

The 'First Skin': Clothes and Masculinity amongst the Izikhothani

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ABSTRACT Izikhothani (young African males) are known for their expensive fashion sense and wearing bright colours in townships where certain gendered stereotypes exist about the colours men and women ought to and should wear. Isikhothani is a word popularly used to refer to a man who is supposedly excessively clean and well groomed, and more importantly, is obsessive about fashion and styling his body. Clothes play an important role in the representation of who and how they see themselves and appearance is perceived as the 'first skin', as they believe that "what a person wears says a lot about who they are". This paper in turn examines the perceptions and feelings about clothes for izikhothani. Using data gathered through participant observation and in-depth interviews to study, a group of young men between the ages of 18 and 25 from Diepkloof Township in Soweto, Gauteng; the paper probes the importance of clothes and the embedded beliefs they hold for the isikhothani. The paper focuses on how clothes form and shape their identity and social status as well as how they tend to use fashion to (attempt to) break away from the existing entrenched stereotypes about how men should dress.

INTRODUCTION

According to Inglessis, 'fashion' is understood as a standard for understanding trends and changes in society since it draws opinions from leaders and influential people (see Inglessis 2008). Dress and personal appearance are visible components people use to identify themselves from others. Clothing and fashion thus manifest the individual, social and cultural process and conveys a meaning through symbolic communication. People who adopt fashion trends in turn (attempt to) satisfy social, psychological and cultural needs. As a 'tool', fashionable clothing helps to satisfy a person's need for adornment, status, modesty and identification (Roach and Eicher 1979). One contends additionally, that an important 'need' satisfied by fashion is the need for social affiliation. The need for social affiliation refers to a personality attribute which corresponds to the individual's desire for social contact and belongingness. Scholars claim that social affiliation is associated with tendencies to receive social gratification from harmonious relationships and helps cement a sense of communion with others (see Murray 1938; Veroff and Veroff 1980; Wisenfeld et al. 2001).

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Research for this study was conducted in Diepkloof, in Soweto. Soweto is arguably one of the largest townships in South Africa with a pre-

dominantly African population, housing people from different religious and cultural backgrounds. It is home to a large number of *izikhothani*.

Working through a social constructivist framework (Mertens 2005: 12) a small sample of ten core participants/*izikhothani*¹ men aged between 17 and 25 years were recruited through purposive sampling.

The study used qualitative research methods, including participant observation semi-structured and unstructured interviews. Observations were also carried out in spaces such as dance contests at the Diepkloof Park and other social gatherings. Ethnography is one of the important qualitative methodologies; its roots can be traced back to the anthropological studies of the early 1900s. It aims to provide rich, holistic insights into people's views and actions, as well as the nature (that is, sights and sounds) of the location they inhabit, through the collection of detailed observations and interviews. It is suitable for writing about a group of people when the researcher is immersed within the community. Ethnographic research allows the researcher to be involved within a study of community and gives the luxury of time, proximity to the field site and the ability to co-ordinate data collection in an integrated and inductive manner to the researcher (see Fetterman 1989: 21).

The researchers in turn spent much time with *izikhothani* and eating *sephatlo*² with them, as well as sharing in their daily activities and experiences; spending time listening to Durban

*kwaito*³ music, chatting and also visiting bars and shopping malls where most *izikhothani* usually spend their time. This helped the researchers not only to be and feel like part of *izikhothani* sub-culture. At the beginning of the study the researchers had two informants but as time proceeded the researchers ended up having a group of *izikhothani* from different sub-groups who were all willing to open up. This resulted in a group of ten men as a core sample from the larger sample with whom the researchers met daily. The researchers always used a place which the participants found suitable. At first this was a problem since the researchers wasn't comfortable with some places they chose, (such as taverns) but the researchers eventually 'adjusted'.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

"Kuvele Kube Sengathi Ngiyandiza Mase Ngigqokile" ("It Feels as if I am Flying in my Clothes"): The Role of Clothes in the Representation of *Isikhothani*

Clothing appears to be critically important for the *izikhothani* as it appears to 'communicate' what they see as their 'masculine' identity and their unique style. According to them, an inability to maintain the appearance of wealth through displays of 'style', which they normally refer to as 'swag', would mean the loss of the 'Kenny Kunene' or upper-class masculinity and the reverting to being a normal *barie yasekasi* (Township boy). The higher the prices of the designer label clothing, the more a *skhothani* gains respect and recognition from his fellows. Bandile⁴, a tall, dark and slender male who wore lemon pants and black and yellow floral T-shirt the first time I saw him, used his hands to explain things, said clothes boost his ego...

I feel as if I am flying when wearing my clothes sister, I just feel that I am a true skhothani and nobody would ever tell me anything. I am the real man. If you are a real skhothani you have to wear clothes that will keep some heads turning to look at you. We seek attention and recognition through what we wear. Our clothes speak for themselves, they grab a girl's attention whilst she is playing on the streets and everywhere we go girls scream at us saying, "Here comes a skhothani" and just by looking at us you can tell which group we belong to).

Bandile is not the only participant who believes in the significance of clothes; Lani (22) who is a second year Electrical Engineering stu-

dent from Zone Six in Diepkloof, shared that being an *isikhothani* is all about style and expensive fashion tastes and one cannot be an *isikhothani* without wearing bright colours and showing off that one can easily afford these items. He seemed like a very shy, young man as he keeps looking down on the ground during the conversation.

You see sister; you can't call yourself a skhothani if you buy from where everybody buys. If you are a skhothani you must pay big amounts of money to show that you are a hard-working man. Wherever you appear, people must see that you have the real style and there is no skhothani who wears dark colours such as black and navy.

Another participant; Phila, a medium heighted, 20 year old, dark in complexion, dressed in bright yellow pants, red floral T-shirt and shiny red Carvella shoes. Flashing a smile and revealing teeth decorated with silver, he says:

The person I am in my school uniform is very different from the person I become when wearing my designer clothes. My clothes give me a sense of confidence; they make me feel as if I run this world. People judge you according to what you are wearing, they can easily tell between a poor person and someone who can afford to look after himself just like me. Clothes are very important, when wearing my uniform people call me by my name, they do not respect me, they just see a small boy my clothes cause others to address me as their 'brother' and girls love my look).

Phil believes the school uniform has no value since 'it is cheap and anyone can afford it'. He says he wishes they could wear their designer clothes to school as this would give him more confidence and help him to perform 'better at school'.

It was intriguing to the researchers to see that his walk also changes when he takes off his school uniform; he walks with his head high, whistles a lot and greets almost everyone he sees. This is very unlike the 'small' boy in grey school pants, white shirt and blue jersey who is very quiet and does not greet anyone and walks very fast past all people. Phila⁵ looks small and dark in his school uniform but when he changes to his bright designer clothes he looks a brighter, taller and more confident. The researchers weren't the only one who 'saw' him as a small boy in his uniform; he also believes that it makes him look younger.

It's not that I never wear the same clothes as my friends, I don't mind if its expensive clothes but the uniform is a problem because it cannot separate those who can afford from those who can't. Why do you seem surprised? It is still the same me, just that clothes give me dignity, they make me feel as if I own the scene and I can do anything. They reveal who I am on the inside. Clothes have magical powers sister; they give me the strength of a lion and make me feel that I have power. The problem with school uniform is that it's cheap and you can get it anywhere. If I had my own way we would wear Carvella shoes at school instead of the R200 ones. Who doesn't have R200?

Tieho is light in complexion, of medium height young with some acne breakouts on his face. He is another participant who was very quiet in his school uniform, he didn't answer most of the questions but would always say "*asikhulume mesifika edladleni*" (Let's talk when we get home). Walking together from school, about four kilometres away, he would be asking about university. However, when he changed to his designer clothes, the small light skinned shy boy from Zone Six would disappear another would appear! He would begin whistling at his friends, telling them that he was the researcher's new Ben 10⁵ and would even say:

"Kodwa wena sisi ngingakubamba ukuthi ususuke wangibona ngifake i-uniform"

(I could date you, it's just that you have seen me wearing a school uniform).

It's just that this thing (uniform) makes me look a bit younger). If I was in power, we wouldn't wear these clothes (looks at his uniform) to school. Uniform makes me feel smaller and less important, it takes away all the confidence that I get from designer clothes. We would be allowed to come with our designer labels and show off in any way we want. However, I support the whole uniform idea because it helps those who cannot afford to be like us. If you see me wearing a school uniform you would hardly recognize that I am a skhothani but when I'm in my clothes you can just easily identify me. For us, clothes are means for identification and recognition. They give us a certain social status and a sense of belonging to a certain community of young and stylish people."

It seemed clear that most *izikhothani* do not like 'cheap' uniformity. They did not mind

wearing the same clothes if they are expensive, but had a problem with school uniforms as they said it doesn't give them any sense of confidence, 'it is cheap'. Perrot (1994) described clothing as an act of differentiation and signification which reveals divisions and solidarities according to a code guaranteed and perpetuated by a society and its institutions. The notion of 'signification' features in semiotics as a term which describes the relationship between the sign and what it represents.

Scholars assert people use clothes as a code, a language which allows messages to be created and understood (see Holman 1981). One of the leading theorists of semiotics and French social and literary critic, Roland Barthes (1983), looked at fashion as a system of signs and compared it to a linguistic text and image. He theorized clothing and identity in semiotic terms and presented clothing as a linguistic code used by people to send certain messages about themselves. In his seminal work *The Fashion System*, Barthes (1983), discussed semiotics and argued that clothes play a major role in the construction of social identity. For Barthes (1983), dress is the signifier which signifies the wearer's participation, whether in a group or as an individual. The 'signified' capitalizes on a certain number of the secondary concept or 'signified', which varies according to how broad the groups are and signalled through these signifiers.

The case of *izikhothani* demonstrates this language system. *Izikhothani* don't purchase any clothes, but only branded clothes which appeal to them. Metaphorically, branded clothes speak a certain language to the *izikhothani* and they respond by buying the brand. For example, when walking around with *izikhothani*, the researchers would show them clothes that were being sold at different stores and whenever they saw something which caught their interest, they would question the 'identity' of the brand. If the garment is not branded, they would show no interest. *Izikhothani* believe expensive designer label clothes are of more quality over other cheap non-branded clothes.

Apart from spoken or written language, communication in semiotics refers to all other modes of communication including gestures, mimics and pictures. The central argument within the study of semiotics is that human beings are social animals and they find meaning in the world in connection with their social upbringing. The

izikhothani use clothes to signify they have money and they can afford their expensive clothes. One can tell if someone is a *skhothani* by merely looking at their appearance. Bright coloured clothes, floral T-shirts, shiny Carvella shoes, Sfarzo pants and expensive cell phones, all represents the self-constructed image of *isikhothani*. The clothes *izikhothani* wear are also meant to show their group membership. One can predict a *skhothani* by looking at his clothes. The appearance of *isikhothani* is represented through dress; for them, if you can afford expensive clothes it shows you are rich. Expensive clothes are very important for *izikhothani* and some *skhothanis* who are still at school and unemployed demand money from their parents or do casual work such as washing cars and street vending, or even find take on part-time jobs so as to make sure they can purchase their clothes. Phila says:

Clothes speak, they tell who you are, what you have, where you come from and what you believe in. A person can make conclusions about you by just looking at the clothes that you are wearing, by the time you begin talking they would already have a certain picture about you. This is like our first skin; clothes meet the eye before the face does. You hardly hear a skhothani being described by their looks, by being dark or ugly. No, we are described by our clothes first. If you ask a girl if she knows Phila, she won't begin by mentioning my height but she will ask if you are talking about the one who likes wearing T-shirts and Carvella shoes.

Some of the young men the researchers observed were between grades eleven and twelve (around 17 and 18 years old). In uniforms; they are shy, speaking a mixture of English and *isiZulu*, but when they change to their expensive branded clothes, the walk changes, they begin to walk as if something is 'burning them from the ground' and as if they are on fire; the language changes to *tsotsitaal*.⁶ The shyness fades: they whistle, sing, do some tap dancing and greet everyone they see. This observation is consistent with a study done by Naidu (2009) where she stated some cleaning women who were part of her sample said they 'would never wear' their work uniform from home to work because they felt it made them look ugly or inferior. The women stated they could only tolerate the uniform in the context of organizational work

and not beyond. They felt the uniform gave them homogenous bodies and they would come to work in their casual clothes, change into their uniform during work hours and back to their casual clothes again to go home. This relates to the case of the *izikhothani* who would rush back from school to change their uniform and wear bright designer clothes. The women in Naidu's (2009) study felt they looked better and more beautiful in their casual clothes as compared to the uniform just as *izikhothani* feel they look better in their designer clothes as compared to the school uniform.

Creating an Identity

Personal identity and dress are intimately linked where clothes can express and shape identity with a sense of materiality. According to Olson "it deals with the philosophical questions about ourselves that arise by virtue of our being people" (Olson 2003). Clothes perform a major role in the social construction of identity. As artefacts, they create behaviour through their capacity to empower people to accept latent social identities and are a means of communicating social identity (Crane 2000). They help identify an individual with peers and through clothing, people communicate their personality. Choice in clothing communicates responsibility, status, power and the potential to be successful (Turner-Bowker 2001). Clothes are instrumental in representing one's identity to others and people perceive nearly all types of identity as being articulated by clothes (Droogsma 2007).

Colourful designer clothes are central to the *isikhothani* sense and construction of masculinity; they are what distinguishes them from other men in the township. Without these, he doesn't qualify to be a member of *izikhothani*. They perceive themselves as stylish trendsetters in the townships and do not affiliate themselves with non *izikhothani* members as they see them as 'backward' people. The *izikhothani* emphasized the importance of avoiding being like people on the TV Channel 'SABC 1'⁷ (wearing the same outfit every day) and wearing fake brands. 'Even if it is jeans, you can't wear it two days in a row', they claimed. There has to be a variety and authenticity in terms of the clothes and the brands, according to them.

One way in which representation works for the wearer is it serves to connect him to a certain community or group of people (Roach and Eichler 2007: 109-121). Bourdieu (1977) speaks of this as social capital. He argued that group membership and social network involvement can be utilized in efforts to improve the social position of the actors in a variety of different fields. Social capital in turn is connected with group membership and social networks (Bourdieu 1984). It is based on the 'exploitative' nature of social relations amongst classes; it is about investment in social relations with expectations in return (Bourdieu 1980). People engage in social relationships with others in order to produce benefits which include information and products (see Naidu and Nzuza 2013). Social relations are expected to enforce identity and recognition. Members who belong to the same social group sharing similar interest do not only provide each other with emotional support, but also public acknowledgement of one's claim to certain resources. "*Habitus* is a result of social processes; it is created in the interplay between social structures including family or individual choice" (Bourdieu 1984: 170).

Members of *izikhothani* rely on each other for moral support and share information about the things such as the latest fashion brands and women. Clothes are an important part of their identity since they keep them connected to the group. They use clothes as signifiers of their lifestyle and claim an elite identity within a supposedly elite social group.

Striving for Social Status

Sperry and Peluso (2004) argued that individuals may join social groups to meet their need for belonging, which then boosts their self-esteem. The social bond shapes an individual's perception on things and motivates his development of personality and coping strategies within a social context. The *izikhothani* have certain connotations based on brands, they purchase branded clothing as means of forming their identity and try to send certain messages to their audience *through how they dress*. They perceive clothes as 'art' that needs to be displayed on their bodies. They find their voice and space in society and communicate who they are through fashion. Their clothes give them a sense of stability and register their 'belonging'.

Thapelo, a member of the SMK crew⁸ emphasized the importance of having clothes for a *skhothani*. This 24 year old, dark skinned, tall *SeTswana* speaking man from Zone Five wore a blue Nike T-shirt, blue Nike-jacket, black Nike track pant, black and green Nike trainers, a big Fossil watch and a gold chain around his neck. He claimed his look costs close to R5 500 (approximately 500\$). He went on to share that he worked for many large companies including as a sales representative. He marketed their products to different people and recruits others to join as 'reps' which is how he makes money to buy clothes. The main motivation behind his 'hustling', he says, is fashion; he works hard so he can afford to buy clothes.

Thus it emerges, the most important thing any *skhothani* must have is expensive clothes. The level of respect they get is measured according to the clothes they have. Social affiliation thus *happens* through clothes. Different crews of *izikhothani* are famous for dressing up in a certain way. Mzi, a member of the 'Italians' crew mentioned his group is all about Italian clothes. They are called 'Italians' because they only wear items which come from Italy as they believe it is of higher quality and is more expensive. If a person wants to change from one crew to another, it means buying a new wardrobe in order to fit into that group. Nike T-shirts are for a crew called the Doskhas, and they are purple in colour. The SMK are blue in colour and for the XDBs it has to be pink or red. Another crew is the RMs who are known for wearing RM branded clothing and the 18Boys are well known for their floral T-shirts and animal printed pants. Wearing the same brand names is part of group identity for *izikhothani*.

According to Crane (2000), some individuals use clothes as means of blurring social standing; as a means of breaking away from a social group or appearing to have more economic resources *than it is actually the case* (Crane 2000: 67). This is seen with most *izikhothani* as they use clothes to break away from the lower to middle class backgrounds they come. They present themselves as wealthier than they actually are. The men in this study are from Diepkloof in Soweto, a township characterized by a history of apartheid where Blacks lived under oppression from White apartheid segregation and supremacy. During the apartheid era, most women from Diepkloof worked as 'kitchen girls' (maids) and men

worked as garden boys and wore overalls to work (see Dilata 2008). Only a few could afford to buy expensive clothes during that time as their wages were exceptionally low. As Lani shares;

Our parents wore clothes which were bought through the money gained by their parents from working as domestic workers during the apartheid era; they could not afford expensive clothes because they would be labelled as thieves and also because they didn't have money. With us it's a different case, Mandela has fought for our liberation and we are free to wear Nike just like anyone. [Lani]

For *izikhothani*, expensive clothes help with 'showing' the former oppressors they can now afford to live like them and buy the clothes which they thought they would never afford. They seem to want to appear as rich people who can afford anything and gain respect from the society because of the clothes they wear. They seek a social identity that makes them appear as wealthy and lacking nothing, thus attempting to blur their real social standing. The reality is that some of them are raised by grandparents who depend on government social grants for a living. Others are raised by single mothers who are domestic workers and who have to save for their clothes. Another *skhothani* even said he would rather eat *phuthu* (dry porridge) and drink plain water every day so long as he could buy the expensive clothes. For most of the *izikhothani* males, clothes are more important than food or anything else. They do whatever it takes to get clothes, some even engage in hard labour to ensure they obtain money for buying more expensive clothes.

The seductiveness of fashion lies in the fact it seems to offer a person the ability of becoming in some way, more attractive or more powerful. The clothing or 'fashion' the men wear appears to create social contacts involved in the interaction between the body and the outside world. Dressing affects and reflects the perceptions of self and has specific character as a material object, due to the direct contact with the body. It acts as a filter between the individual and the surrounding world. Clothing communicates the social identity of a person, and how he wants to appear in a society. According to Crane, men's clothing reflects the concentration of power and prestige (2000).

The portrayal of status through clothes and other adornment is a universal phenomenon. People sometimes intend to show their wealth

and achievement through clothing. Designer and brand clothing carries perceptions related to statuses derived from multiple sources of influence which could be celebrities, media or advertising (Beaudoin and Lachance 2006). According to Simmel (1957), so called lower status groups sought to acquire status by adopting *haute* fashion and set a process of social contagion whereby styles were adopted by groups at successively inferior social levels (Simmel 1957).

For Bennet (2005), fashion plays an important role in enabling people to construct, sculpt and express their identities (Bennet 2005: 96). Fashion enables people to make statements about ourselves and identities; enabling communication about who we are, who we would like to be, which social group we belong to and who we are most likely to be associated with. What Kratz and Reimer (1998) claimed several years ago is highly visible in the case of *izikhothani* today. They use clothes to make statements about style and wealth and show they would like to be rich and respected for their style. For most members of *izikhothani*, being rich is all about affording what you would like to wear and looking good in public, what happens behind their closed doors (not being able to afford many things) is personal and, as far as they are concerned, should not be spoken about.

It doesn't matter what I eat, when people look at me they do not see what's inside my tummy but they can see what I am wearing. This thing about clothes is very crucial to any skhothani. You cannot claim to be a skhothani if you do not have clothes. You have to hustle to get clothes, if it means sleeping with water and bread it's okay because in public we would be eating pizzas, wearing expensive clothes and showing off. [Mzi]

Edwards (1997) points out that men's dress has a strong history with rank in society in the overall significance of class and work in men's lives. This still applies in contemporary times in the detail accompanying formal dress which demonstrates the status through which the level of expense involved. Often it has led to the idea that men's dress is interlinked with the notion of utility and its purpose is practical rather than decorative. For example, the so called BEE⁹ in the townships can be easily identified by their dress code; they are always wearing expensive formal attires, which are usually dark in colour.

Izikhothani are identified through their 'attention-grabbing' brightly coloured attire.

The *izikhothani* trend is not completely new, but a rather more developed form of *oswenka* (the swanker) in the 1950s (Lemon 2000). *Oswenka* refers to black migrant mine workers mostly from KwaZulu-Natal who had relocated to Johannesburg for work. These men would dress up in expensive suits and Italian shoes for a fashion parade at the community halls where they 'battled' for a prize of a goat, blanket or a sheep. Just like *izikhothani*, *oswenka* had their own walk, dance and language. This trend continues today, *oswenka* are now famous for their *isicathamiya* (a Zulu acapella) music. They take pride in wearing flashy suits and standing out as an inspiration for others. They compete for money and take their competitions so seriously they even use *muthi*¹⁰ to win competitions. The man with the strongest *muthi* or medicine wins the competition.

What makes the *izikhothani* trend unique from the *oswenka* is that the latter compete for a monetary prize and they are not always or routinely dressed in Italian clothes; they only dress for special occasions and competitions. They wear Italian dark suits during such occasions but do not even care about brands on the normal day. Conversely, the *izikhothani* are always dressed in bright colours and their competition is not for money, but for status. It is all about who is wearing the most expensive brand, who can afford more clothes and dresses better than others. Those men are respected within the group and many (lesser) group members wish to become like them. The more expensive the clothes *isikhothani* wears, the higher the level of respect he receives/commands from his peers.

Early anthropological studies of township life such as that of Wilson and Mafeje (1963) explore the presence of groups of young men who were known as Townees or the *tsotsi* type who were further sub-divided on the basis of age to *ikhaba* and *ooMac* and presented a fashionable appearance in Langa township, partly through wearing the latest fashion in men's clothing (Wilson and Mafeje 1963: 15). Leslie Banks (2011) wrote of the *iikati* and the *ivies* (the cats and the ivy leaguers) in the 1970s in East London. One of Bank's informants said that *iikati* were 'very well-groomed and loved to dress in bright clothes' (2011:120). The informant claimed that the *iikati* were 'clean and well groomed and

loved to dress in bright coloured clothes. They wore tight trousers known as 'zoots' which were slightly short in length to reveal their bright coloured socks and they also liked to wear *oom-abotshwecaleni* (shoes with laces at the side and often had their shirts pushed back to the elbow. They permed their hair in the S-curl style and were known to be 'womanisers' and modelled themselves on the black American pop idol Michael Jackson.'

Colour and Gendered Identities

Some of the beliefs in society, especially within Black townships, are that there are specific colours a girl or boy should wear. However, the strict gendered divisions of colour of choice are no longer relevant as a result of mediated fashion trends (Mohamed 2011:106). *Izikhothani* enjoy wearing bright coloured clothing and it is not strange to find them wearing pink, lilac or bright yellow. When asked them what their favourite colours were, the responses included pink, lemon, bright yellow, mint, red and white, none of them picked the colour blue. When asked how others reacted to their love for bright colours, they mentioned some call them 'gay' because they believe such colours are for women, and 'proper men' wear blue, grey and black. They say however, that they are not offended by such commentaries. For them it is the price tag that matters. The item of clothing may be pink or yellow – *if it is expensive they buy it*. They claimed one's clothes have to be bright, which they refer to as *ukurasa* (making noise), and state the appearance has to do the 'talking' more than the mouth does. The belief is if they are wearing bright colours they become more 'visible', more people greet them on the streets and more women recognize them. They claim that clothes give them dignity and help them to impress other people. Their slogan about clothes is: *dress to impress the mistress*. This form of visibility speaks to a notion of hyper-visibility (see Naidu 2009, 2011).

However, notwithstanding the attraction to (the need for) hyper-visibility on the part of the men, there are many stereotypes that exist about men's clothing in the townships. There, as mentioned, a strict gendered division of colour amongst men and women. Pink is usually associated with women whereas blue is associated with men. Floral clothes and bright colours are

regarded as more suitable for women. Additionally, men who wear tight skinny pants are regarded as *izitabane* (isiZulu derogatory word for a homosexual person). *Izikhothani* however, believe bright clothes give them more attention/visibility and make them more visible than other men in the township. They wear bright clothes because they want to be 'seen' as the 'possessors of style' and be respected by people. According to them, their brightly coloured clothing 'speaks' the price tag, it becomes easy for anyone to see them when they are wearing bright colours whereas wearing black one can be hardly recognized. They are fascinated by the fact that whenever they appear, heads will turn and everyone will begin talking about them. One participant said, "When you are amongst people you need to be seen and people have to know that you have swag (style) and they must learn to respect you. We do everything so we can charm women and prove that we have money."

Izikhothani do not believe in being controlled by other people's beliefs, but rather in doing what gives them a feeling of contentment. Just as some workers wear high-visibility safety apparel (for example, vests, bibs or coveralls which are bright and reflective) to improve visibility and alert others of the worker's presence, especially in low light and dark conditions; *izikhothani* use their clothes to make other people 'see' them. Their clothes are not just clothes but they are 'high visibility clothes' to be seen. They also claim bright floral T-shirts form an important part of their 'culture' and *asikho isikhothani esingenayo i-floral* (there is no *skhothani* without a floral T-shirt) unless he's fake. Floral T-shirts are part of the *izikhothani* heritage. When the nation celebrates heritage day on 24th September each year by wearing their traditional attire, *izikhothani* wear floral T-shirts in celebration of their 'culture'. They no longer identify themselves in the first instance as Zulu, Tswana, Xhosa or Tsonga men but they see themselves as *izikhothani*, people who have somewhat blurred and perhaps broken the so called ethnic and 'clan' traditions to create a separate 'culture' inspired by fashion, which welcomes everyone regardless of their background.

Wearing bright colours is their way of breaking the existing stereotypes about fashion, for them there are no clothes that look gay or manly; sexuality is not presented through clothing but rather through an inner preference between

men and women for men or women. They all claim to be heterosexual men who just have a pure undying love for fashion and are here to show that fashion is *flexible* and people should not be tied to other people's beliefs. For them, clothing and fashion is all about liberty and breaking out of the 'nest' society confined men into. Almost all the participants said there is absolutely nothing wrong with a man who wears bright colours; instead he is a brave man who is brave enough to live his life regardless of what others think about him. Bright colours do not signify femininity for *izikhothani*, instead it represents the ideas of luxury and wealth (and free choice). The most common colours they wear are: yellow, pink, lemon, lavender, red, blue, turquoise and animal prints.

CONCLUSION

Clothes play a significant role in the representation of *isikhothani* and we cannot define *izikhothani* without mentioning words such as fashion and clothing. *Izikhothani* hold a high value for expensive designer labels. The price tag for clothing is extremely important to every *skhothani* as they prefer expensive branded clothes; for them, the price tag does the *talking*. The person who affords the most expensive clothes gains the (most) respect and recognition from other members of the group. Designer names are more important for *izikhothani* than the appearance of clothes. For this group of men, clothes are not just garments, they play a huge role in ensuring their visibility and representing the 'first skin.' Clothes act as a distinguishing agent between *izikhothani* and other men and 'guard' the *isikhothani* sense of belonging in a group. The *isikhothani* masculine confidence is boosted when they are dressed up and the appreciation they receive from women makes it worth their while. *Izikhothani* are concerned about uniformity when it comes to the school uniform because they see it as cheap and easily affordable, but they do not mind wearing the same/uniform designer clothes to identify the status of their group.

NOTES

- 1 *Izikhothani* is a plural form of *isikhothani*
- 2 *Sephatlo* is a quarter cut of an unsliced bread loaf which is usually stuffed with minced meat, ham,

- fried chips and atchar/pickles and is mostly found in Soweto.
- 3 Kwaito is a music genre that emerged in Johannesburg, South Africa in the early 1990s. It is based on house music beats, but typically at a slower tempo and containing melodic and percussive African samples which are looped, deep basslines and often vocals, generally male, shouted or chanted rather than sung or rapped (www.lastfm).
 - 4 The researcher used pseudonyms throughout to ensure their identity is protected.
 - 5 Township slang that is used to refer to toy boys
 - 6 The word 'tsotsitaal' is made up of two words; 'tsotsi' and 'taal'. In township slang, *tsotsi* refers to a thug or criminal. The word *taal* is derived from Afrikaans and it means language. Tsotsitaal is a language that is
 - 7 SABC 1 is one of the television channels which is owned by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) it is mostly known for repeating their shows and bringing back the old content over and over again. *Izikhothani* metaphorically use it to refer to someone who frequently wears the same clothes.
 - 8 The word "crew" is used to describe the categories within the izikhothani subculture. There is an umbrella term, "*izikhothani*" which refers to the subculture itself and there are categories, crews. They are distinguished by the name of the brand they tend to wear the most but they all form part of *izikhothani*.
 - 9 BEE is an abbreviation for Black Economic Empowerment also known as B-BBEE (Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment). A programme initiated by the South African government to promote the economic empowerment of all Blacks through diverse but integrated socio-economic strategies. The term BEE is informally used in townships to refer to business personalities.
 - 10 The word *muthi* refers to traditional medicine. In a video posted on vimeo.com; men confess to using *muthi* in order to win the competitions.

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