Deepesh Dayal: Microaggressions Against South African Gay Indian Men

Introduction

Despite legal protection, South African gay men continue to face discrimination (Mahomed & Trangoš, 2016). Amongst South Africans of Indian descent, discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people exists due to conservative values (Khan, 2017, 2018; Mahomed & Trangoš, 2016; Mkhize, Bennett, Reddy, & Moletsane, 2015; Pillay, 2015). Conservatism within the South African Indian community is emphasised in studies done by Msibi (2012), and Vahed and Jeppie (2005) who found that there was importance placed on maintaining religious conservativeness and cultural norms. Discrimination against gay men by "perpetrators" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 272) has become subtler and less direct in the form of homonegative verbal comments that have been called microaggressions (Hill & Willoughby, 2005; Nadal, 2008, 2013; Nadal et al., 2015; Walls, 2008). Microaggression is described as "daily verbal, behavioural, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults towards members of oppressed groups" (Nadal, 2008, p. 23).

Sexual orientation microaggressions occur when the microaggression is perpetrated against sexual minorities (Nadal, 2013). Examples of these microaggressions are when gay men are told that they are confused about their sexual orientation (Sue, 2010). Microaggression perpetrators also use words such as 'faggot, sissy and fairy' (Nadal et al., 2011). Microaggression perpetrators also use stereotypical language and associate being gay with sexual pathology (Nadal et al., 2011; Sue, 2010). Studies on microaggression has typically focussed on race-related microaggressions (Lynn, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2000, 2002, 2005) and only recently explored sexual orientation microaggressions (Francis & Reygan, 2016; Nadal et al., 2015; Platt & Lenzen, 2013; Sue & Capodilupo, 2008). Microaggressions decrease social cohesion and adversely impact mental wellbeing of gay men (Holder, Jackson, & Ponterotto, 2015; Nadal et al., 2010; Orelus, 2013; Reid, 2017). Stress, anxiety, depression, limited social and academic progression, guilt and embarrassment are experienced by victims of microaggression (Holder, Jackson, & Ponterotto, 2015; Orelus, 2013; Reid, 2017).

The study aims to analyse South African gay Indian men's accounts of microaggressions levelled against them by South African Indian people. Sexual orientation microaggression perpetrated by South African Indian people against South African gay Indian men has been written about by many journalists in news articles (Akoob, 2018; Jagmohan, 2017; Igual, 2018; Khan, 2017, 2018; Pillay, 2017); however, there have been no studies conducted on such encounters of gender orientation microaggressions. These news articles mention the challenges, such as negative psychological effects and social exclusion experienced by South African gay Indian men (Akoob, 2018; Jagmohan, 2017; Igual, 2018; Khan, 2017, 2018; Pillay, 2017). I am a South African gay Indian man who has personally experienced the negative effects of homonegative microaggression perpetrated against me by South African Indian people. The research question of the study is: "What sexual orientation microaggressions, which have been perpetrated by South African Indian persons, have South African gay Indian men encountered?"

Summary of Preliminary Literature Review

South African LGBT studies have focussed limitedly on South African gay Indian men (Pillay, 2017). Conceptions of diverse sexualities in South Africa are often shaped by religious, cultural and societal factors according to Sigamoney and Epprecht (2013). Roberts and Reddy (2008), and Mwaba (2009) corroborated the idea that heterosexual

participants disapproved of homosexuality, and a later Pew Research Survey (2014) found that, despite liberal South African laws, 61% of heterosexual participants found homosexuality to be unacceptable. Mahomed and Trangoš (2016) found that a large proportion of heterosexual respondents viewed lesbian and gay people in a negative light. South African gay Indian men therefore live in a society where negative attitudes towards gay people exist (Pillay, 2017).

Negative attitudes towards LGBT people also exist amongst South African Indian people. Within the study by Mahomed and Trangoš (2016), it was also found that South African Indian women were seen to have the strongest belief that being gay is against the conservative values of the Indian community. Conservatism featured in Dave's (2011) interview study focussing on South African gay Indian and lesbian students. All of the four participants in the narrative study found it difficult to speak about their sexual orientation and they experienced negative attitudes from family members based on their sexual orientation. Based on the participant's accounts, this occurred due to the strong focus on the norms set by heterosexist Indian people (Dave, 2011). Only 52% of Indian LGBT people in a study by the South African Institute of Race Relations felt confident with disclosing their sexual identity (Morris, 2017). In addition, Indian LGBT people were also at an increased risk of being exposed to physical violence from their families. The recent OUT survey (2016), which had an Indian sample of 2.4%, identified that 42% of Indian LGBT respondents had been discriminated. Amongst the Indian LGBT participants, 38% had experienced verbal microaggressions being directed against (OUT, 2016).

One of the earliest studies on microaggressions is the study conducted by Nadal and colleagues (2011). Their study found that gay men had experienced heterosexist language and statements based on stereotypes, such as the notion that all gay men are promiscuous and that they all like interior design and fashion. Participants also experienced being excluded from sports as they were told that gay men are effeminate and should not play sports. Self-identified gay participants in a study by Platt and Lenzen (2013) also experienced sexual orientation microaggression by family members when the participants initiated romantic relationships. Sexual orientation microaggression was also confirmed to exist in South African schools in a qualitative study done by Francis and Reygan (2012) using Life Orientation teachers as participants. Microaggressions are used during lessons, and teachers who identify strongly with conservative religious beliefs attribute the origins of diverse sexual orientations to pathology (Francis & Reygan, 2012).

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

The theories of microaggression and intersersectionality underpin the study. Microaggression is widely used in social psychology to describe casual degradation of socially marginalised groups (Paludi, 2010), and occurs in three forms: microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations (Sue, 2010). Microassaults include verbal and nonverbal behaviours and insults which could include heterosexist language (Nadal et al., 2011), such as calling gay people 'princess, doll, fairy or faggot'. Microinsults include actions or statements which demean an individual's identity, such as "You can't play football!" or "every gay man is an interior decorator" (Nadal et al., p. 246). Microinvalidations "exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality" of individuals belonging to a certain group (Sue et al., 2007, p. 278). These can occur when heterosexist people identify gay people as being 'confused' and believe that gay people are unable to fully understand themselves (Sue, 2007).

Intersectionality also serves as a lens because it considers an individual to have multiple identities based on race, gender, social class, age and sexual orientation, which are

derived from power, history and social relations (Cole, 2009). Intersectionality was borne out of the second wave of feminism (Biklen, Marshall, & Polard, 2008), and helps understand how gender intersects with other identities and how this leads to privilege or oppression (Richardson & Loubier, 2008).

Intersectional microaggression experienced by gay men emphasizes the multiple different identities that contribute towards discrimination (Nadal, Whitman, Davis, Erazo, & Davidoff, 2016). Oppression and discrimination do not act independently based on singular factors. There is a "matrix of domination" or "vectors of oppression" that act interdependently leading to microaggression (Ritzer, 2007, p. 204).

Research Methodology

A qualitative instrumental case study method is proposed for this research study, providing an in-depth exploration of a particular issue or theme (Creswell, 2007, 2009). It uses a bounded system, where the "bounds" are (a) settings (within South Africa), (b) participants (South African gay Indian men), and (c) specific events (microaggression encounters of South African gay Indian men as perpetrated by South African Indian people).

The sample will consist of three to five participants who are South African men of Indian descent. They should be 18 years or older and self-identify as gay. An online lifestyle magazine, *Indian Spice* (www.IndianSpice.co.za), is going be used to obtain research participants, with an advertisement placed free of charge in the "News" section. The advertisement will state that I am conducting a study on the discrimination experienced against South African gay Indian men by South African Indian people, which will contribute towards my Master of Arts in Counselling Psychology degree. It will also state that I am looking for self-identified South African gay Indian men, who are 18 years and older, and who have experienced discrimination due to being gay. Also highlighted in the advertisement is that the study will initiate with an interview and then it will require participants to keep a diary for 4 weeks after the interview. My contact information will also be available on the advertisement. *Indian Spice* magazine focuses on issues facing the South African Indian community, which includes LGBT-aligned information, and will therefore serve as a suitable platform to recruit participants. *GALA*, a LGBT organisation responsible for promoting LGBT culture, will be used as an alternate method to obtain participants (GALA, 2019). GALA also has an active social media account where activities and studies focussing on LGBT people are showcased. I will create an advertisement and submit it to GALA to place on their social media pages.

Two data collection methods will be used to allow for a broad understanding of the data (Creswell, 2009). This will also ensure consistency and, triangulation, which "is a powerful technique that facilitates validation of data through cross verification from two or more sources" (Honorene, 2017, p. 91). Semi-structured interviews, to obtain historic experiences of microaggression, will be the initial method of data collection. Interviews will be used to introduce the idea of microaggression. The interviews allow for an informal grouping of questions which enables exploration of valuable insights from opportunities as they present themselves (Fallon, 2008; Robson, 2011). After the interview, participants will participate in diary study for 4 weeks. This time is seen as sufficient to gather information regarding current experiences of microaggression. The diary can be completed on as a typed document on a computer or written in a notebook. The diary entries should be based on the participants sexual orientation microaggressions perpetrated by South African Indian people. This includes: verbal and nonverbal statements made towards participants about their sexual orientation, statements making them feel inferior about their sexual orientation, and incidents where they feel excluded based on being gay. Participants who

choose to complete the diary in a typed out format will be given a 1 GB flash drive. Participants will use the flash drive to store the typed out diary in a password-protected format. Participants opting to hand write the diary will be given a hardcover notebook. I will personally collect the diary, either written in the notebook or on a flash drive, anywhere within South Africa, once completed.

I will transcribe the data from the interviews. Transcription involves the repeated analysis of recorded data. I will use Jeffersonian transcription in this study. This transcription method uses symbols, which takes into account the subtleties of delivering speech, as well as the characteristics of turn taking (Jefferson, 2007). The data from the interview and the data from the diary study will be analysed using social constructionist-informed thematic analysis, which allows realities, meanings, incidents and experiences to be understood from the social and cultural context of participants and through social interaction (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This is different from the realist approach which is simple and a unidirectional relationship exists between meaning and experience. It is seen as simply reporting experiences of participants without taking social context into account (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Thematic analysis allows for the identification of surface (semantic/explicit) themes and subsequent interpretation and analysis of latent themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Marks & Yardley, 2004). Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013) outline the process of analysis: the first phase involves familiarisation with the data set, while the second phase involves the initial coding across collected data. In the third phase, the codes will be collated into themes, which is followed by a review of themes by generating a thematic map in the fourth phase. Themes will be defined and named in the fifth phase, and lastly, the sixth phase involves selecting relevant extracts and presenting the findings.

Reflexivity allows for an awareness and scrutiny of the researcher's role in the process of conducting research, it allows for participants to be represented in a fair manner (Moon, 2008). I will document my awareness and interrogate my self-perceptions and subjectivities related to the study, throughout the research process. Prospective reflexivity will focus on the effect I will have on the study and retrospective reflexivity will highlight the effect of the research on me (Attia & Edge, 2017). Regular supervision will also be used to discuss the research process and my thoughts and experiences regarding the interviews and content of the study. Epistemological reflexivity and methodological reflexivity will also be focused on during journaling. Here, I will focus on how knowledge is being created during the research process, whilst reflecting upon my prior assumptions, beliefs, and attitudes (Attia & Edge, 2017). Through methodological reflexivity I will reflect upon how and why the research was conducted and conclusions drawn (Johnson & Duberley, 2003).

Ethical Considerations

Interviews will be conducted in a closed room. The interview will take place within the privacy of participants home and I will travel to the participants. Should the participant request an alternate venue, a safe and private venue based on the participant's geographical location will be identified. Participants will receive consent forms. Participants will be explained exactly what the study entails and potential risks involved (Babbie & Mouton, 2010). Participants will be given a cover letter to read, outlining the aims of the study. The cover letter will then be explained to the participants and they will be given an opportunity to ask questions. Participants will be informed that they have the option of withdrawing from the study and that they are not forced to answer uncomfortable questions. The names and numbers of counselling services such as Lifeline, SADAG and OUT will be given to participants at the beginning of the study. This is to assist participants

who experience any psychological effects during the study. SADAG is a 24h counseling phone line and is accessible to participants in all provinces. Lifeline has branches in all provinces, and it provides face-to-face and telephonic counseling. A confidentiality clause will be included in the cover letter and will also be verbally communicated to participants. Voice recordings and data will all be securely stored in password-protected folders. Participants who decide to complete the diary in a typed out format will be given a 1 GB flash drive. They will use this flash drive to save the completed typed out diary in a password-protected format. I will personally collect the written diary or the flash drive from the participant anywhere within South Africa, at a venue most convenient to the participant. Both the flash drive and the written diary will be stored in a locked cabinet. The names in the typed out diary and in the written diary, which will be typed out, will be anonymised. My contact details and that of my supervisor will also be given to participants should they experience any challenges related to the study.

Original Contribution to Scientific Knowledge

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