as heterosexual. Despite – or because of – its pervasive expression in the physical and social organisation of space, heterosexual desire is invisible and thus can be performed without question. By contrast, space that appears asexual to heterosexuals unaware of their own performance of heterosexuality is clearly marked as straight for nonheterosexuals, who are said to police their own performativity, convinced that safe access to that space is contingent on the appearance of being straight.

“Space” is both process and social product, arising from and conditioning everyday spatial practices; it both constitutes and is constituted by social relations. “Place” refers to the locales and locations in which these social relations are inscribed. Geographical investigations have demonstrated the significance of both space and place in the formation, development and consolidation of gay identity (Collins, 2006). It is highlighted that the meaning of space is constantly contested and renegotiated. As Myslik (1996) suggested some time ago, part of a contemporary challenge to the “heterosexual street” has been the development of spaces that have come to be identified in, and outside of, the gay community as gay spaces. These spaces, it is argued, not only enable open displays of behaviour and affection but also allow access to a variety of gay services and facilities including shops, bars, housing, legal and medical services. Importantly, these are areas in which behaviour does not need to be edited so as to conform to the heterosexual norm. As a result, gay spaces provide community and territory, as well as a sense of order and power (Pritchard et al., 1998). In recent years these debates have become entrenched in Anglo-American geographical discourse, with the experiences of a number of large cities generally corroborating these views. Lately, this literature has been augmented with a considerable amount of work redirecting the investigatory focus to suburban areas, the metropolitan fringe, as well as smaller cities and towns (Bonfitto, 1997; Gorman-Murray, 2006; Kirkey and Forsyth, 2001; Lynch, 1987). These investigations have increasingly brought into question the hetero-homosexual binary with regards to gay use and interpretation of public spaces.

These analyses are increasingly linking up into a set of arguments suggesting that the integrity of gay culture appears to be threatened by various internal (cf. Kirby

and Hay, 1997; Richardson, 1996) and external forces (Valentine, 1993), leading to encroachment on “homosexual lifestyles” and the possibility that the spatial basis of sexuality is not all that relevant anymore (Pritchard et al., 2000: 268). Indeed, it is suggested that lesbians and gays who “fit” heterosexual views of normality (professionals, middle-class, suburban and coupled) are regarded as acceptable and productive members of society. In many spheres the need for a spatial base both for leisure seeking and residence diminishes and can be seen as a threat to what homosexuality could be (Bell and Binnie, 2006). In this context a new body of research concerning homonormalisation has emerged (Richardson, 2005), taking further Duggan’s (2002) idea that heteronormativity has set in among certain cohorts and gay men, as well as lesbians, and threatens homosexual lifestyles. Richardson (2005: 392) is of the opinion that the genesis of these supposedly misplaced “desires for sameness”, or the “normalisation of gay/lesbian lives”, can be found in the rights-based campaigns of the late 1980s and 1990s that tend to demand equality on the grounds of “sameness”, rather than “equality in difference”.

Rushbrook (2002: 203) argues that despite the complexity of the notion, gay space or queer space in these debates implies some sort of coherence and homogeneity that does not exist. Following a Foucauldian view, she suggested that “heterotopia” capacitates the idea of a single real place, in which multiple sites emerge that are in themselves incompatible. It is argued that the appearance of homogeneity conceals exclusionary practices predicated on other axes of difference, or even on sexual practices themselves, as well as the labour that produces these spaces. To the extent that queer space is structurally dependent on “normal” space, on what exists outside it, its very survival is defined by exclusion from, and opposition to, the dominant and heteronormative. This binary construction elides the dominant’s dependence on the other and, by naturalising a place of queerness, defines where queerness may not exist.

It is here, however, where the current debates do present problems in terms of causality in the creation or destruction of gay leisure space. A slightly different approach in thinking through gay space development in the context of a leisure economy, seems called for, in which one does not mourn the loss of a community that never existed or position an original, essentialised gay identity and accompanying space. The contention is that the current view of gay space development, whilst mindful of the diversity and different relationship with heterosexuals cohorts, does not move significantly beyond the binary view of heterosexual-homosexual leisure spaces, rather, it seeks it out. Also, in understanding those spaces in which there might occur greater interaction between different sexual identities, the perspective is nearly always one of gay disempowerment. The basic line of reasoning remains, that initial fear and real discrimination created liminal spaces of gay leisure. In turn, a range of neo-liberal imperatives (cf. Richardson, 2005) led to the commodification of gay/queer identities, popularis-

ing aspects of those spaces gay men historically “carved from” heterosexual leisure space. Although some debates acknowledge that leisure spaces can represent and affirm both hetero- and homosexual identities, the presence of bodies perceived as straight will, nevertheless, seemingly always in the end, lead to the “dilution” of gay/queerness. Rushbrook (2002: 194) refers to this process as “the straightening of gay [leisure] space”. Moreover, a further question, principally linked to “homonormativity” debates (Seidman, cited in Rushbrook 2002: 407) in which “diluted” gayness/queerness is of central importance, asks “if what we understand as the public is no longer sexually exclusionary in the same way by incorporating the normal gay and lesbian citizen, at least in some respects and contexts, does this mark the end of [closeted spaces], and therefore the need to come out of it?” More significantly, “what might this mean for different communities and populations if homosexuality is increasingly to become a part of everyday life, where homosexuality is no longer just an abstract issue of morality or rights but a matter of dealing with real people?”

It is the contention of the paper that approaching issues of leisure space development from an empowered point of view, in which some gay and lesbian cohorts are included irrespective of their sexuality, “the gaying of straight space” is a better way (from a gay perspective) to understand the development of certain types of leisure spaces which are frequented by certain cohorts of gay men. In doing so, this investigation argues for a somewhat different approach to thinking through the concept of “homonormalisation” – the homonormalising of heterosexual leisure space.

3. Gay identities, gay leisure and South African urban space

These international debates concerning the spatialities of gay male leisure have seen little resonance in the scholarship of developing world countries, although some aspects of these debates have been considered in contexts such as South Africa.¹ Gay- and lesbian focused investigations are recent phenomena in South Africa, as apartheid heteropatriarchy (cf. Elder, 2005) complicated formal research into homosexual identities generally, and gay leisure space in particular (Gevisser and Cameron, 1993; Visser, 2003a). Since the early 1990s this paucity of research into homosexuality, particularly beyond its rather marginalised position as “abnormal”, began to be addressed. In most cases these works are historical in nature and/or are highly circumscribed in terms of their spatial foci (see Visser, 2006 for a review of this literature).

Currently, Van Zyl and Steyn’s (2005) anthology *Performing Queer: Shaping Sexualities 1994–2004* represents the most comprehensive investigations into queer sexuality and identity in South Africa, chronicling the lives of persons from a range of different racial backgrounds. The

¹ This claim is made only with reference to material published in Afrikaans and English.

schism between South African gay men and lesbians' near unrivalled constitutional protection and the hegemony of a racial heteropatriarchy, is portrayed as part of many homosexuals' daily existence (see Fig. 1). The experience of different types and levels of oppression linked to class, gender, gender performance and race are shown to be common and echo Euro-American discourse. Perhaps most important is the fact that authors report the seeking out of homosexual normalisation through calls for equality on the grounds of "sameness", rather than "equality in difference" (Richardson, 2004). Even the lesbian and gay movements are shown to be demanding equal rights of citizenship on the grounds of being the "same" as most heterosexuals with same-sex marriages and the adoption of children their most significant point of struggle and subsequent success. Indeed, the normalisation of gay and lesbian identities is strongly profiled in current activism and research (see also Dirsuweit, 2004).

Although implicit in South African-based gay and lesbian research, their leisure behaviour *per se* is not central to contemporary research. Leap (2002) has addressed Cape Town's queer life in a spatial context and has insightfully highlighted the multiple spaces and places that contribute to the formation, development and reconfiguration of homosexual identities. The imprint of racial, economic, social and political histories on the meaning of various spaces informs the use of urban space and includes those associated with leisure. Perhaps most importantly, the different geographies of homosexual persons are shown to be separated by race, class and gender, with central and suburban city spaces for mainly middle-class white, gay males, excluding most other homosexual "cohorts". Visser's

(2002, 2003a,b) work in Cape Town's gay village expands these observations, showing the apartheid legacy of race, gender and class inequality imprinted in the development of Cape Town's formal gay leisure spaces. Formal gay space is shown to be wealthy, white, male leisure space, echoing gay identities expressed in European and North American cities as a means of affirming their own identities. In addition, that those white gay identities were impacted upon by increased gay and lesbian commodification – principally through queer tourism – leading to the normalisation and globalisation of (white) queerness (Elder, 2005).

This work has extensively been taken forward in the research of Oswin (2005: 567) who has sharpened this position by finding that in the "process of queer commodification [are] found anxieties, cracks and fissures beneath the veneer of assured mainstreaming... an undetermined process that did not represent either 'un-African-ness', or 'global queer homogeneity' or 'African-ness' and 'local queer heterogeneity'". In the process, Oswin highlights that we should take tremendous care in queer theorisation – particularly making universalising claims, which I would contend is equally true for leisure and gay identity in South African cities (see Bell and Binnie, 2006, for a similar position). One important theme is that we might identify and create leisure spaces in South Africa that are highly complex in their meaning and do not wholly reflect those ideas concerning gay leisure space development seen elsewhere in the academic press. One such theme would be to rethink the manner in which we use the term homonormalisation.

It is the contention of this investigation that in trying to understand the development, or lack of development, of formal gay leisure space, it is also imperative to study that part of the gay "community" that has been shown elsewhere, and in South Africa, to demarcate and occupy physical "heterosexual spaces" most successfully in a bid to create spaces that are coded as gay. Notwithstanding a South African research environment where there is little or no imperative to invest time and resources in the study of any privileged cohort (cf. Visser, 2003c), a focus on middle-class gay men could, nevertheless, be regarded as important. It is the position of this investigation that such an investigation may comprise the only way to study formal gay space in South Africa in such a manner as to have a direct bearing on Anglo-American and European debates. Moreover, understanding the development of white gay space would appear to be of critical importance, because the sexualised cultures of white gay men have a range of impacts as far as the production of sexualised spaces is concerned, along with the possibilities for the subsequent development of spaces that might provide community and territory to the broader gay, if not all homosexual, cohorts of South Africa.

4. Methodology and the study group

Employing a snowball technique, the primary source of data was in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 40 white



Fig. 1. An example of homophobia in South Africa (2006) (Photo: author).

gay men and 16 white lesbian women. Life-histories were constructed from semi-structured interviews, and these life-histories subsequently analysed. Table 1 outlines broad biographical data of survey participants. In terms of the male (but also true for the lesbian) component of the survey group, it is important to note that the gay men interviewed are mainly well-educated white middle-class professionals, generally aged between 25 and 35. In addition, it was an “out” group who had all revealed their status to family and friends, whilst the co-workers of the vast majority are aware that they are gay. This cohort of gay men comprise the persons who are most active in formal gay leisure space development, although we need to acknowledge Richardson’s (2004, 2005) concerns that this would also represent gay male cohorts most likely to lead heteronormalised gay lives which she essentially portrays as not gay/queer-authentic (see Bell and Binnie, 2006, for a critique of this position).

Beyond the survey group’s class status, it must also be pointed out that this investigation presents the views and experiences of a grouping of gay men who describe themselves as gay, but who might not all fit theorists’ views or definitions in respect of what it means to be gay. Confirming Bain and Nash’s (2006: 12) contention surrounding this issue, few if any of the participants expressed, for example, “rebellious sexual identity through dress, enactment or performance”. These are men who have remained in, or moved to Bloemfontein while fully aware of the existence of a larger gay leisure system/scene, or gay world beyond the borders of South Africa. These interviewees are not

naïve in respect of broader gay/queer realities and possibilities in terms of solidarity, sexual expression, leisure options, etc. Participants did not display any uniform views on issues such as heterosexual norms concerning marriage, procreation, sexual behaviour, sense of dress, occupation, etc. They do, however, appear to ascribe to so-called “straight acting” – which some see as ingrained “gender-edited” behaviour often associated with the concepts of heteronormalisation and heteronormativity (see Kirby and Hay, 1997 and Richardson, 1996 for a critique of such behaviour). This could be interpreted as a gender performance of nondisclosure, which might make these men complicit in a process referred to by Kirby and Hay (1997) as gay men heterosexing space. However, such an argument works from a monolithic premise: that there is a necessary gay identity which ignores the heterogeneous and diverse nature of all identities (Greene, 1997). What is important is that the spaces that they have demarcated as spaces they enjoy going to, are spaces where they feel that the patrons of these venues have homonormalised sufficiently to make them feel comfortable in these spaces.

5. Historical notes on white gay space in Bloemfontein

Bloemfontein – South Africa’s judicial capital – is a small city of approximately 500 000 inhabitants (of whom 90 000 are white) and is located in the agricultural and mining province of the Free State (Fig. 2). The historical development of gay spaces in Bloemfontein can be traced to the 1960s when there were some bars, restaurants, theatres and

Table 1
Biographical outline of survey participants (men = 40, lesbians = 16)

Age	<25	25–30	31–35	36–40	>40
	Gay men = 10%	Gay men = 35%	Gay men = 35%	Gay men = 10%	Gay men = 10%
	Lesbians = 6%	Lesbians = 63%	Lesbians = 19%	Lesbians = 12%	Lesbians = 0%
Education	High school certificate		Bachelor’s degree or equivalent		Postgraduate degree
	Gay men = 10%		Gay men = 65%		Gay men = 25%
	Lesbians = 19%		Lesbians = 37%		Lesbians = 44%
Employment	Professions	Services	Administration	Business owner	
	Gay men = 35%	Gay men = 40%	Gay men = 20%	Gay men = 5%	
	Lesbians = 50%	Lesbians = 29%	Lesbians = 7%	Lesbians = 14%	
Relationship status	In a relationship		Not in a relationship		
	Gay men = 60%		Gay men = 40%		
	Lesbians = 63%		Lesbians = 37%		
Income	<R5000	R5000–R10 000	R10001–R15000	R15001–R20000	>R20000
	Gay men = 25%	Gay men = 25%	Gay men = 40%	Gay men = 0%	Gay men = 10%
	Lesbians = 25%	Lesbians = 32%	Lesbians = 19%	Lesbians = 12%	Lesbians = 12%
Neighbourhood status	Middle-Low	Middle	Middle-High	High	
	Gay men = 10%	Gay men = 70%	Gay men = 15%	Gay men = 5%	
	Lesbians = 13%	Lesbians = 81%	Lesbians = 6%	Lesbians = 0%	
Monthly leisure budget	<R500	R500–R999	R1000–R1499	R1500–R2000	>R2000
	Gay men = 25%	Gay men = 10%	Gay men = R25%	Gay men = 5%	Gay men = 35%
	Lesbians = 12%	Lesbians = 12%	Lesbians = 20%	Lesbians = 6%	Lesbians = 50%
Weekly leisure frequency	1/week	2/week	3/week	4/week	>4/week
	Gay men = 50%	Gay men = 25%	Gay men = 15%	Gay men = 5%	Gay men = 5%
	Lesbians = 25%	Lesbians = 44%	Lesbians = 19%	Lesbians = 6%	Lesbians = 6%

similar venues that provided some space for the local gay community (Interview, XYZ, 2006). In contrast to the large metropolitan cities of Cape Town and Johannesburg (cf. Visser, 2003a), there were no formal gay (or lesbian) venues in the “white city” centre. However, in the face of generally antagonistic homophobic heteropatriarchy, one venue (Orange Grove – later renamed Buzerant) was established outside of the city during the mid-1980s (Interview, XYZ, 2006). This space was shared by gay and lesbian patrons. Antagonism between the two gender groups was evident from the outset. For example, one interviewee described the venue as a poor one literally like a barnyard, with plastic chairs, where patrons took their own cooler bags with alcohol and had braais (barbeques) outside. Adam (Interview, 2006) remembers the “butch lesbian women . . . braaing (barbequing) outside while all the men sat inside drinking wine and dancing”, whilst there were “continuous brawls among the lesbians” (Interview, Dizzy, 2006).

During the early 1990s the core of gay social life revolved around Buzerant. However, this period also witnessed changes in the South African club scene. The imploding apartheid regime opened up opportunities to satisfy long-denied banned items ranging from clothing and club venues to literature, movies, music, and even drugs. The style of music was starting to change and rave music appeared on the local club scene. Along with rave clubs and trance music came new drugs that seemingly complemented this new clubbing experience. In addition, alternative sexualities suddenly seemed to be regarded as just another part of a broader societal transition. In this context of political and social flux, gay men felt less fearful

of heterosexual patriarchy as exemplified in formal leisure spaces.

The gay scene (the whole Bloemfontein club scene for that matter) did not have venues that provided the appropriate context, in terms of aesthetics, the style of music, or emerging party-drug consumption. At this stage a number of gay men started to travel to Johannesburg and Pretoria during weekends. In these larger cities clubs “looked right”, were playing the “right” type of music, and had an easily accessible supply of drugs, not the least of which was ecstasy (MDMA). “Club tourism” to the metropolitan regions also fulfilled a further purpose. Some of the interviewees recalled that these excursions were part of a process, or desire, to feel part of the larger “gay scene”. In the context of a transforming South Africa, they wanted to experience “the gay life in the big city and see what it was all about” (Interview, Red, 2006).

In Bloemfontein, the local gay club did not provide what was seen as a trendy and vibrant atmosphere. The gay men felt left behind, and, in time, support for Buzerant dwindled. Having experienced alternative gay leisure venues, the younger gay men found the music and décor choices of the owners neither satisfactory nor appropriate. In addition, “rave parties” were taking place in the straight city centre and its newly decentralised entertainment node in Westdene (Hoogendoorn, 2006a,b). In a haze of feel-good drugs these clubs’ straight patrons were seemingly far more accepting of gay and lesbian persons. This was particularly the case in terms of the Afrikaans-speaking youth who were turning their backs on the cultural, political and social mores of their parents. At this time, “alternative” was

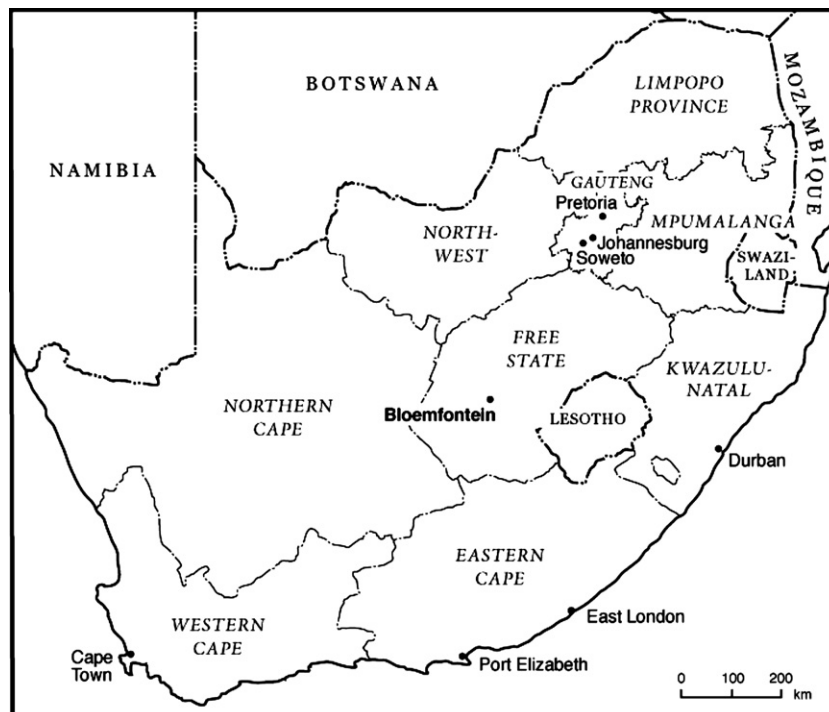


Fig. 2. Orientation map of South Africa.

important for social acceptance among the adolescent and young adult cohorts. The content of this “alternative” is difficult to describe, but it certainly included a search for all things different from the “coherent, hegemonic Afrikaans Calvinist society [that] white Bloemfontein represented” (Interview, AJ, 2006). All these venues, besides music and drugs, made the young gay men feel safe (enough), which in turn resulted in their not supporting the formal gay club.

In 1996, homosexual persons obtained equality before the law through the new Constitution (Du Pisani, 2001: 170). This provided new impetus for the gay leisure scenes of Cape Town and Johannesburg. A range of factors complicated the expansion and/or maintenance of a viable gay scene. Owing to racial and restructuring transformation in the various spheres of government at the time, there was a movement of white people out of Bloemfontein, reducing the white leisure market, whether gay or straight. A factor that was very pertinent to the gay male leisure scene was the significant expansion of gay leisure facilities and communities of gay men with very specific types of sexualised lifestyles in the larger cities of Cape Town and Johannesburg, whereas such expansion was absent from Bloemfontein. Gay men in Bloemfontein who ascribed particular value to such lifestyles moved to either Cape Town or Johannesburg. Others remained in Bloemfontein, but would go to Johannesburg very regularly “in order to party and with the aim of having sex” (Interview, Sarge, 2006). As a result, a “sifting process” ensued. Those most likely to support gay leisure spaces regularly were the very cohorts of white gay men who moved to the larger cities. Those who ascribed less value to gay leisure and lifestyles were the ones who remained in Bloemfontein, thus creating a situation which involved the presence of a significantly large group of gay men who, however, were not particularly interested in the abundant availability of gay leisure spaces. In the process, dedicated formal gay male-only leisure space development in Bloemfontein remained stagnant Fig. 3.

6. Bloemfontein and gay leisure space circa 2006

Figs. 3 and 4 reveal the main leisure venues that the survey group supports on a regular basis. Here, reference is made to leisure time spent “going out” in the evenings and no mention is made of any regular recreational activities such as organised sport, gym visits, etc. in which the interviewees might participate. Moreover, recreational activities that do not occur on a regular basis, such as going to the cinema, theatre and sport events, are excluded too. It is clear that leisure time in terms of going out to specific venues is concentrated in three clusters. In all cases these are areas that are decidedly heterosexual leisure spaces. The main focus of the gay men is Westdene and includes a bar – Oolong, and an action bar (i.e. mainly a bar but with a relatively small but busy dance floor too) and – The Mystic Boer.

Westdene is popular with students from the two local universities, as well as working adults, who are generally under the age of 40. An important point concerning the youthfulness of these leisure seekers is that they would have grown into adulthood during a time when the new constitutional provisions protecting minorities in terms of sexual orientation comprised part of their general socialisation.² Moreover, during this period homosexual rights to equality in terms of a range of issues were established. In terms of other activities, these mainly included visits to restaurants, either in the main regional mall, or at Preller Square. The most popular leisure space – Oolong – is described in a number of positive ways, for example as “fabulous” with a “liberal crowd”, whilst Mystic is “relaxed”, “with an interesting blend of people” who “leave one another alone”³. The range of the acceptance/tolerance of difference is explained in terms of statements that affirm public displays of same-sex affection. Fig. 3 also reveals those spaces that the survey group specifically avoided. It is clear that these spaces are dispersed over the study area. Wiesbaden, which one participant pointed out as being “filled with racist gay-bashers” (Interview, Snowy, 2006), while another described it as being frequented by “Boerevarke” (Boer pigs) (Interview, Blue, 2006; Sarge, 2006; Thys, 2006), is located 10km from the CBD, outside of the city boundary.

The most curious finding is that the two venues that might most accurately be identified as formal homosexual spaces are either not supported in any great number, or are in fact actively avoided by the survey participants. These venues are Buzerant – a nightclub located 15 km from the CBD – and Roxy’s (an action bar) in the Willows neighbourhood adjoining the CBD.⁴ A significant difference is recorded when comparing gay and lesbian support for Buzerant, which is evidently heavily supported by lesbians. These venues are located outside of the main white leisure area of Bloemfontein’s current entertainment cluster in Westdene. Thus, the survey participants’ leisure spaces are overwhelmingly located in heterosexual leisure space areas and are, in fact, heterosexual, or as will be argued, homonormalised venues. The question arises as to why this should be the case.

As a central contention of current debates on homonormativity is the point that sexuality must be understood as a simultaneously classed, racialised and gendered performance, these themes form the main axis around which the investigation puts forward reasons as to why the gay men do not support the formal homosexual spaces of

² This does not mean that they are not homophobic, but rather, that they are aware that violence against someone on the grounds of their sexuality is a criminal offence.

³ It must be emphasised that this does not mean that all patrons are accepting of homosexuality, but rather that difference in terms of sexuality

⁴ It is interesting that the two main club spaces for either overtly heterosexual, or overtly homosexual patronage, are both located at a very considerable distance from any of the city’s mainstream white leisure nodes.

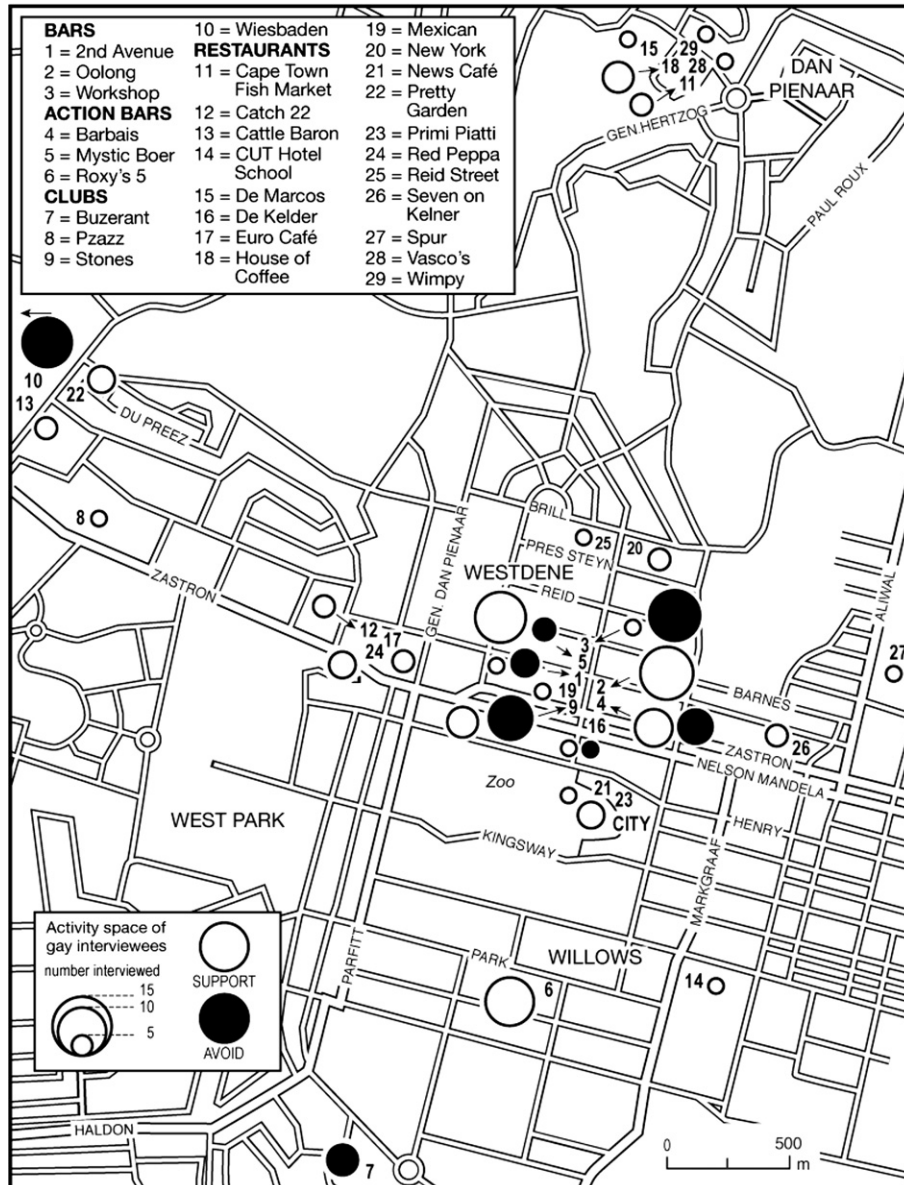


Fig. 3. Gay male leisure spaces in Bloemfontein.

Bloemfontein and which space they have created. The investigation adds to this analytic framework by additionally investigating aspects of gender performance linked to the relationship between gay men and lesbian women, suggesting that this plays an additional role in the reluctance of the survey participants to support the homosexual-coded spaces. Finally, it is also argued that the role of tourism has to be acknowledged as a further instance of gender performativity and provides a further reason for the lack of gay male leisure space development in Bloemfontein.

6.1. Gay space, class and race

The first reason why the gay venues of Bloemfontein are not supported by the gay men in the survey group is directly related to issues of class and race. Roxy's is cen-

trally located in the lower-middle income area of Willows and in close proximity to Bloemfontein's lower socio-economic residential areas. This central location made it well-liked in the past, and "a popular venue among people who did not own cars and could not drive out to Buzerant... we used to go to Buzerant first and Roxy's would be the after-party" (N, 2006). However, as John (Interview, 2006) stated, "the current gay venues are not on the right side of town" and "as a rule I never travel that far south". This limits support from these gay male cohorts and the commercial viability of both Buzerant and Roxy's.

As a result, and in addition, the spaces (particularly Roxy's) are poorly maintained, which further reinforces the limited support of these venues. As a consequence, Roxy's leisure offering is seen as "pathetic, the music is poor, and I do not fancy the people" (Interview, XYZ,

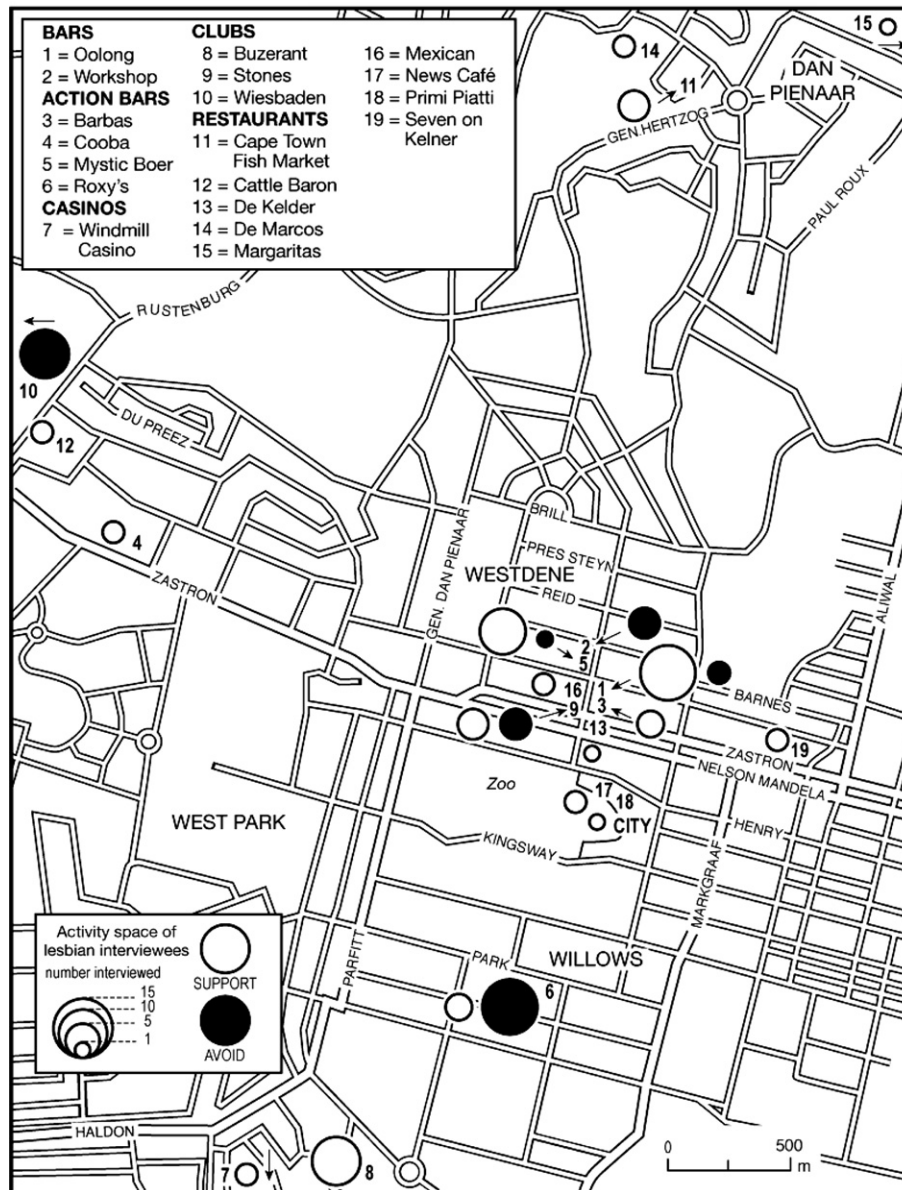


Fig. 4. Lesbian leisure spaces in Bloemfontein.

2006), whilst Ryan (Interview, 2006) thought of Roxy's as "common", and Luka (Interview, 2006) was of the opinion that the gay spaces of Bloemfontein cater for "the low socio-economic groups... unsafe, horrible and filled with trailer trash". Indeed, it has to be stated that by comparison to gay leisure venues in the larger cities, both Roxy's and Buzerant are indeed dingy, unattractive spaces, and are located in rather unattractive parts of the city. The majority of the survey participants pointed out that they had experienced what gay leisure and living spaces can be like. Whilst seemingly not recognising the importance of their own class position and greater mobility, it was often highlighted that upon their return from living gay lifestyles in places such as Amsterdam, Cape Town, Edinburgh, London or New York, they had different expectations in respect of gay leisure spaces (Interview, Freck, 2006; Luka,

2006; Patsy, 2006; Schalk, 2006). For them, gay spaces can (should) be upmarket; and that is what these gay men who had travelled, whether in South Africa or abroad, apparently demanded in the Bloemfontein context. Further instances of class difference are displayed through accusations that there were "users" at Roxy's, meaning that there were young gay men who were not of the right economic standing and who were having a "party" at the expense of wealthier gay men.

Owing to the historical, apartheid-induced correlation between race and class position in South Africa, issues of race certainly formed part of their lack of supporting Roxy's. Although few of the interviewees stated that the area "was too black" (cf. Interview, XYZ, 2006), the racial composition of the neighbourhood in which it is located does appear to play a role, too. For example, Phoenix

(Interview, 2006) placed particular emphasis on the fact that the “venue feels terribly unsafe”. However, many of the descriptors used by the gay men to explain the safety of the area or, indeed, its location in a less desirable part of the city, are white post-apartheid colloquial references to denote high levels of racial desegregation and the presence of “too many black persons”. Within a post-apartheid context, centrally located lower class neighbourhoods were first to desegregate significantly (Horn and Buyisiwe-Ngcobo, 2003). Similarly, the neighbourhood in which Roxy’s is located has experienced elevated levels of desegregation, the large number of residential flat complexes making it a particularly popular area among black cohorts relocating from peripherally located, under-serviced black township areas.

Whilst the venues were near exclusively populated by white women and white men, the area has a large young black student population, and young employees in lower level positions in the close by CBD did appear to play a role in the avoidance of that part of Bloemfontein by these gay men. In itself, the lack of any black patrons in the formal gay venues also underscores the fact that gays and lesbians of other racial communities are made not to feel welcome in these venues. Indeed, a number of exploratory interviews ($n = 15$) with black gay men indicated that in the past they certainly were made to feel most unwelcome in Roxy’s and hence steer clear of the venue. Evidently, the white gay men are just as good at discriminating against others (i.e. black gay men); and historically-rooted racial prejudice is still seemingly deeply ingrained in the minds of the white gay and lesbian cohorts supporting (and owning) the formal homosexual leisure venues.

What is important to note is the total lack of solidarity with other gay-identified people in Bloemfontein in terms of class and race. The remnants of a highly racialised historical past into which the survey participants were socialised, whilst no excuse, might have been expected. However, in terms of race, which in South Africa would generally enable some sort of intra-racial class difference accommodation, the highly exclusionary behaviour was not expected to be so strong. The survey participants look to gay identities expressed in “white” European countries and the USA as a means to develop and affirm their own identities and those class cohorts that enable their development. Taken together, it would appear that for the survey group, association with Roxy’s would equate to a simultaneously failed performance of both their class and race identities.

6.2. Seeking real men and space

Debates concerning homonormativity also suggest that the gender performance of homosexual groups, not least gay men, requires close attention. Cox (2002: 168–169) noted that among some gay men, “camp” is regarded as an inadequate gender performance that is too closely associated with homophobic representations of gay men. It has

become evident from Cox’s investigations that perhaps homophobia has resulted in the forced repression of the feminine in all men (ibid.: 168). In the Bloemfontein context these findings certainly find resonance. The “sissy boy” Cox refers to is not the type of male the survey participants are seeking. They are seeking “straight-acting men”, and “straight-looking men”. Indeed, one interviewee pointed out that he considers himself a “homophobic homosexual” (Interview, JC, 2006), whilst another referred to “gays who are freaks” (Interview, Sarge, 2006). A near-universal theme related to the kind of masculinities that the interviewees were seeking in gay men. This issue was not only of relevance to the various individuals’ construction of what they seek in terms of a potential (or current) partner (and their own expressions of sexual identity), but also had a bearing on the question as to who, and where, the survey participants socialised. Most interviewees stated directly that as far as gay socialising is concerned, they mainly “hang out” with straight-acting gay men. Interviewees also observed that they did not enjoy a “load of queens” around them (cf. Interview, JC, 2006; Luka, 2006).

The “ideal” construction of men varied considerably. These “types of men” could comprise anything ranging from national rugby team members and Olympic swimming gold medallists, to more Beckhamish metromen/met-robots. However, the bottom line was that effeminate men were not what the interviewees were seeking. Whether or not the enactment of, and search for, the “butch” male correlates with Silverman’s (in Cox, 2002) suggestion that these virile displays paradoxically always seem so feminine, was not clear. However, this phenomenon could be the reflection of an internalised mechanism that these men use to enable and perpetuate self-policing and the restriction of behaviours in order to minimise the possibility and consequences of discovery (cf. Kirby and Hay, 1997). These constructions of gay masculinity, however, present consequences for the construction of leisure space for other gay men. On the one hand, these men might be inadvertently complicit in heterosexing leisure spaces through these acts of nondisclosure and the adoption of straight sexual facades, thus constraining other gay men’s leisure space possibilities. On the other hand, the formal homosexual venues, as will be shown later, are strongly supported by lesbian patrons, who “control” these venues and who are reported to prefer less “straight” gay men because the “straight-acting” gay men make them feel uncomfortable. Consequently, forms of discrimination among gay men and between gay men and lesbians, lead to certain gay males seeking out leisure spaces elsewhere – in this case heterosexual leisure spaces, in predominantly white middle-class areas.

The male interviewees seek out spaces that are relatively accepting of gay men, but which are not gay *per se*. For the survey participants, it was a matter of a venue serving as a relatively neutral ground where different groups could come together and co-exist. In this case Oolong and The Mystic Boer presented such spaces, which were seen to

provide “more room for individuality” (Aquarian, 2006). In this respect, it was felt that there was space for gay men in these straight venues where they could be themselves. Most indicated that if they went out as part of a group of gay men, these venues would feature prominently, as they would not need to be concerned about how they acted or who their companions were. Indeed, it was pointed out by those who were not involved in a relationship that these were also spaces in which they could act out their adult desires in terms of “cruising”, if they so wished.

This theme alludes to the fact that the two main leisure venues supported by these gay men held meaning and are coded beyond heterosexual leisure spaces, representing something more normalised from their perspective and what this paper argues represents homonormalised leisure spaces.

6.3. *Gay men, lesbian women and leisure space*

Internal to the white, economically similar gay and lesbian cohorts, a lack of solidarity appears to be a pervasive element that explains a lack of homosexual leisure space development. In the interviews an important recurring theme related to the rather fraught relationship between gay men and lesbian women. Johnson and Samdahl (2005: 331) have recently argued that where gay men and lesbian women have to “share” space, there is usually an attempt by gay men, nevertheless, to define that space as a gay male space, thus highlighting their allegiance to a normative dialectic that pits men against women, and showing their unwillingness to forego the authority and power inherent in their position as men. Whilst some of the gay men have lesbian friends and socialise with them in “straight spaces”, such socialisation very seldom occurs in the “formal” gay venues. In the main, the survey group tended to withdraw from the formal “homosexual spaces”. Not only is there a lack of solidarity between the gay and lesbian groups in Bloemfontein; there appeared to be antagonism towards one another. Gay men, beyond the issues of class difference and safety, avoided Buzerant and Roxy’s as social space because they “are filled with lesbians in check shirts” (Interview, Candy, 2006; JC, 2006). In addition, some men adamantly insisted that they “prefer straight females to lesbians” (Interview, Luka, 2006). Moreover, the gay men reported that they sensed an intense antagonism to their presence at Roxy’s. A lesbian respondent supported this view by pointing out that she (apparently like her other lesbian friends) does not like gay men, particularly those who are “too straight” – she likes “the real queens and drags” (Interview, Alex, 2006). Another lesbian respondent noted that “the ‘straight gay men’ could go to any place they wanted” (Interview, Veronica, 2006). Here gender performance by both gay men and lesbians results in the necessity for the two groups to use different leisure spaces. Principally, this meant that the gay male survey participants would rather socialise with their gay male and/or straight female friends in heter-

osexual venues, than homosexual venues, whilst the lesbian participants felt comfortable with the more effeminate men in the homosexual leisure spaces they interpreted as having some control over. In addition, as noted earlier, the performed masculinity of the gay male participants would probably be better suited to the heterosexual venues. This particular behaviour, however, destabilises the assumption that there is a necessary hetero-homosexual binary in terms of leisure space support.

The observations also point to a further set of issues. While it is generally assumed that lesbians are less likely to express the need to exert direct control over a public space, they certainly do so in the case of Buzerant and Roxy’s. Indeed, it was pointed out by many of the survey participants that the lesbians have “taken over” both Roxy’s and Buzerant. The relationship between the gay men and lesbians interviewed played an interesting additional role in limiting white middle-class support of the homosexual leisure scene. One issue relates back to gender performativity (in this case “female”); and the second, but directly related, concerns control of the “homosexual” leisure spaces. Counter to the general position, it is not always true that gay men are necessarily unwilling to forego the authority and power inherent in their position as men, evidently, sometimes they do.

It is important to point out why the lesbian community has such a hold on the “homosexual” leisure spaces of Bloemfontein. Lesbian interviewees revealed a range of reasons for their considerable support (and defence) of Buzerant and Roxy’s as “their space.” The lesbian community was reported to be fearful of a whole range of leisure venues in Bloemfontein (Interview, Maggie, 2006; Jacky, 2006; Veronica, 2006). As compared to the spatial range and number of leisure spaces visited by the general white leisure market (Visser, 2006), and indeed by gay men, the lesbian group showed a more restricted engagement with leisure facilities in Bloemfontein. This is the result of their experiencing the primary (mainly white) entertainment areas as both discriminatory and dangerous. In their experience, both the straight men and the straight women were antagonistic towards them. As a result, they tend to go out in groups; but this merely aggravates the negative response of the heterosexual public (both men and women), as someone always “slips up” in terms of her “inappropriate” gender performance (of femininity), drawing attention to the group (Interview, Maggie, 2006). Indeed, this issue mirrors Kirby and Hay’s (1997) observations concerning gay men going out in groups and in the process disclosing their homosexuality in heterosexual public spaces. In the end, there is a clear reason why the lesbian participants are “protective” of their space (Buzerant and Roxy’s) since it comprises one of their only options as far as “safe” leisure space is concerned. This, however, does appear to have led to a situation where the more effeminate gay males find space and acceptance in these spaces, whilst the “more straight-acting” gay men feel unwelcome, as a result of which they tend to socialise in heterosexual venues. Again,

this observation challenges the hetero-homosexual leisure space binary. Certain gay male bodies are, to adapt Rushbrook's (2002) phrase, penetrating heterosexual leisure spaces and diluting the "straightness" of those spaces. This represents an act of gaying straight space which this paper contends is a better way of understanding homonormalisation.

6.4. *Gay men, travel, and the Bloemfontein leisure scene*

Although the vast majority of the survey participants felt that they could live out a gay life in Bloemfontein, this was not the case for all the survey participants. Binnie suggests that one often has to leave "home" to find a queer home (Binnie, 1995, 240), because gay identities are a matter of geography, in that the spaces and places in which homosexually inclined people move have a direct and profound influence on identity construction (Cox, 2002, 151). Authors such as Cox (2002) and Hughes (1997, 2002, 2003) take this observation further by arguing that this often also means that gay men engage tourism as a means to develop and affirm their gay identity. This is a very pertinent observation in the case of the gay men interviewed in this investigation. It transpired that some of the interviewees travelled to Johannesburg, or Cape Town, where they supported the gay scene. These were "special events" for them, since they could "do all the gay things". Some of the younger survey participants, or those not currently in relationships, would go on weekends to Johannesburg "to do the gay scene".

Mac (2006) stated that before he was involved he would often go to Cape Town and Johannesburg for weekend trips. His leisure behaviour "was definitely different in these cities . . . it is easier to be gay away from Bloemfontein as we are a 'farm community' where everyone knows each other". Some participants also stated that when it came to certain "adult desires" they seldom acted upon these desires in Bloemfontein, but preferred to visit the big cities. In this case aspects of particular sexual practices, such as group sex, or leather sex, in spaces specifically developed for such practices formed a key motivator. Here too, it is instructive to remember the historical "shifting process" discussed earlier, where those gay men for whom such practices were important to their sex expression, have left Bloemfontein for cities where such practices are catered for. The small number of men seeking such opportunities remaining in the city is simply too small to make the development of a commercially viable leisure space catering for such desire, possible. Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, the larger proportion of men argued that venues such as Oolong and The Mystic Boer were certainly spaces in which sexual desires could be fulfilled – meaning these men could "pick-up" someone for casual sex. Once one "grew up" it was not really necessary "to flee to Johannesburg", said one respondent. The main reason behind this change in attitude (setting aside the few seeking particular types of sexual expression) related to the fact that the sur-

vey participants were less concerned about the fact that things might be said about their sexual behaviour. As these men grew more mature, they no longer viewed their sexual desires as aberrant. Moreover, it was argued that the spaces they frequent are filled with "a new generation of straight people who are much more open-minded and liberal as they are more exposed to homosexuality as a concept and part of their lived lives" (John, interview, 2006).

For the survey group as a whole, the activities in which they engaged during their travels elsewhere did not appear to be very different from what they did at home. The participants went shopping for items they could not generally find in Bloemfontein, or which could perhaps be purchased elsewhere at a better price, and in the evenings they socialised. However, it was striking that in terms of socialisation, they preferred "gay-friendly" environments similar to those in Bloemfontein, and did not exchange them for an exclusively gay set of venues in these metropolitan areas. This pattern, however, appeared not only to occur in their travel behaviour in South Africa, but also to be repeated in terms of their international travel behaviour. Nearly all of the interviewees have travelled over the past three years to numerous countries in Australasia, the Americas, Europe or Asia. On the whole, the gay-friendliness of a destination was not a deciding factor "except when the death penalty enters the equation" (Interview, Sarge, 2006). This would explain the glaring absence of any recent travel to any African country where homosexuality can indeed lead to jail terms and death sentences. Nevertheless, in most cases visits to gay capitals such as Amsterdam, New York, Sydney and London have been undertaken. In these cases, however, it was nearly always the place itself that was deemed attractive, rather than the fact that these cities have extensive gay leisure spaces.

7. Conclusion

Historically, the white middle class gay men of Bloemfontein, as elsewhere in South Africa and, indeed, internationally did appropriate space in response to the homophobic heterosexual context of Bloemfontein. Leisure space away from the core heterosexual leisure clusters was developed and in large part shared with lesbians. In this sense "homosexual leisure space" was generated. However, over time, those men most likely to create and maintain exclusive gay leisure space sought out leisure in heterosexual leisure spaces. In fact, those spaces that are available to "homosexual" identities are shunned. Importantly, those leisure spaces in which they felt free to be gay are not gay-coded spaces and are overwhelmingly heterosexual. That said, these men certainly do avoid certain areas which they have experienced, or interpret, as being heterosexual to the point of being overtly homophobic and possibly dangerous. The avoidance of dedicated gay space was shown to be the outcome of class and race differences, as well as the performed masculinities in these dedicated "homosexual" leisure spaces, together with tensions between these

particular gay male cohorts and lesbians. Those leisure spaces which the survey participants deemed most welcoming and their preferred sites of leisure interaction, was argued to represent homonormalised leisure spaces. In the light of these observations, some broader issues may be considered in terms of thinking through the further development and evolution of certain leisure spaces in which white gay middle class men seek leisure, in South Africa, and perhaps elsewhere too.

Firstly, the investigation suggests that for some places the sexing of space does not necessarily assume a heterosexualing of leisure space. Rather, whilst the everyday use of heterosexual space might result in a perhaps asexual space for heterosexual bodies, the spaces described in this investigation are certainly sexualised spaces for the gay men included in this investigation. In this sense homonormalised space – as opposed to gay only space – is not structurally dependent, as [Rushbrook \(2002\)](#) argues, on normal space, and on what exists outside of it. Moreover, these spaces' survival is not defined by exclusion from and in opposition to the dominant and heteronormative. The development of such spaces is made possible through the homonormalising of essentially heterosexual leisure spaces by particular cohorts of gay men who would, according to earlier literature, have pursued the outright gaying of those leisure spaces to the exclusion of other sexual identities. Moreover, the homonormalising of leisure space, as presented in this investigation, were shown not to have been linked to the de-gaying of particular homosexual leisure spaces, but rather the creation of homonormalised spaces in places that were conceived and located in heterosexual leisure spaces.

Secondly, this idea is important in terms of how a subsequent generation of gay men are to be (and might be) socialised into the Bloemfontein “gay community”, as well as into a “gay world” more generally. In what way will these gay men be gay, relative to “gay communities” elsewhere in South Africa, and/or indeed elsewhere? This claim echoes [Kirkey and Forsyth's \(2001\)](#) contention that this may indicate that the earlier enclaves, in this case formal gay leisure space, may not now be as necessary in forming, or affirming gay identities, as initially suggested by investigators such as [Valentine](#). Similarly, there are by now, role models for gay male identity. People can identify with and modify the roles portrayed by these role models, on the basis of mainstream information outlets such as sitcoms and the wider gay press. Indeed, in the local context of Bloemfontein, the “out” gay men in this investigation are there to be seen in certain heterosexual spaces, certainly in the homonormalised spaces described in this investigation.

Then again, institutional structures are playing a role in this regard, as the constitutional environment has opened up such possibilities. The constitution guarantees equality in terms of sexual orientation; and these men are economically and educationally empowered enough to assert these rights. Also, there is an increased appropriation by middle-

class cohorts of the extensive rights contained in the constitution through socialisation and the education system, which might, at least partially, provide a figurative space for all people to claim citizenship on an equal footing.

Thirdly, in this light, it might be argued that implicitly, if not explicitly, the predominantly binary view of heterosexual-homosexual leisure space that characterises the academic press, is inadequate to describe those spaces in which some gay male cohorts seek leisure. The familiar debates concerning a violent/discriminating/disapproving heterosexual world require some refinement. Authors such as [Valentine \(1993\)](#), [Blunt and Wills \(2000\)](#), as well as [Holt and Griffen \(2003\)](#) were correct in asserting that heterosexuality is the dominant form of sexuality in modern Western society. This claim is probably universally true. However, times have changed, and the same institutions that once oppressed homosexuality are now the very frameworks that provide recourse to safety and protection for gay men. It is plainly considered as wrong, in the South African context at least, that heterosexuality is institutionalised, to the exclusion of homosexuals, through marriage, as well as the legal, tax, and welfare systems, and celebrated (to the exclusion of gays) in public rituals such as weddings and christenings ([Valentine, 1993: 396](#); also see [Blunt and Wills, 2000](#); [Holt and Griffen, 2003](#)). Gay and lesbian people can now marry; can adopt children; can have access to their partner's medical insurance and pension funds. All these institutions are open to gays and lesbians in South Africa and are increasingly becoming so elsewhere too. It has to be acknowledged, in the context of this investigation, that these freedoms and rights are in the main taken up by an empowered white male cohort; but they do, nevertheless, apply to all South African citizens. The increasing homonormalising of the leisure space is part of institutionalised homonormalisation which can penetrate a broader societal context. If historically an extremely homophobic white Bloemfontein can, admittedly selectively, start to show signs of homonormalising, then it can in time be extended more broadly. However, it must be conceded that currently there are many social, cultural and economic limitations in South Africa that impede the realisation of such rights and freedoms, the harsh realities of which have not been investigated here.

Finally, these remarks present some challenges for current Anglo-American geographic scholarship focused upon gay leisure space development. This observation has to be made, because the greatest advances in the rights and freedoms of gay (and lesbian) people (certainly from a statutory perspective) are taking place in countries which are not predominantly English-speaking (i.e. where English is not the first national language). At least from a geographical perspective, the voices of, for example, northern European geographers dealing with gay leisure space are mute in the Anglo-American geographic academic press. For example, what does homonormalisation mean, and is there evidence of the gaying of straight spaces in these countries? Precisely how, and why, the hegemonic position of gay

male experiences, particularly in respect of the United Kingdom and the United States, should be seen as central to the theorisation of the relationship between gay identities and leisure space development, requires closer examination – why privilege those particular gay cohorts' experiences as more important than the experiences of those living elsewhere, and seemingly in more liberated places? That said, whether or not this will (is allowed to) happen, I for one, seriously doubt. Whilst the hegemony of heterosexuality and heteronormativity over gay lives has been a productive avenue of investigation for some Anglo-American scholars, the idea that these hegemonic discourses might be undermined by those located in, and commenting about, alternative realities might be taking the argument one step too far.

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Interviewees included in the paper

- Adam, 2006. 28 years old, Medical representative, Involved.
- Alex, 2006. 27 years old, Graphic designer, Single.
- AJ, 2006. 34 years old, Researcher, Involved.
- Aquarian, 2006. 29 years old, Personnel manager, Single.
- Blue, 2006. 35 years old, Interior designer, Single.
- Candy, 2006. 26 years old, Graphic designer, Involved.
- Dizzy, 2006. 36 years old, Hair stylist, Single.
- Freek, 2006. 35 years old, Business owner, Single.
- JC, 2006. 22 years old, Student, Involved.
- Jacky, 2006. 36 years old, Events manager, Single.
- John, 2006. 52 years old, Paediatrician, Involved.
- Luka, 2006. 35 years old, Medical doctor, Involved.
- Mac, 2006. 29 years old, Buyer, Involved.
- Maggie, 2006. 22 years old, Student, Single.
- N, 2006. 35 years old, Regional Sales Manager, Single.
- Patsy, 2006. 26 years old, Lecturer, Involved.
- Phoenix, 2006. 25 years old, Lecturer, Single.
- Red, 2006. 36 years old, Business owner, Involved.
- Ryan, 2006. 24 years old, Multi-media designer, Single.
- Sarge, 2006. 34 years old, Futures trader, Single.
- Schalk, 2006. 35 years old, Business owner, Single.
- Snowy, 2006. 38 years old, Bank official, Single.
- Thys, 2006. 26 years old, Lecturer, Single.
- Veronica, 2006. 38 years old, Event manager, Single.
- XYZ, 2006. 44 years old, Teacher, Involved.