



Chapter 6

Black Middle-Class Gay Men and Queer Intimacy: Stereotypical Roles and Signifying Money in Relationships

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Introduction

South African studies of the Black middle class have been increasing in number since 1994. These studies illustrate the complexities involved in conceptualising the Black middle-class position. Consequently, some of them emphasise the economic and political possibilities for the growing Black middle class and issues relating to the new consumption trends among its members. The growing interest in understanding the Black middle class in post-apartheid South Africa is a result of the socio-economic and political changes that occurred at the end of apartheid and the promulgation of legislation, such as that relating to affirmative action and BEE, that addresses past inequalities.

The focus of this chapter is on how class positionality plays a major role in how gay men define and experience intimacy. When we understand the connection between money and how intimacy is expressed, we can uncover relationships related to the functionality of money. Intimacy is defined and experienced differently by people of different races, classes, sexualities, and genders. This is particularly this case with queer intimacies and when considering how intimacy from this perspective is unbounded and destabilises heterosexual Judeo-Christian notions of intimacy (Canham 2017; Matebeni 2008, 2013).

Intimacy is rooted in the deep connections individuals express within private relationships. In this study, intimacy is defined as queer affection; this can be thought of as any form of connection, including physical or sexual interaction within a same-sex couple. When we study intimacy from a queer perspective, we understand that homophobia affects how gay men define and experience intimacy. Homophobia in relation to Black bodies should be viewed as a continuation of colonialism and the colonial gaze. Matebeni (201:405), in her writing on the queer Black female body, indicates how queer enactments of intimacy disrupt the “colonial constraints and constructs” of these bodies. The same ideas may be used to understand the hate gay men experience from those who would have them follow a particular script. However, due to the pain and gruesomeness of homophobia, gay men find themselves following a heteronormative script in order to avoid discrimination. Understanding the impact of homophobia is useful for comprehending how gay men respond to discrimination and the impact it has on how they experience intimacy. The existence and continuation of same-sex partnerships challenge dominant ideas that normalise heterosexual partnerships (Adeagbo 2019; Mupotsa 2020). Same-sex partnerships exist and continue to exist in a society that denounces gay people. Gay relationships challenge exclusive norms by redefining sexist and heterosexist customs, which are inherently bounded and exclusionary. For example, in the article “Conjugality”, Mupotsa (2020) amply illustrates how heterosexual exclusions are built into the moral code that suggests that queer sex is bad sex because it is not procreative.

Knowledge about how gender shapes intimacy is dominated by a heteronormative idea of intimacy. Although research has demonstrated gendered (and unequal) emotional work in heterosexual relationships, we do not know enough about how intimacy and emotional work unfold in relationships involving two men who self-identify as Black and middle class. This chapter presents findings on the stereotypical gender roles and the interplay of class and intimacy in gay men’s relationships. Based on these themes, differences and similarities in how Black

middle-class gay men understand intimacy and the middle-class position is explored.

The aim of this chapter is to investigate Black gay men's conceptions and experiences of intimacy as this is guided by their position as member of the middle class. Interestingly, in the findings, we may observe that some of the experiences of intimacy shared by the participants in this study adopt a heteronormative point of view. These Black middle-class gay men adopt heterosexual gendered role divisions in their conceptions and experiences of intimacy.

When it comes to romantic relations, heteronormativity is deemed the norm, and this influences how individuals undertake their everyday affairs. In context of homophobia, heteronormative roles can be used as a protection mechanism for gay men and to reduce the level of exclusion experienced. Matebeni (2013:410) shows that homophobia and notions that involve the claim "that to be black and gay is to betray the race" create isolation for Black queer individuals. One of the ways in which gay men are discouraged and stigmatised is that they are regarded as feminine and less masculine. Heterosexual couples, on the other hand, enjoy a privileged position in society. Societal ideas of queer intimacies are often linked to patriarchy and the idea that homosexuality is un-African (Matebeni 2008). Similarly, Mupotsa (2020) refers to the notion of "compulsory heterosexuality". Such ideas emerge from the fact that gay identities and queer intimacies oppose the idea that monogamous relationships are the norm.

The rest of the chapter provides a brief overview of the methodology of the study and then reviews the literature associated with it. The first section of the review provides an overview of research related to the middle class and the Black middle class. The second examines debates on gender. This part of the chapter explores the impact of hegemonic masculinity on gay men. The third section of the literature review explores the discussion on gender and queer intimacies. The literature review focuses on the impact of homophobia on the lives of gay people. The chapter also includes analysis and discussion of the findings.

A Brief Methodology

The data for this chapter was gathered in Johannesburg by means of qualitative, life history interviews (see Table 6.1 at the end of the chapter for the profiles of the interview participants). Life histories were selected because stories are important: they occupy a central role in the place of knowledge that is generated in society (Dhunpath & Samuel 2009). Moreover, life stories give rise to structures that continue to shape, divide, and separate human beings, opening up debates connected to power, ethics, and subjectivity. In addition, the life-history method adds structure and significance to the narrative being shared (Atkinson 2007). Moreover, the life-history method brings order and meaning to the life story being told. It is used to understand the past and the present more fully (Atkinson 2007). Life-story interviews were used to capture the participants' accounts of what it means to be a gay Black middle-class man. The life-history interviews allowed them to share their experiences with the researcher, thus allowing the researcher to explore rich data on how sexuality, race, and the middle-class position have an impact on their experiences and conceptions of queer intimacy.

Five participants took part in this study. Three were in the early forties and two in their early thirties at the time of the interview. Four of the participants were born in South Africa, and the other was born in Namibia and now lives in South Africa. All the participants were Black African. Their relationship status varied, being characterised by one of two configurations: single, or in a relationship.. Two were in a relationship, and three were single at the time of the interviews. The career interests of the participants varied: two were in academia, two in consulting industries, and one held a position in government. The intention of the study, as is the case in qualitative studies more broadly, is not draw generalisable conclusions but to offer a contextualised understanding of the experiences of the participants to inform further research.

Conceptions of the Black Middle Class

As already alluded to in the introduction and Chapter 1, conceptualising class is a daunting task. Among the reasons for this are the differences in the contexts in which class is used and in vocabularies used to describe it (Phadi & Ceruti 2011). Of the other important criteria in conceptualising class is whether education or a certain level of income is at the heart of the meaning of the term (Atkinson & Brandolini 2013). Education and income were the two markers of class relevant to participation in the study. The idea that education enables class mobility influences much theorising on conceptions of the middle-class (Alexander *et al* 2013; Khunou 2015; Mabandla 2015; Melber 2017), and it was also a strong determiner of middle-classness for the participants in this study. The participants' ideas of what it means to be middle class were first and foremost influenced by their level of education. Their upward class mobility was assumed to be closely tied to further improvement in their educational achievements, which would in turn improve their projections for their careers and increase their income.

Notwithstanding the significance of education and income for entry into the middle class, what remains fundamental for Blacks now (and, historically, for whites) to attain a middle-class position is the state and its policies. According to Mattes (2015), the South African government's efforts to establish a middle class of Black individuals have been marked by several key moments. These include the implementation of affirmative action policies for hiring in the public sector and promoting diversity in private-sector employment by setting demographic employment targets, benchmarks, and timelines governed by specific codes of practice. Furthermore, to be awarded state contracts, bidders must meet minimum numeric scores in terms of Black economic empowerment. Due to apartheid racism in South Africa, we encountered exponential growth in the Black middle class only after 1994 with the advent of democracy and the implementation of policies of transformation and equality. According to Mattes (2015:671), in South Africa, "the Black middle class grew from 350 000 in 1993 to almost 3 million by 2012". Even though the Black middle class in South Africa has grown significantly

since the end of apartheid, the position of its members remains precarious (Khunou 2015; Mhlongo 2019).

Like other middle-class groups in the country and abroad, the growing Black middle class in South Africa continues to look to the state to counter perceived racial barriers to further the upward progress of its members. This matter was mentioned by the participants in the stories they shared about their challenges in the workplace and about access to the market. This reliance on the state reflects the insecurity which defines middle-classness (Mabandla 2013; Ndletyana 2014; Southall 2016).

In the years since the Covid-19 pandemic, we have seen how especially those at the lower end of the middle-class scale have been negatively impacted on by rising inflation (Buheji 2022). The precarity of the Black middle-class position is evident from a reading of consumption patterns which show that the affordability of goods by the middle class is being outpaced by constantly rising food and fuel prices and financial commitments such as school fees. In early 2021, it was estimated that one-third of middle-class families in South Africa were financially vulnerable (BusinessTech 2021a). Based on monetary categorisation, southern Africa has the highest percentage of middle-class segments on the continent. According to data released by a think tank in Cape Town, due to the economic challenges emanating from the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of people in the middle class in South Africa decreased from 6.1 million in 2017 to 2.7 million by mid-2020 (BusinessTech 2021b). This is a significant decline and confirms the precarity of this class position (Khunou 2015). With the economic slowdown, many faced the danger of retrenchment and the loss of the benefits that this class position affords (Southall 2017).

Conceptions of Masculinities and the Place of Gay Men

Gender is not established by the biological makeup; rather, it is founded on social relations and societal norms (Connell & Pearse 2015). The way men and women act, dress, and talk can be expected to be different. Borisoff and Victor (1998, cited in Eguchi 2009:193) show that gender “simultaneously creates expectations

about how women and men ought to act and to respond in various contexts and relationships". With regard to understanding masculinity and femininity, Bhasin (2004) writes that they are what one makes them out to be. Gender is influenced by the process of socialisation but can be reconstructed by individuals. Gender is a socio-cultural construct and relates to norms, values, customs, and practices which are constructed and reconstructed over time and across societies (Adhiambo-Oduol 2003).

Traditionally, being masculine is defined as being an individual who is in possession of qualities that are considered to be within the boundaries of manhood (Langa 2020). Among the characteristics of masculinity are aggressive behaviour, strength, and being a breadwinner and a protector (Williams 2002). Acting outside of or violating these expectations attracts homophobic attitudes and behaviour. Morrell (2001:7–8) notes that "the term masculinity is often employed to talk about a specific identity, belonging to a specific male person", while Bhasin (2004) contends that it is socially constructed rather than biologically enacted. In other words, masculinity is not fixed but is rather constantly reconstructed over time.

Over time, the concept of masculinity has developed multiple meanings. These meanings generally relate to the context of a specific era. These foundations are discussed in the article, "Towards a new sociology of masculinity", which reviews sex-role theory (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005). The critique proposed in this seminal piece by Connell and Messerschmidt is that there are multiple masculinities. In Connell (1987), "Gender and power", the argument is that there are differences between masculinities and that each masculinity advocates an understanding of the social construction of the term (masculinities). Connell (2005) defines four types of masculinities: hegemonic, subordinate, complacent, and marginal. The subordination of women, as well as some men, to those who embody hegemonic masculinity highlights a crucial distinction between males and females. It also illustrates that various forms of masculinity are in conflict with one another regarding their relations to power (Connell, 1995). In terms of this conception, given that patriarchy is linked to heterosexuality, men who present masculinity in a manner that

differs from the hegemonic notion thereof do not have access to the same extent of power that is available to those who adhere to the hegemonic version.

South African theorists who have engaged with Connell's (1995) conception of masculinities provide relevant discussions for understanding South African masculinities. The norm of power and resistance to it is where Ratele (2008) and Langa (2020) place the hegemonic construction of young Black masculinities in South Africa.

The norm of power in South African society has historically been rooted in a complex interplay of race, class, and gender hierarchies. This norm establishes heterosexual, economically successful, and culturally dominant forms of masculinity as the ideal. Ratele (2008) argues that this hegemonic masculinity in South Africa is intrinsically tied to the country's history of apartheid and colonialism, which privileged white masculinity while simultaneously oppressing and emasculating Black men.

The power held within this normative framework manifests in various ways. It is evident in social institutions, cultural practices, and economic structures that reinforce traditional notions of masculinity. This power is expressed through the marginalisation of alternative masculinities, particularly those embodied by Black gay men. Langa (2020) notes that this power dynamic often results in the exclusion of queer Black men from spaces of cultural and economic influence, as well as from narratives of 'authentic' Black masculinity.

Resistance to this hegemonic power takes multiple forms. Black middle-class gay men, in particular, challenge these norms through their very existence and visibility. By occupying spaces of economic privilege while simultaneously embracing their queer identities, they disrupt the traditional linkages between masculinity, heterosexuality, and success. This resistance is not merely passive but often involves active efforts to create alternative spaces and narratives.

Ratele (2008) describes how this resistance operates on both individual and collective levels. Individually, Black gay men may resist through personal choices in self-expression, relationships,

and career paths that defy stereotypical expectations. Collectively, resistance manifests in the formation of support networks, advocacy groups, and cultural productions that celebrate queer Black masculinities. Langa (2020) further explores how this resistance confronts power by challenging the very foundations of hegemonic masculinity. By demonstrating that one can be Black, successful, and gay, these men force a reconsideration of what constitutes 'authentic' Black masculinity. This resistance often involves navigating complex intersections of privilege and marginalisation, as the middle-class status may provide certain protections while queer identity continues to be stigmatised.

Ratele (2008) explores the idea of bravery, guts, or fearlessness as a common and dominant stereotype characterising hegemonic masculinity in South Africa. In his work, Langa (2020) illustrates how several boys conform to and defy prevailing conventions of masculinity, indicating thereby the difficulties of navigating the conflicting voices that would define what constitutes masculinity. Malinga and Ratele (2016) found that men feel pressured by the media to express their love in a particular way. Spending money on their loved ones was identified as a popular technique that men use to demonstrate their sense of responsibility and to validate their affection for them.

In the context of normative masculinity, gay men may be viewed as subverting such ideas, which then presents a rationale for the violence perpetuated by some heterosexual men on gay men. Not presenting as heterosexual creates multiple challenges for gay men, including the threat of violence, being denied promotions at work, and denial of access to other, everyday opportunities easily accessed by those who express heterosexuality and other traits valued by hegemonic masculinities (Eguchi 2009). Thus, gay men are perceived not to be 'ideal' men and occupy what Connell (2015) refers to as marginalised masculinities.

Gender and Queer Intimacy

Lorentzen (2007) writes that, except for same-sex intimacy, men and intimacy is not a topic that has been given much academic

attention; in light of this, he calls for a deeper examination of the matter. It is in this regard that the study aims to contribute to knowledge by understanding the intimate lives of Black gay men. Even though Lorentzen (2007) writes from the context of Norway, his concerns relating to men and intimacy are relevant to the South African context as there is a dearth of research in this area, other than studies by Hunter (2010), Malinga and Ratele (2012, 2016), Bhana (2013) and a few others. What these studies illustrate confirms Lorentzen's sentiment, to the effect that society does not think men's affections are significant topics for discussion or theorising; this is especially the case for Black gay men. The source of this neglect may be the stereotype that intimacy is a feminine trait (Gaia 2013).

Conceptualisations and experiences of intimacy cannot be separated from how individuals are socialised into either being masculine or feminine; that is to say, love is gendered (Bhana 2013). Men are socialised to demonstrate intimacy through the completion of certain tasks, whereas women are socialised to navigate situations from a relational point of view (Gaia 2002). In brief, it is important to note that while same-sex relationships may be perceived to be different from heterosexual relationships, they share certain qualities (Diamond, Hicks & Otter-Henderson 2006). For instance, the same factors predict relationship maintenance and dissatisfaction in both heterosexual and queer relationships.

However, gay and lesbian couples reflect more on the meaning and purpose of their intimate relationships because of the constant pushback from society that they encounter. This comparison of lesbian women and gay men is made with the acknowledgement that there are differences as well as similarities in their everyday life experiences (Canham 2017; Matebeni 2008). The reflection undertaken by homosexual individuals fosters greater creativity and imagination in developing family structures that suit their circumstances (Kuderk 2005; Solomon, Rothblum & Balsam 2005; Szymanski & Hilton 2013) For example, gay men may craft a unique family arrangement that honours both their queer identities and cultural heritage by engaging in discussions about their desire for children and the importance of maintaining

connections with their extended families. Some of the attributes that have been observed as being prevalent in same-sex relationships are equality and the use of humour (Kuderk 2005; Solomon *et al* 2005; Szymanski & Hilton 2013). Yet, due to the strict heteronormative ideals of the contexts in which they find themselves, gay individuals tend to show restraint in their everyday interactions and suppress their expressions of intimacy (Bird 1996; Hammarén & Johansson 2014).

Homophobia and Queer Love

In post-apartheid South Africa, being a queer black person involves having a complex identity based on a particular socio-historic background (Matebeni 2011; Mupotsa 2020). From verbal abuse to gruesome acts of corrective rape, queer Black people continue to face discrimination (Gibson & Macleod 2012; Matebeni 2011; Scheepers 2023; Smuts 2011). Regardless of South Africa's Constitution and Bill of Rights, violence against sexual minorities persists. Families and those components of society that condone the stigmatisation of sexual minorities sustain the violence against gay men and lesbian women; this violence is understood as homophobia.

When men who identify with ideal notions of what it means to be a man perceive that they are being stripped off their power, they react with violence. Gay men in South Africa who challenge the traditionally gendered stereotype of manhood are considered unmanly thereby threatening 'traditional' ideas of masculinity; for this reason, they are punished (Batisai 2015; Bhana 2013). This punishment is meted out in violent ways and includes sexual, physical, and psycho-social violence. Bhana (2013), in her definition of love, illustrates that, even though it is associated with intimacy, it also involves violence. The life experiences of gay and lesbians illustrate this clearly as their love for those of the same sex is erroneously viewed as non-normative. Thus, gay men continue to be victims of gender oppression, discrimination, and abuse. In most South African communities, being gay is viewed as a Western phenomenon and consequently perceived as alien and un-African (Matebeni 2008). The idea that being gay is un-African "conceals a moral and sex panic that is externalised as an acute

psychiatric and security emergency” (Reddy 2001:83). Despite the South African Constitution’s upholding of human rights, gays find it difficult to express their identity freely. As a result, sexual minorities that have experienced any sort of discrimination question the legal frameworks employed to protect all citizens. Calala (2014) stresses that the extent to which homophobic attitudes, practices, and hate speech and related crimes occur may have increased in recent previous years.

Re-Conceptualising Intimacy and Gender Roles

To unpack the argument of this chapter, two themes are discussed to illustrate how gay men experience and define intimacy. The first theme concerns stereotypical gender roles and gay relationships. Here, how normative notions of differential gender roles influence how intimacy is experienced by gay men is unpacked.

The second theme, concerning money and intimate relationships, focuses on how money and middle-classness influence ideas and actual experiences of intimacy. Normative considerations of money sometimes influence the gay relationships of Black men in ways that mimic heterosexual relationships.

Stereotypical Gender Roles and Gay Relationships

Contrary to the generalisation regarding the existence of a significant difference between heterosexual and homosexual relationships, in this study, the enactment of gender roles in the relationships of the participants demonstrates that gay couples adopt stereotypical heterosexual structures.

Men have been argued to exercise more power than women in heterosexual romantic relationships, irrespective of women’s socio-economic status and independence (Bogle 2008; Laner & Ventrone 2000; Lever, Frederick & Hertz 2015). For example, in this study, one of the participants who described themselves as the more feminine in their relationship was responsible for maintaining its finances. There is often a distinction in sex roles as well as other social, cultural, or monetary differences between

individuals in a gay male relationship, and these often parallel differences in heterosexual pairings.

Given that gay love happens in a patriarchal context, it is not easy for individuals in such relationships to act completely outside the broader societal script for relationships. Kutlwano, one of the participants in the study, concurred with this view. He contended that intimacy in gay unions is influenced by the need to live up to a heterosexual script that determines how one should act with an intimate partner:

We have to link this to people with same-sex identities because our identities were denied. We operate on heteronormative basis; we adopt values of the heterosexual world. That's the one aspect, the other aspect is that we have been rejected in so many ways, often by people we love, and when we want to have this intimacy, it is just to have a sense of belonging, a sense that somebody loves me, somebody appreciates me, somebody doesn't judge; it is a sense of – you know what? – I take you for who you are, and because of that we become so desperate that we eventually start to perform what we think are the ideal values in an intimate situation. If you are familiar with the work of Judith Butler, performativity – we come in this world with a script, what is romance? It is when you have champagne, strawberries, and cream; so you perform to this script, but is that who you are?

Kutlwano described intimacy in gay relationships as being influenced by heterosexual values. In his description, he also evokes Judith Butler's theory of performativity. Butler (1990) explains that when one is born male, one is expected to act in ways that illustrate masculinity, and vice versa for women (Butler 1990). People come to perform the acts repeatedly, as one does a script. For example, when intimacy is shown, some gay couples may be involved in role-playing; they follow the heterosexual script for intimacy. Research by Hollander, Renfrow and Howard (2011) shows how intimacy is gendered: men perform an instrumental role, and women play an affectionate role. In the above quote, Kutlwano also indicates that money plays a role in

how people express intimacy and that it gives those who have it the power to direct how this intimacy is expressed. Intimacy, to his mind, is attached to having access to material things. Intimacy signals strong affectionate behaviour that is experienced with a loved one. This can be demonstrated for example, by buying expensive dinners and having picnics. Hollander *et al* (2011) note that intimacy in heterosexual relationships is linked to money, such as when men invite women on a date and ensure that they sponsor the event. In the excerpt below, Kutlwano uses the example of fine dining in Sandton to illustrate how the same is experienced in gay intimate contexts:

Coming back to your class and where we socialise, when thinking about dating, I am interested in you, so I must take you to Sandton, that will create the chemistry if we go for a night out, we must go to a particular restaurant, look into each other's eyes, but is that who we are? So, intimacy is blurred for me, especially for a same-sex person with rigid, existing heterosexual values about what intimacy is about.

In this case, the one who is paying is the one who defines the type of intimacy that will be experienced. Another experience that illustrates the use of heteronormative performativity was related by Segopotso.

Segopotso described how he connected closely with his partner; he also showed how their relationship was based on heteronormative roles, as was the case in Kutlwano's experience:

Whatever I needed, he could do. And he didn't mind coming to see me every month, and when I visited him, he would book a bus ticket. He was one person to tell me, Baby, I don't want you to use your money, I am here as your boyfriend. I am the head of the house, so let me do the big stuff, let me provide, so, yah. It was crazy, like, I will never forget.

Being responsible for the financial side of things was important for Segopotso's partner as he identified himself as the "boyfriend". As in heteronormative relationships, the financial aspect of the

relationship is traditionally the responsibility of the boyfriend or the hegemonic masculine partner.

Segopotso also revealed that, because he occupied the submissive role, it was expected that he would cook:

[Laughs] Okay, first of all, my role, I am a bottom. So, the guys who date me like that I am bottom, so they treat me like their lady. I like it, but they know that I hate cooking; it is the first thing we talk about. So, I always question why they ask about cooking. Okay, I can cook, but I don't see myself doing it every day. But cleaning, I love cleaning; you can cook and mess up and I will clean. I love doing the laundry, the curtains, the bedding ... but just not cooking.

For Segopotso, even though he was able to provide for himself, the boyfriend was the provider. In this way, the relationship was conventionally gendered: Segopotso's boyfriend was perceived as the provider and Segopotso occupied the feminine role of nurturer. This mimicry of societally normative gender roles is also evident in how easily Segopotso linked being the bottom and being the feminine and nurturing one in the relationship. Specific gendered identities are linked to sexuality, and they influence behaviour patterns and performance (Maines 1996).

Identity has been extensively studied within queer studies. It involves the idea that labels are attached to particular ways of behaving, and that these labels in turn categorise the individual's behaviour. For instance, the idea of 'tops' and 'bottoms' as categories of identification refers to a range of experiences that are both potentially sexualised and indicative of the gendered behaviours that individuals in homosexual partnerships exhibit (Edwards 1994). The top/bottom distinction is not always rigid in practice but may be characterised as applying to different contexts of being or performing 'top' or 'bottom'. Furthermore, it is important to recognise that this distinction is a social construct rather than a stereotyped depiction of many gay relationships and interactions. Pachankis, Bütünwieser and Bernstein (2013) argue that top and bottom identities are constituted by multiple aspects of sexual position, behaviour, identity, and other developmental

influences. This flexibility in performance and identification highlights the importance of questioning binary productions and reproductions of gendered and sexual subjectivities in general.

According to Eguchi (2009: 194), “these gendered semantics communicate that the power struggle of gender is also at the core of the gay male identity negotiation processes and their everyday interpersonal relations”. Research has illustrated, for instance, that men who self-identify as tops are less lady-like than men who self-identify as bottoms (Han 2006). This is much like what was evident in Segopotso’s relationship: the partner played a more dominant role and perceived himself to be the ‘man’ of the house, while Segopotso preferred domestic tasks usually associated with women.

Heteronormative gendered roles are hence present in gay romantic relationships. Kutlwano noted how this paradoxical juxtapositioning can cause tension in a relationship when the duties expected by one partner are not fulfilled by the other:

What I have picked up from my previous relations is also that Black people do not have a real culture, they do not have good communication skills. They come from a very patriarchal space where the woman’s role was to be involved in the domestic sphere and not have a say, and the husbands’ role was to provide. So much of that has been transferred to same-sex relationships. However, you might find that your softer partner has more capital and the butch one does not have any [Laughs], and it creates tension, because he is the ‘man’ and the ‘man’ has to provide – and you have most of the resources. So you have power contestations, so he uses his private parts for power – so you have the economic power and he has the sexual power – so both these parts have a critical effect on the relationship, and often these powers collide and it creates conflict in the relationship. The traditional role of a man is to provide and here he is at the receiving end; so it troubles this role of the man as the provider.

This is illuminating as Kutlwano foregrounds the contradiction resulting from a need to follow normative gender divisions of labour and confrontation with their inherent limitations. Kutlwano grew up in a heteronormative environment, and his current experience illustrates that, even though he is in a relationship that is supposed to challenge normative gender roles, the actual everyday experiences involve challenges relating to the linking of the provider role to men which are similar to those in heterosexual relationships in which the woman earns more than her male partner. Conflict arises when a man cannot fulfill the role expected of him, due to the misalignment between his actual experiences and the form he believes he should embody.

To reiterate, in most cases, individuals with a soft demeanour in gay relationships take on the submissive roles, and vice versa. In this case, Kutlwano revealed that the person who was expected to be in the submissive role was placed in a position that made him the breadwinner in the relationship because he had the financial power to do so. One should remember that when men and women perform gender in a traditional manner, the taking of these masculine and feminine roles indirectly suppresses sexual satisfaction for women, though not for men, because traditional gender-based sexual roles dictate sexual passivity for women and sexual agency for men (Kiefer & Sanchez 2007).

In heterosexual relationships, it is likely that the man is expected to be more sexually experienced than the women and to initiate and direct sexual activities. The internalising of traditional gender roles has taught women to avoid expressing sexual agency and to adopt a submissive, passive sexual role (Schwartz & Rutter 2000). In the same vein, conversely, Kutlwano's partner, as the 'man' in the relationship, was left only with sexual power, which he used since he could not provide financially and thereby fulfil his perceived 'role' as breadwinner. Thus, he used their bedroom interaction to affirm his power as the 'man' in the relationship.

Such misalignment between what is expected and what actually occurs causes tension within the relationship. That being the case, Kutlwano questioned the gender division and role-playing adopted from heterosexual relationships into homosexual

relationships. This questioning presents Kutlwano and his partner with an opportunity to re-imagine what is possible in their relationship. Higher education, social status, and income have been noted to be powerful tools for negotiating power within gay men's romantic relationships; For example, Stacey (2004) writes that older, richer partners have more power than their partner in gay relationships.

Moreover, Kutlwano observes that since the 'man' in the relationship could not fulfil the role of breadwinner, the 'man' used the bedroom to gain power:

He is the 'man', and the 'man' has to provide, and you have most of the resources, so you have power contestations – so he uses his private parts for power; so you have the economic power and he has the sexual power.

Based on what society expects, for a man to be embraced as a 'good' man, he needs to fulfil the provider role. This being the case, money is a fundamental asset for men because such an asset gives men the opportunity to provide financially (Khunou 2006, 2012). Historically, men have been credited with the status associated with the provider role as they are the leaders of the family.

Kutlwano indicated his disapproval of the existence of traditionally gendered roles in same-sex romantic relationships:

I hate it, traditional roles that are associated with women, I hate it, so I appointed a nanny who could do it because I have a son, I adopted a boy. But my partner loves it, ahh, he's so pedantic, so he cleans, he presents a very masculine role. I cook because I am a good cook. Both these activities are associated with female roles; we are both involved in my son's life.

Most same-sex relationships involve less role playing associated with their preferred sex role (top or bottom) than do the relationships of heterosexual couples. For example, although gay men may exhibit high levels of femininity and low levels

of masculinity in some aspects of their identities, in other areas they may display aspects of the masculine identity similar to heterosexual men. This is not usually the case with most heterosexual men, as there might be an expectation for them to maintain a masculine identity most of the time. For some gay men, these roles linked to their preferred sex role dichotomies are not critically important. In his research on queer intimacies, Adegagbo (2019) demonstrates that gay men view themselves as equals in their relationships.

Kutlwano described his frustration with the heterosexual love script he had experienced in his gay relationships and indicated that he would prefer a different sort of experience of intimacy. Thus, he argued for a redefinition of gay intimacy, one that moved away from heteronormativity.

I have experienced it the same way when you want a night out, that the two of you go for dinner. I don't know if I can touch on this, even in the intimacy, although you are two men or two women, there must be a performance of one endorsing a feminine role and one subscribing to a masculine role. So, we are not two men, and we cannot live as two men in our unique way – there is always this role that one has to play. When we go out, people will ask, who is the female in the relationship? Who is the man? When we go out, there is always, the more masculine one, and when the people at the restaurant pick it up, they put the bill close to the more masculine one. So, those were my experiences, and ironically, my partner, who is very masculine in appearance, is just the opposite role; and I am softer; however, we play different roles, so when we go out to these places, we are bound to subscribe to these heterosexual roles. If not, we must perform as two guys, which has a bearing on the intimacy. Whereas if you are two men who do not subscribe, people question the intimacy. How can this happen? So, at a point when I was attracted to a feminine gay person, people would ask, what kind of lesbianism is this? Even people with same-sex identities.

Kutlwano confirms that gay intimacy is gendered. He shares that gay men occupy dominant and submissive roles that are similar to those found in heterosexual relationships. In gay relationships, men who are labelled 'tops' are commonly ascribed characteristics associated with hegemonic masculinity, such as power, dominance, and physical strength; whereas 'bottoms' are often defined as passive and effeminate. For example, labelling oneself 'top' or 'bottom' reproduces specific sexual scripts that uphold heteronormative ideas about masculine versus feminine identity and gender roles (Kiguwa 2015). These terms may be elements of self-identify that indicate an individual's usual preference but might also describe broader sexual identities.

Many gay relationships involve marginalisation practices that, depending on the context, can either evoke and reproduce heteronormative categories of behaviour and identification; or, in other cases, produce functional intersectionality matrices (Kiguwa 2015). According to Kiguwa (2015), cultural norms have influenced the idea that gendered sex roles and penetration during sex are synonymous. These rigorous definitions of sex roles dictate what it means to identify as masculine or feminine in heterosexual relationships as well as among gay men. Plummer (1981) shows that classifying gay individuals is difficult, particularly when the various and ever-changing meanings people attach to their relationships are not clear. This draws attention to how societal perceptions of homosexual relationships are evolving. We must investigate the role that essentialising these gay relationships plays in the construction of the meanings that are associated with them. Plummer (1981) thus urges us to reject overly simplistic interpretations. This will draw attention to how societal perceptions of gay relationships are evolving and contradictory. According to Kiguwa (2015), the top/bottom divide is not always as clear-cut and cannot be distinguished by many circumstances in which one is or is not acting in a 'top' or 'bottom' capacity. Furthermore, to reiterate, it is important to recognise that these distinctions in identity are social constructs rather than the actual stereotyped depictions of many gay relationships and interactions.

Pachankis *et al* (2013) have drawn attention to how societal norms for sexuality influence the way we understand gay men's sexual behaviours and identities. According to Kiguwa (2015), these norms construct non-heterosexual behaviours and identities through a heterosexual lens, which is problematic because it reinforces the very norm they are trying to challenge. However, Gill (2007) argues for a more nuanced approach that recognises both the opportunities for change and the moments when the norm is reproduced.

In this chapter, it is clear that the notion that all claims to identity are, to some degree, performances corresponds with Butler's theory of performativity. Butler (2011) argues that gender and sex are shaped and maintained by hegemonic heterosexual norms. People repeatedly exhibit specific, gendered modes of existence which highlight the crucial role that practice and discourse play in the formation of identities, and how they either support or impede specific behaviours and agency. The diverse context of post-apartheid South Africa, including the economic factors here, influences how Black middle-class gay men experience and express their sexual and gendered identities. The unique characteristics of same-sex intimate relationships are overshadowed when perspectives germane to heterosexual relationships are used to study such partnerships.

Kutlwano advises that intimacy should create a space for versatility, a space where individuals can openly express who they are and not be coerced into roles. Intimacy requires a level of versatility and adaptability that may not be a matter of the individual's ascribing to a manly or a feminine sex role. Two men, raised in accordance with the social perspective that they are masculine, will face immediate difficulties in attempting to adjust.

When 'Relationship Requires a Bit of Money'

In the interviewing process, Sifiso, Mandla, and Masilo revealed the importance of money within an intimate relationship. These participants noted that money can buy resources. For example, when one is in a romantic relationship, one will need to go on dates and to have a private space for sex and conversation. Money

thus proves to be an important aspect of a romantic relationship. Employment provides an income, allowing individuals to maintain intimate relationships (Khunou 2006, 2012; Krige 2012).

Sifiso shared his thoughts about and experiences of why money is important in intimate relationships:

We live in a world which works on money, so me attempting to be in a relationship requires a bit of money. It is a world of materialism. The class thing; before, then I had a boyfriend, it was lovely, we loved each other. I could afford to have him around and when I couldn't afford him, I let him go. However, now I am much more serious about relationships, and looking for a soulmate.

The concept of affordability is central in research by Phadi and Ceruti (2011), who assert that it is a key aspect of class for most SoweTans, who argue that it is the key concept as regards class for most SoweTans. This word is used to indicate that a certain commodity is within a person's capacity to purchase it. One's class depends on what you can afford. Class has frequently been used to describe things one possesses or lacks. Alexander *et al* (2013:29) note that affordability "provides a link from subjective experiences (including classed culture and verbalised class identities), through income, to occupation (or lack of occupation). Thus, it connects consumption and production". Sifiso's quote above illustrates that the idea of affordability is central to middle-classness, and he states that when he could not afford his partner, he "let him go". Hence, money, which in Sifiso's case is accessible because of his middle-classness, is central to how he thinks about relationships. Lacking money or a middle-class position, he felt he could not keep a partner. He elaborated as follows:

You need resources to do things to have an intimate relationship. For example, if you live in rural areas in a shack, and you live with your five brothers, like back in Alexandra, I realised that there was nowhere to chill. So, when you want to escape your five brothers, you go outside, you go to the streets [laughs]. And other people come chill with you. There is no intimate space; it is harder when you do not have the resources.

And when you look at class and culture in this country, black means poor. This is due to the history of this country.

Sifiso described intimate relationships as “a world of materialism” and as being difficult for those who are black and poor. He said that, earlier in his life, he did not have the resources to have a boyfriend and so he let the boyfriend go. Relationships require one to have money to afford commodities and services. Sifiso’s example of a lack of resources shows that things like privacy are a commodity and can be afforded with money. He indicated that, growing up with five brothers, he did not have privacy, especially the privacy to express intimacy with his gay partner, since they all lived in a small house. Sifiso also mentioned that living with brothers who were not familiar with the gay lifestyle was problematic, especially because gay people are stigmatised. This made it difficult for him to engage in the romantic aspects of his life. Only later in his life did his middle-class position provide the power for him to negotiate his ideas of intimacy. He expressed that he was able to talk freely about his sexuality and to introduce his gay partner to his family. Vanyoro (2021) and Scheepers (2023) write that gay men in different contexts, such as rural spaces, experience challenges coming out, which is a matter of both class and race privilege (and the lack thereof).

In contrast to the findings of Plank and of De Mendonca and Khunou in this volume, who focus on the experiences of Black middle-class women, for the Black middle-class gay men interviewed for this study, their position gives more than it takes away. As a result of their class position, they are able to purchase the freedom to be intimate in a violent, homophobic world. For the women interviewed by Plank and by De Mendonca, for example, being middle-class high-earners took away the simplicity that comes with being in a heterosexual relationship in which women are taken care of and do not have to contend with the various problems associated with being with an unemployed man in a context in which the provider role is normatively associated with men.

Another example of middle-classness is evident in Mandla’s experience:

We were insulted by this group of people, but he did not understand them because they were insulting us in isiZulu, and he is Sotho, so he did not understand a thing. They said, “Look at these moffies. What nonsense is this?”

Here, we can see how lack of money – and, for some in the middle class, this may mean being able to afford a car – could be to one’s detriment. Mandla experienced this abuse in the course of using public transport, whereas, if he had had a car, a valuable resource, he would not have had to experience this discrimination. Thus, money or as Sifiso expressed it, having resources, is an important aspect of a relationship for gay men.

Mandla’s experience highlights the ongoing victimisation of gay men. Gays are constantly reminded of how their sexuality is associated with disgust. It is clear from the stories that have been presented above that the Black middle-class position does not remove the challenges of being in a relationship; what it does, rather, is insulate these individuals from some aspects of the violence and discrimination that occur when one expresses same-sex love.

Masilo was of the opinion that, for him, intimacy includes presenting middle-classness:

Middle-class people prefer a certain space; KFC does not offer you the luxury of being served; you eat from a box, on a tray, it is too full, the ambiance there is not for smooching. So, no, I would not take people to KFC or Chicken Licken. If you take someone out, make it worth it. Like if I invite you to my house, I would not serve you leftovers. I would make you lasagne, spaghetti bolognese; like, I would even go search for a recipe to make something nice....

Masilo added that, when you have money, you can dine at places that have an ambiance that facilitates romance. He compared the offering of KFC and a steak house in Braamfontein; of the two places, he opted for the one that creates a mood for intimacy.

Conclusion

What emerges in this chapter is that gay men challenge dominant theories of masculinity that box men in. Gay men have found alternative ways to welcome and embrace intimacy, even in the face of discrimination. They do away with boundaries that force them to guard their behaviour while embracing intimacy. However, as shown in the chapter, gay men often replicate traditional roles seen in heterosexual relationships.

Stereotypical roles influence how gay men experience intimacy. In this chapter, it has been argued that even though gay relationships are praised as being void of gender, roles such as 'top' and 'bottom' guide gay men in performing gender within their relationships. Stacey (2004) contends that decision-making in gay relationships is negotiated on the basis of education, social status, and income. The findings here also suggest that money is an important aspect of gay relationships because gay men do not always have the freedom to be affectionate in spaces that are heteronormative. Patriarchy and homophobia are two of the key factors that hinder gay intimacy. Many gay Black men in South Africa live in environments in which homophobic violence is common. A middle-class position allows for gay men to choose spaces that cater for public displays of affection, reinforcing queer love and disrupting the hegemony that discourages same-sex intimacy. The importance of class to how one expresses and lives one's gender and sexual identity is of utmost salience.

Table 6.1: Profiles of participants interviewed

Name	Relationship status	Age	Occupation
Kutlwano	In a relationship	41	Teaching and learning sector
Segopotso	Single	32	Social worker
Masilo	Single	30	Consultant
Sifiso	Single	40	Consultant

Name	Relationship status	Age	Occupation
Mandla	In a relationship	40	Teaching and learning sector

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