

## **Exploring the representation of men who have sex with men (MSM) on the *Anova Health Institute* digital platforms**

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### **Abstract**

South Africa is a country that is a patriarchal society with heteronormative attitudes being accepted as the norm. Many men who have sex with men (MSM) in South Africa are experiencing stigma and discrimination because of socio-cultural norms around masculinity, and negative perceptions of partnerships between MSM. In this regard, same-sex practices may be viewed as “un-African”; a myth as it is anchored on an old practice of selectively invoking African culture by those in power. This paper focus on the representation of MSM as visually represented on *Anova Health Institute* digital platforms. *Anova Health Institute* is a Non-Governmental Organisation that empowers MSM and changes lives by promoting good health, quality of life, healthcare solutions, and support for MSM. *Anova Health Institute* was chosen as it has “a diverse MSM focused research agenda, including work on STI’s, clinical outcomes of HIV treatment, mental health issues, and intimate partner violence, and prevention technologies” Furthermore, the paper reviews how *Anova Health Institute’s* visual representation of MSM does either perpetuate or go against these issues in their digital platforms. This paper seeks to describe in what ways, if at all, the three factors that socio-culturally contribute towards this negatively skewed representation of MSM (vulnerability, discrimination, and stigmatisation) emerges through these forms of representation. A qualitative visual semiotics analysis was conducted towards critically analysing a non-probability purposive sampling of five (5) visual texts on the digital platforms of *Anova Health Institute digital* platforms. The findings revealed that MSM faces issues such as criminalisation, discrimination, marginalisation, and stigmatisation. An additional major finding was that *Anova Health Institute* tries to avoid these issues. This paper concludes with the recommendations on strategies to have more exposure to positive representation of MSM to decrease prejudicial, discrimination, stigmatisation, and vulnerability of MSM.

**Keywords:** criminalisation, discrimination, men who have sex with men (MSM), stigmatisation