

**Being Queer in South African Township Secondary Schools: Experiences of  
queerphobic violence and creating opportunities for change**

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degree of  
Master in Education**

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## DECLARATION

I, **Nkonzo Mkhize** declare that:

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### **Statement by Supervisor**

This dissertation is submitted with my approval.

A black rectangular box redacting the signature of the supervisor.

Professor Relebohile Moletsane

## Abstract

Despite the fact that the rights of South African queer persons are enshrined in the Constitution, queer youth continue to experience marginalization and queerphobic violence in communities and schools. The aim of this study was to investigate how, despite the protective constitutional context, queer African youth experience, respond to and resist queerphobic violence in and around their township secondary schools. The main research question addressed by the study was *How do queer African youth experience, respond to and resist negative experiences in township secondary schools?* The study is located within the constructivist paradigm to understand the world in which the participants live and learn, and the critical paradigm to critically examine and challenge the unequal social norms that informs their marginalization and violence they experience. Linked to these paradigms, the study adopted a qualitative methodology, and in particular, participatory visual methodology (PVM) as an approach to addressing the research question. Working with 10 queer African youth, the study generated data through participatory visual methods, drawing and cellphilms-making, during a series of workshops. In addition, using the visual artefacts (drawings) they generated, I held one-on-one interviews with each participant. The emerging data was analysed using thematic analysis and John Fiske's three layers of analysis of visual texts. These layers include the primary texts (drawings and cellphilms), the secondary text (what the participant had to say about what they have made), and the audience text which involves what the audience (including other participants in the workshops and others outside the workshop) says about the primary text.

To address the main research question, the study posed three critical questions. In response to the first critical question, *What does it mean to be a queer African youth in a township secondary school?*, the findings suggest that the schools are configured around unequal gender

and heteropatriarchal norms. In these spaces, for these participants, queerphobic violence, including name-calling, bullying, physical and sexual assaults, was part of every aspect of schooling, with little support from teachers, who were often perpetrators. In response to the second critical research question, *How do they respond and resist their negative experiences from peers and teachers?*, the findings suggest that despite the heterosexist school contexts, the participants drew on their agency to develop friendships, love, and a sense of belonging. The participants' resistance and agency involved avoiding certain spaces (such as toilets), but also knowingly going into queerphobic areas to disrupt and subvert the unequal gender norms that informed interactions in and around the school. In response to the third research question, *What changes do queer African youth want to see in their township secondary school?*, the study found that, informed by their experiences of queerphobic violence, the changes the participants wanted to see in the schools included changing school policy, improving teacher preparation for teachers to address queerphobic violence and queer issues, and changing the curriculum to include queer content and affirm queer youth in schools. These findings have implications for interventions aimed at addressing the safety of queer learners in these schools and communities. Based on these findings, interventions might include changes to school policy (particularly the Code of Conduct), working with communities and parents to identify and develop strategies aimed at making schools safe, improving school and classroom practice, and teacher education and professional development to ensure that curricula for training include the needs and issues of queer learners.

## **Dedication**

*From my heart*

This study is dedicated to every queer person in this country of **OURS**, especially the 10 queer African youth in this study, who, for a brief moment, trusted me with their lives. Without you this study would have not been possible.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction to the Dissertation

### 1.1 Introduction

During my schooling years in the uMlazi Township, the words “*isitabane, HeShe, nqigili, SisBhuti*<sup>1</sup>” and many others formed part of my daily experience in my interactions with teachers and peers in my school. As a young boy in high school, I identified as gay. For me, this meant that I was attracted to other boys. However, over the years, I came to realise that the term ‘gay’ is limiting and fails to fully capture how I feel, desire, express, and practice my sexuality. In this moment, therefore, rather than being able to place my identity at any fixed point on the spectrums of gender, and sexual orientation, I understand my identity to be fluid and dynamic, moving along these spectrums across space and time. This is not to ‘discredit’ gayness or the gay identity. The gay identity has enabled me to find acceptance, friendship, community and a politicised voice. However, I have found the term ‘queer’ more suitable to how I identify. For me, queerness is a voice that has always been there, subtly questioning myself and the world I found myself in. I believe this queer voice became louder when I took the decision to stop attending church in grade 10. I stopped going to church because of the questions that I had about the church regarding my gender and sexual orientation that were not part of the church’s culture and tradition. This is not to say that my gayness vanished or became silent. Rather, it remained and continues to be present.

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<sup>1</sup> Terms which are equal to that of fagot, they are derogatory words used against same-sex desiring and gender non-conforming individuals.

In my queerness, I continue to find myself questioning. I have become questioning of the world that I find myself in, from varying points on the spectrum of social identity (race, class, gender, sexual orientation, geopolitical location, education). Through questioning the world I am in, I am now able to recognize and acknowledge other forms of injustice beyond those that I experience. Questioning removes the walls that only make recognizable and attend to social, political, cultural and economic issues faced by the gay male community.

Furthermore, my identification as queer speaks to my performance of gender – which is not fixed. I tend to play around with femininities and masculinities. In my queerness, I have been able to recognize my masculinities and not fear them. In queering my masculinities, I have found that they have not and have never existed alone. Finding acceptance of self, friendships and community have enabled me to acknowledge my femininities. In doing this, my femininities have not only found expression in my gender performance, but also in how I use my body therein. This queer African and biologically male body also has curves and thighs that thunder like a tempest – all thanks to my ancestors, and swishes at the hips, only to speak with a deep voice. Denying my queerness would be to deny my femininities and masculinities– and to deny myself. For me, being queer goes beyond my gender and sexual orientation. It is a state and sense of being.

Recognising this complexity of queerness, Kumashiro (2002, p. 9-10) writes that the word ‘queer’ has come to mean

gay, lesbian, bisexual, two-spirited (this last term is specific to Native Americans; see Jacobs, Thomas, & Lang, 1997); transgendered, intersex (neither male or female; see Chase, 1998; Kessler, 1998); questioning, or in other ways different because of one’s sexual identity or sexual orientation (a catch all abbreviation for these identities that I use here is LGBTIQ).



Further, Kumashiro (2002) defines ‘queer’ to mean more than only these sexual orientations. Rather, he sees queerness as entangled with sexuality, sex, gender and with heterosexism and gender oppression (Kumashiro, 2002). While the concept ‘queer’ has been appropriated, its history remains in its derogatory meaning, meant to deter people who feel attracted to the same gender and sex and those whose gender expression is ‘misaligned’ with social constructions of gender performance, expression and identity (Kumashiro, 2002). In its broadest sense, ‘queer’ draws its history from an activist agenda meant to disrupt heterosexism. Thus, while, the argument might be presented that queer is foreign (and misaligned) in the African context, borrowing as it does from the US queer culture, in this dissertation, I find the local concept ‘*isitabane*’ limited in relation to explaining the agency that I have constructed, negotiated and deployed over the years. *Isitabane* has remained derogatory and has not been a galvanizing term for social-political action for the queer community in South Africa. Thus, in this study, I use ‘queer’ instead of LGBTQ+, because of the fluidity of sexuality, gender expression and identity. For me, queer bodies are not fixed into categories and sections, which LGBTQI+ might suggest. Further, the term LGBTQ+ is suggestive of the colonization of queer bodies by the dominant heteronormative culture, which seeks to establish categories, leading to hierarchies within queer communities. This makes queer bodies unthreatening to the heteronormative culture’s dominance, and queer bodies, in this instance, lose the troubling and destabilizing aspect of queerness, making queerness normative. To counter this, I find the concept ‘queer’ useful in moving our understanding from a derogatory concept to seeing it as empowering and community-building.

## **1.2 Motivation for the Study**

My motivation for conducting this study was, therefore, both personal and political. On a personal level, I have first-hand experience of some of the ways in which teachers and learners

treat queer learners in schools. From my experience as an African queer learner, there was nothing more terrifying than the start of every school day. Going to the toilet during class time because it was ‘less’ dangerous than break time, avoiding certain teachers, and only speaking when I was spoken to, were some of the strategies I employed to avoid being called derogatory names. As a queer learner at school, my experiences included being verbally harassed while walking down the corridor, being locked inside the toilet, or punched, kicked or even spat on, having my pants pulled down to see if I had a vagina or penis or both. In class, to try and avoid being visible to my tormentors, including male teachers who would mock me for not having a girlfriend and say that this made me stupid, I resorted to avoiding answering and asking questions and making a comment in class.

I was not the only one going through such experiences and when considering the experiences of other queer learners in my school, I consider myself one of the lucky ones. For example, a mother of a Grade 12 boy in my school came to the school to ask the principal to make her son an ‘*Indoda yakwa Zulu yangempela*’ (a ‘proper Zulu man’). She said her son had the body of a woman and behaved like a woman. As a result, this learner was forced to run/jog around uMlazi while the principal followed behind him in his car. Additionally, he was forced to join the rugby team and to change from the humanities stream where he had been pursuing home economics studies to the science stream (which was regarded as more masculine).

Things were no different at home. For example, as a single parent, my mother, who was very religious, also called queer identity into question. This meant that my sexuality and my experiences of homophobic violence from teachers and other learners were never spoken about at home. Instead, my mother and older siblings explicitly encouraged me to be a soccer player, and like all the boys in the neighbourhood, to play with other boys and not girls, and to watch soccer matches on the television.

The various acts of marginalization and discrimination against queer learners like myself were informed by religious beliefs and cultural norms and values in the community and school. Their impact on my schooling was highly negative. I could not speak out about the violence I was experiencing at school to my family. This meant the violence went unaddressed. For the longest time, I did not trust myself, my ideas, and my thoughts within the classroom environment. I found it difficult to understand what I was taught but could not tell anybody that I did not understand. In some instances, during lessons, I would tune out of the classroom, and my thoughts would wander to issues not related to what we were being taught. This meant that forming friendships and developing a sense of belonging was challenging. Throughout my schooling years, I was not able to form any lasting friendships as these usually broke up when my sexual orientation was brought into question. Thus, most of my school life was spent alone. This further impacted my grades. I did not perform to the best of my ability. I remember some teachers writing that I had great potential on my report card and watching each year pass without fulfilling this potential.

It is from these experiences and others that this research was conceptualized. The study is not only a personal life-long project but also a political one premised on principles of social justice. For example, the South African Constitution (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996) provides explicit protections to all South Africans from all forms of discrimination, including that based on sexual orientation. Within this policy context, scholars such as Brown (2016), Mayeza and Vincent (2019), and Young, Moodley and Macleod (2019), emphasize that teachers have a particularly significant role to play in not just addressing issues of queerphobia in schools, but also in making schools safe places for all learners. Sadly, existing research and my own experiences suggest that this is not the role that many teachers currently play. Instead of challenging discrimination against queer learners (and teachers), and creating spaces of

freedom at school for all, teachers tend to be active and/or complicit in the perpetuation of discrimination and violence based on sexual orientation.

So, why a study on the experiences of queer African learners in township schools? The first reason is that little is known about queer African youth, particularly from the perspectives of this group themselves (Francis, 2017a). Beyond some attention in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for Life Orientation (LO) and the teacher-training curriculum, very little attention is paid to the experiences of queer learners in schools and often queerness is conceptualized as a problem or challenge to be addressed (Francis, 2017a). Research and interventions, including the curriculum, have generally left queer African youth in schools out of the conversations about naming the problem. To date, only a few studies focus on the voices of queer African youth. The few exceptions include the works of Francis (2017a), McAllister (2015) and Msibi (2012). This study aimed to unsilence queer African youth voices and experiences in secondary township schools; facilitate their agency to share, understand and critique their experiences within schooling institutions; and draw from them and their experiences to identify what needs to change to make their schooling experiences safer and more productive. This study, therefore, aimed to focus on how queer African youth experience and respond to their township schooling experiences and how they resist violence and marginalization in these contexts.

### **1.3 Context of the Study**

Literature suggests that queer learners experience marginalisation and victimisation from peers, teachers and other stakeholders in and around the school (Butler et al., 2003; Francis & Reygan, 2016; Msibi, 2012; Richardson, 2008). In South Africa, few studies exist which focus on the experiences of queer youth in schools, and even fewer researchers have worked *with* this group in schools to understand and find solutions to their negative schooling experiences, particularly

in township schools. While South Africa has a progressive Constitution, which is non-discriminatory and condemns violence in all forms, queer youth in schools continue to be under constant, unrelenting threat of violence. These experiences notwithstanding, this study was based on my belief that while queer African youth in township schools experience extreme violence, many continue to draw on their agency to resist and challenge their marginalisation. Thus, the study was concerned with the nature of the agency and the lives of queer African youth in such a context.

### *1.3.1 Policy Context*

As discussed above, the marginalisation of queer youth in schools happens despite South Africa's progressive policy environment. Thus, understanding the schooling experiences of queer African youth in township schools requires an analysis of the policy context in which their schooling exists. First, South African education policies are informed by a human rights-based Constitution, with, for example, the Equality Clause Sections 9(3) and 9(4), prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation. Specifically, the South African Schools Act of 84 of 1996 (SASA), Section 5(1) *Admissions to public schools*, mandates that any learner must be admitted to and served without unfair discrimination. This means that queer youth, like all learners, are protected against any unfair discrimination, including violence based on their sexual orientation.

Beyond the SASA, the *White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an inclusive education and training system* (Department of Education, 2001) (hereafter referred to as White Paper 6) mandates the inclusion of all learners regardless of "age, gender, ethnicity, language, class, disability or HIV status" (p. 16). The policy does not explicitly identify sexual orientation as a category. While this might indicate a disconnect between what is constitutionally guaranteed for queer youth in South Africa and what they find in education policies (Francis,

2017b), the policy also mandates schools to provide education that is inclusive of all learners. It is within this framework that the study reported in this dissertation sought to understand the experiences of queer African youth in secondary schools.

### *1.3.2 Violence in Townships and Township Schools*

This study was conducted with youth enrolled in some of the schools in KwaMashu Township near the city of Durban. KwaMashu is part of the largest metropolitan municipality in the province of KwaZulu-Natal (StatsSA, 2016). The eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality recorded a growing population of 3 702 231 (StatsSA, 2016). In the 2011 national census conducted by Statistics South Africa (StatsSA), KwaMashu was considered one of the largest townships in South Africa with a population of 175,663 (Stats SA, 2011). According to this census, KwaMashu, a township where 99.4% of the population is African, is characterised by high rates of unemployment and poverty, with just 22% of households reporting having an income. 44.3% of the population report residing in female-headed households and 40% of the population have completed high school. Just 9.5% of the population of KwaMashu have accessed higher education and 63.2% of the population has no access to the internet. (StatsSA, 2011).

The bleak picture for KwaMashu Township is exacerbated by a national context where public schools, the majority of which are in townships, also reflect this socio-economic and violent context. This means that they are poorly resourced in terms of infrastructure and teaching and learning resources, are often staffed with poorly trained or poorly motivated teachers and immersed in violence (Coetzee, 2014; Le Roux & Mokhele, 2011; Msila, 2005; Zoch, 2015). As a result, the schools perform poorly in national and international examinations. For example, the 2015 TIMSS report showed that 17 % of 12 514 Grade 9 learners who participated and

were not bullied performed better in mathematics and science than learners who were bullied (Reddy et al., 2016). Linked to the socio-economic context, available evidence suggests that townships, and in turn, schools therein, are not spared (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013). In particular, two decades ago, Harber and Muthukrishna (2000) argued that “townships are regularly prey to gangsterism. Poverty, unemployment, rural-urban drift, the availability of guns and general legacy of violence has created a context where gangsters rob schools and kill and rape teachers and students in the process” (p. 424). Sadly, this violence continues unabated and even seems to have intensified.

In recent years, scholars have investigated the prevalence of sexual and gender violence in South Africa, particularly amongst adolescents and young people. These studies have found disturbingly high rates of young people who have experienced some form of sexual violence in their lives (Artz et al., 2016; StatsSA, 2021). Some scholars have referred to such violence as an ‘epidemic’ that requires serious attention (Moletsane, Mitchell & Lewin, 2015; Ngidi et al., 2018). While girls and women tend to experience higher rates of violence than their male counterparts, however emerging research suggests that boys are also becoming victims (Ngidi & Moletsane, 2018; Artz et al., 2016).

Adolescents generally, and girls in particular, have experienced many forms of violence, including sexual violence. These include “sexual, physical, emotional or neglect... criminal victimisation or exposure to family or community violence” (Artz et al., 2016, p.11). For many scholars, the socio-economic context shapes the increase or decrease of the exposure to violence (Artz et al., 2016; Moletsane et al., 2015). For instance, living in overcrowded homes, “parental substance abuse [and] disability status of the child” increase exposure to sexual victimisation (Artz et al., 2016, p. 11). In contrast, a good parent-child relationship lowers the

risk of exposure to sexual victimisation, in particular for girls.

The effects of sexual victimisation on young people go beyond the physical. The Optimus study has reported on the strong links between sexual abuse and mental health, stating that “young people who reported having been sexually abused were more than twice as likely to report anxiety and depression and are three times as likely to report [Post-traumatic stress disorder] PTSD symptoms” (Artz et al., 2016, p.12). The effects also filter into school life. Twenty per cent of children abused by adults find it difficult to cope with schoolwork or attend school. Almost 30% of children who were “sexually abused by a known adult reported having injuries as a result of this abuse, although in turn, only a third of those injured actually sought assistance” (Artz et al., 2016, p.12). While fewer children who had been abused by an unknown adult were injured, they were far more likely to seek medical assistance (Artz et al., 2016, p.12). According to this study, in terms of reporting, girls (31%) reported cases of sexual abuse to authorities where the adult was a known person, while boys tended not to report cases of sexual abuse.

Amongst earlier studies into school violence in South African schools, Harber’s (2001) study, which documented a project addressing violence in two schools, is worth noting. From this study, a crime survey conducted in the two schools found that in one school (550 participants), 51% of the learners feared the journey to school, while 23% experienced actual bullying and were threatened, and 13% were assaulted, 34% were robbed, 17% verbally abused and 4% experienced sexual abuse. In the second school (279 participants), 37% of the learners feared the journey to and from school, 33% experienced bullying and being threatened, 13% were physically assaulted, 11% were sexually assaulted, 44% were robbed and 28% experienced verbal abuse.

More recently, in a study conducted in 2013 (Burton, & Leoschut, 2013), which involved 5 939



learner participants, 121 principals and 239 educators, learners reported being threatened by someone in school (12.2%), assaulted (6.3%), sexually assaulted or raped (4%) and robbed (4.5%). Perpetrators included teachers with more than 25% of reports identifying them as responsible for verbal violence and more than 10% of physical violence. Learners feared being in certain areas of the school with toilets (53.9%) being the most dangerous place for them. The study also captured family and community violence, with 60.5% of the learners who were victims of violence at school reporting violence being a problem in their neighbourhood.

Locally, the South African Police Services (SAPS) statistics for the 2019 to 2020 period placed KwaZulu-Natal province as the murder capital of the country (4 859 murders, a 10% increase of the previous period) (SAPS, 2020). Inanda, one of the neighbouring townships of KwaMashu, is South Africa's rape capital for the second year in a row (SAPS, 2020). For the 2019-2020 period, Inanda registered 297 rape cases that were filed at the local police station (SAPS, 2020). Worryingly, all 30 of the gender-based violence (GBV) hotspots identified in this time period were in townships, including KwaMashu, Inanda and Ntuzuma (Zuzile, 2020). This places the schools in these townships at the epicentre of violence. What is not visible in the statistics from SAPS is queerphobic violence. A 2016 OUT LGBT Well-being survey (involving 1165 queer persons) revealed that while some participants (40%) were comfortable in being 'out,' the majority (55%) feared being discriminated against based on their gender identity, expression and sexual orientation, while 56% experienced discrimination while in school, and 55 % experienced verbal abuse.

Violence at school continues to impact the education system negatively. For example, the 2015 TIMSS report showed that 17% of 12 514 Grade 9 learners who participated experienced bullying every week. This impacted negatively on learner's performance in Mathematics and Science. In these two critical subjects, learners who had not experienced bullying performed

above 60 per cent more in Mathematics and 90 per cent more in Science (Reddy et al., 2016). Thus, as discussed above, despite constitutional protections, queerphobic violence has been a part of post-1994 South African society. Schools, communities and institutions of higher learning have experienced the ever-widening gap between constitutional protection and equal citizenship for queer Africans (Bhana, 2014; Msibi, 2012; OUT LGBT-Wellbeing, 2016; Richardson, 2008; Tucker, 2009; Tshilongo & Rothman, 2019).

This dissertation takes as its starting point the notion that the purpose of doing research is not only to address the research questions posed, but also to challenge (as the first step towards stimulating change) the status quo. In this study, my aim was to understand the experiences of queer learners and to use the emerging understandings to inform interventions geared towards more inclusive and less violent cultures in township schools.

This study is also grounded on the understanding that although queerphobic violence is rife in township schools, and queer youth are often positioned exclusively as victims, many have been able to draw on and enact their agency to resist and challenge their marginalisation. Thus, the study aimed to explore and how queer learners exercise their agency to resist their discrimination and marginalisation in schools.

#### **1.4 Research Aims and Questions**

In this study, I examine the schooling experiences of queer African youth in township schools in Durban. As discussed above, emerging research suggests that, as a group, queer African youth continue to experience discrimination, stigma and violence in and around their schools (Francis 2017a). For example, parents, teachers, learners and school managers participate in violence and discrimination in schools against queer youth (Bhana, 2014; Msibi 2012). In a school environment where such violence and discrimination are predominant, queer youth tend

to be marginalised, surveilled and policed. As a result, they constantly feel powerless, often experience suicidal thoughts and may even drop out of school (Butler et al., 2003; Human Rights Watch, 2011; Langa, 2015; Lalbahadur, 2018; McArthur, 2015). In some instances, queer learners hide their feelings of hurt from queerphobic bullying, developing ‘a thick skin,’ and not letting queerphobic comments and violence bother them (McArthur 2015; Msibi, 2012). Available research also suggests that despite this violence and marginalisation, some queer youth seem to deploy their agency to contest and challenge their marginalization (Francis, 2017b; Msibi, 2012). Thus, the aim of the study reported in this dissertation was three-fold: 1) to understand the experiences of queer African youth in township schools; 2) to explore how they draw on their agency in 'speaking against' discrimination from their peers and teachers in their schools; and 3) to identify what they feel needs to change in township schools to better support their education. The main research question of this study was: *How do queer African youth experience, respond to and resist negative experiences in township secondary schools?* To address this question, the study posed the following critical questions:

1. What does it mean to be a queer African youth in a township secondary school?
2. How do queer African youth respond to and resist their negative experiences with peers and teachers?
3. What changes do queer African youth want to see in their township secondary school?

In addressing these questions, the aim was to document the current lived experiences of violence and discrimination among queer African youth in township schools and their response and resistance to it.

Focusing on the lived experiences of queer African youth in these contexts, through having meaningful engagements as equal partners in a research process which recognizes these learners as agents in and experts on their own lives and context, we may learn more from and

with them. This may contribute to a better understanding of their experiences and the ways in which schools function to maintain queerphobic violence, gender policing and discrimination through their policies and practices, curriculum, staff, and school cultures.

### **1.5 Overview of Theoretical Framework**

The study in this dissertation used queer theory as a theoretical lens for analysing data. Contemporary understandings of queer theory include Calafell and Nakayama's (2017) assertions that it is

... a perspective that scholars take in order to better understand both how we conceptualize sexualities and how to change them. Queer theory ... can be useful for understanding gay, lesbian, and bisexual lives. Queer theory begins from the notion that identities are not destiny; our identities do not determine who we are, who we become, or how we view the world. Instead, identities are constituted and constructed in order to meet particular goals. In this sense, queer theorists have paid much attention to what is considered normative, as well as to how and why people sometimes resist normativity.” (p.1)

Building on this understanding, queer theory is deeply critically invested in the personal lives of queer people, making it subjective and anti-postpositivist in social theory (Grzanka, 2019). Queer theory has also been used in the education system to inform the teaching of sexuality (Morris, 2000), but also as a way in which to understand and address violence in schools (Meyer, 2012) and as a pedagogy (Quinlivan & Town, 1999). In this study, queer theory is used to analyse how queer African youth understand their schooling experiences and how they resist and respond to queerphobic violence and discrimination in township educational contexts (Chapter Three focuses on the theoretical framework used in this study in more detail).

## **1.6 Overview of the Methodological Approach**

This study is located within the constructivist paradigm. In the constructivism paradigm, “individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 24). Aligned with this understanding, this study aimed to understand, from the perspectives of queer African learners, their experiences of inequality in and around township secondary schools. Furthermore, the constructivist paradigm regards knowledge as co-constructed through “interactions among investigator and respondents” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111). From this perspective, in this study, I was interested in how the participants, individually and together as a group, constructed knowledge about being queer in township schools. The study also aligned itself with aspects of the critical paradigm. From this perspective, the research aims to not only understand, but also to critique society and its structures, transform societies that are based on inequalities, and seek justice and emancipation for those who are disempowered in societies (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Informed by these paradigms, the study adopted Participatory Visual Methodology (PVM) as its methodological approach. PVM tends to operate at the local grassroots level – it is for communities. PVM enables a collaborative co-construction of new ways of understanding and experiencing the community (in this case, township secondary schools). PVM involves using visual, art-based methods and accessible technologies to reach the co-construction of knowledge and to develop action plans for new experiences that are imaged by community members. The visual methods include drawing, photovoice, cellphilm making, collage, action briefs and policy posters (Chapter Four discusses the research design and methodology in more detail).

## **1.7 Overview of Ethical Considerations**

What does it mean for queer African youth, who are in a township schooling context, to

participate in a research project? Here I thought about queer youth's visibility and vulnerability within and outside their schooling context. For example, some of the concerns were that my participants' visibility would be heightened because they participated in the study. The study had planned to use a school as a research site or the local community hall, but in my first encounter with the participants, a group of boys from the neighbourhood threatened one of the participants. It was clear that there was a real and present danger. This was resolved by moving the workshops away from the township to the university campus. A related concern was how I would use and archive the visual products to ensure that the participants had power over the produced visuals. For example, to ensure participant anonymity, their real names and the names of their schools are not used in this dissertation nor will they be used in any future publications. The visual products that they produced are kept safe within a hard drive and the participants were informed that they can contact me to say they would like their visual products to not be used after the study (Chapter Four presents the methodology used in the study in more detail).

## **1.8 Summary and Overview of the Dissertation**

The purpose of this chapter was to introduce the study. This introduction presented the background of the study, accounting for policy and socio-economic-educational context. The second part of the chapter discussed the focus and purpose of this study. This was followed by the rationale for the study, the aims of the study and research questions, and an overview of the theoretical framework and methodology. The chapter concludes with an overview of the dissertation in the form of a synthesis of each of the following chapters in this dissertation.

Chapter Two presents the review of literature, which begins with detailed conceptualisations of what and who is 'queer.' This is followed by a review of the literature on the experiences of queer youth in various parts of the world, their interactions with other members of the schooling community, and how policy within the school speaks to their experiences. The chapter

concludes with research on local experiences of queer African youth in schools. In Chapter Three, the theoretical framework is discussed. The theoretical framework is used not only to centre the queer African youth voice but also as means to think through the critical research questions within a township schooling context.

Chapter Four focuses on the research design and methodology used in the study. It locates the study within the constructivist and critical paradigms, discussing the key tenets and the characteristics of research located therein. The chapter then discusses PVM, which, linked to the paradigms, is used to address the research questions. Specifically, the chapter discusses and explains the use of drawings and cellphilms as strategies used to answer the research questions posed in the study. This is followed by the data analysis strategy, the ethical considerations, and strategies used to ensure rigour and trustworthiness in the study.

Chapter Five presents the findings from the study in response to the three critical questions posed in the study. The chapter captures the experiences of queer African youth in their township school setting. It is divided into three sections: 1) Being queer in a township secondary school; 2) Responding to and resisting queerphobic violence in and around school; and 3) What should change about the schooling experiences of queer African youth? Each section focuses on a particular question while still in conversation with other sections.

The concluding chapter, Chapter Six, discusses the findings and presents the implications of the study related to policy, practice and future research. The chapter then identifies and discusses the limitations of the research before concluding the dissertation.

The next chapter reviews relevant literature related to the study.

## CHAPTER TWO

# Understanding the Schooling Experiences of Queer Youth: A Review of the Literature

### 2.1 Introduction

The study reported in this dissertation aimed to understand the experiences of queer African youth and their resistance to marginalisation and violence in township schools. The main research question of this study was: *How do queer African youth experience, respond to, and resist negative experiences in township secondary schools?* To address this question, the study sought to address the following critical questions:

1. What does it mean to be a queer African youth in a township school?
2. How do they respond and resist their negative experiences from their peers and teachers?
3. What changes do queer African youth want to see in their township school?

In the previous chapter, I introduced the study and the dissertation. I began the introduction with the background to the study, accounting for the policy and socio-economic-educational context of schooling in South Africa. Next, the chapter discussed the rationale for the study. The aims and research questions followed this. The chapter concluded with an overview of each chapter of the dissertation. In this chapter, I review literature related to the research phenomenon in this study: The experiences of queer African youth in township schooling contexts. First, I review scholarship on the conceptualisation of queerness and queer youth, including discourses, policy and conceptual understandings and of queerness. Second, a review of international studies that examine the experiences of queer youth in schooling contexts is presented. The aim is to explore how queer youth interact with teachers and other learners in



the school context, the role of parents/guardians in communities and how queer youth respond to negative experiences. Thirdly, the literature review focuses on the South African context. Within this context, the review considers the policy framework, particularly the rights of queer people as enshrined in the South African Constitution and related legislation such as the South African Schools Act of 84, 1996. Fourthly, literature related to queer youth's experiences of marginalisation and violence in communities and schools, including their interaction with teachers and peers, is reviewed. Finally, the chapter reviews literature focusing on the agency of queer youth in the context of queerphobic violence in and around schools.

## **2.2 Conceptualising Queerness and Queer Youth**

In Chapter One I introduced my own queer identity. I described how my queerness, which continuously evolves, is unfixed and ever-changing. Understanding my own identity has led me to see definitions as informed by underlying principles of fixity, normativity, and boundedness, where 'what' or 'who' is defined becomes a fixed idea with little or no ability to change in definition beyond its boundaries (Kumashiro, 2002). Like Kumashiro (2002), I have come to see defining the other, those who are outside the norm, as a problematic task:

[A]fter all, identities and characteristics of groups are difficult to define, since the boundaries of groups are constantly shifting and contested, which means any attempt to describe a group can simultaneously function to prescribe what it means to belong to that group. (p. 38)

This has led me to seek knowledges about and understandings of queerness rather than *a* definition.

The term 'Queer' has had many meanings which continue to evolve. For example, Cregan (2012, p. 152) writes that in the 1920s, the word 'queer' meant odd or irregular and later became to "an insulting term for gay men." Subsequently, the term underwent some political

transformation, from vilification to empowerment (Cregan, 2012). First, the term has been used for identification, where ‘queer’ encompasses all sexualities that are outside of the supposed norm of heterosexuality. Second, it refers to the political practice or queering, which involves re-reading and disrupting heterosexual normality, thinking and practice. Third, the term refers to theory/academic praxis, where “its agenda is to show that queerness is and always has been present across time, space and cultures” (Cregan, 2012, p. 153).

In the same vein, Hall (2003) writes that the term ‘queer’ can be used in three forms: as an adjective, noun, or verb. Used as an adjective, the word ‘queer’ is unfixed and untethered. According to Hall (2003, p. 13), as an adjective, queer “means that there is no single word, no simple slot into which complex personalities, behaviours, desires, abilities, and ambitions can be placed.” As a noun, *being* queer means the presence/existence of someone who “desire[s] for same-sex experiences, a position outside of the normal trope of daily life that affords perspectives apart from the norm” (Dilley, 1999, p. 458). As Dilley (1999) contends, the political transformation of the word, ‘queer’ meant moving from the absence of heterosexuality (vilification), with those who are queer belonging to a group of marginalised people because of their sexual orientation, sexual desire and gender performance, to the presence of same-sex desire and performances that are not mainstream (empowerment). Finally, perspectives of ‘queer’ as a verb place existence, resistance, challenging and responding to the heteronormative world as involving agency – queer agency.

However, concerns have arisen about the conceptualisation of queer youth internationally. Talburt, Rofes, and Rasmussen (2004), for example, write that they “... have grave concerns about a range of policies and activities that are emerging internationally and that are intended to “protect” queer youth, create “safe” school cultures, and effectively divide “queer youth” from “straight youth.”” (p. 1). According to Talburt et al. (2004), such a conceptualisation of

queer youth does not capture the lived experiences of love, pleasure, friendship or agency. Instead, queer youth experiences are only read from a danger and victim script (Talbert, et al., 2004). Framing queerness within martyr-target-victim discourses shapes how queer youth understand themselves rather than how they wish to be understood (Rofes, 2004). Further:

Categorising queer youth as passive victims or normalising subjects obscures a more fructuous and complex dynamic of power and inequality through which youth negotiate their gender and sexuality across racial, national, class, ethnic, age and ability boundaries of desire and identification. The racialised politics of queer youth are both concealed and constituted in the universalising and oppositional terms of scientific discourses (Driver, 2008, p. 5).

Framing queer youth as victims and in danger “undermines queer youth agency” (Marshal, 2010, p. 67) in understanding their lived experiences and responding to and resisting the negative encounters therein. Significantly, it disconnects queer youth from their activism in such struggles as the HIV&AIDS pandemic, everyday discrimination, queerphobic violence and queer-phobic legislation.

Informed by the above understandings, I align my conceptualisation of the queer youth who participated in my study with Msibi’s (2012) positioning of

gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people under the 'category' of queer to escape labels of identification that tend to fix individuals. The use of queer is an attempt not to essentialise identification. This is in line with the queer theory, which sees identification as shifting and fluid. The use of queer also acknowledges the complexity of identification. (p. 516)

‘Placing’ participants in the queer ‘category’ leaves their sexual orientation, gender identity, and performance open to shifting and changing. In essence, the term ‘queer’ does not bound or

essentialise sexual desire, sexual identity, or gender performance. Instead, it allows an understanding of gender and sexual orientation that is not fixed (Francis 2017a; Jagose, 1996).

In sum, available literature suggests that identities are better left open-ended because they are constantly shifting and contested. As such, the term ‘queer’ remains unbounded, unfixed, plural and has been used in multiple ways that involve being reclaimed to include all non-normative sexualities and genders, and as a political tool for rethinking, acting against and disrupting heterosexual normality in all social institutions. Of relevance to the study reported in this dissertation is the conceptualisation of queer youth as victims without agency. Thinking of queer youth in this way foregrounds experiences of violence and ignores their positive lived experiences of being young and queer. In this study, I align myself with perspectives of queer youth as actors in their own lives, who have friends, love and desires within and outside of violence.

### **2.3 Experiences of Queer Youth in Schools: A Review of International Literature**

International studies point to the ever-present queerphobic violence in and around schools. In some cases, this is despite national and school queer-phobic policies. For example, to examine how homophobia was addressed in secondary schools in the United Kingdom, a study by Warwick and Aggleton (2014) found that national educational legislation and policy enabled teachers to address homophobia. However, the findings also suggest that some heterosexual learners pathologised some queer youth while accepting others, thereby constructing a hierarchy of the ‘ideal’ queer. Worryingly, homophobic acts were not considered harmful by teachers and learners, including homophobic teasing, cussing, and insulting.

In another study, Carlila (2020) examined how teachers taught an LGBTQ-inclusive education curriculum in primary schools in faith-based communities in the United Kingdom. The findings

show that teachers found legislation and policy, specifically the Equality Act of 2010, helpful and motivated to teach the inclusive curriculum. Furthermore, findings indicate that teachers started their teaching from an anti-bullying perspective and then moved on to the inclusive curriculum. This was seen as a strategy even though it had the potential to pathologise queer youth. Findings also show that teachers used their religious faith to be open to the curriculum and teaching it. Similarly, learners were open-minded to the inclusive curriculum. Schools became ‘accepting’ of queer youths and hosted pro-queer events at school, which involved the parents and the faith-based communities.

Ferfoljas’ (2013) review of the New South Wales Government Education policy on ‘homosexuality’ in schools found that LGBT youth are imagined as vulnerable and lacking. Because of its deficit discourse, the policy further entrenches the broader queer-as-deficit discourse by linking LGBT youth with HIV&AIDS. Further, the policy privileges gay boys/men and silences lesbians, and universalises LGBT youth's suicidality, entrenching the idea that all youth are prone to self-harm and suicide. The policy further silences the homophobia that takes place in primary schools. In addition, the policy lacks commitment or accountability from the department of education. According to Ferfolja (2013), while the government recommends that the policy be read in conjunction with other policies, such policies, like the Student Welfare Policy, do not include LGBT youth in their framework or address homophobia.

In a review of policies on gender and diversity in schools in five Southern African countries (Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland), Francis et al. (2019) found that school policies and cultures tended to “marginalize, silence and invisibilise gender and sexual minorities” (p. 20). The authors conclude that the policies and school cultures were a barrier to accessing education for non-normative genders and sexualities. Additionally, the authors argue

that being at the core of inclusive education, teachers need to be trained and educated on teaching gender and sexual diversity.

The findings from the literature reviewed in this section suggest that, firstly, despite policies aimed at addressing the issue, queerphobic violence, whether subtle or overt, is ever-present in schools in a variety of contexts. Secondly, educational policies rarely target queer children in primary schools. This neglects the queer child experience in the lower grades. Thirdly, educational policies and school cultures have worked together to deny queer youth access to education. Constructed from and based on a heteropatriarchal view of the school, largely by omission, educational policies and school cultures tend to marginalise, silence and make invisible diverse genders and sexual minorities in schools. For example, even where there are pro-queer educational policies they tend to not hold those in positions of authority in the education system and schools accountable. This omission tends to expose queer children and youth to marginalisation and violence in and around schools. For this reason, in this study, I wanted to understand how queer youth in township schools might experience this gap. The dissertation asks: *What changes do queer African youth want to see in their township school?*

### *2.3.1 The Role of Teachers*

Teachers have come under focus for how they relate to queer youth. Often, teachers seem to be at the centre of perpetuating queerphobic violence in school. In the United States of America (US), for example, Preston (2016) investigated sexuality educators' perspectives and actions against gender policing and queer-phobic bullying. Findings from the study suggested that teachers had essentialist and stereotypical understandings of sexuality. For example, by way of illustration, the author cites Tasha, a public-school teacher, who saw women as gatekeepers of sexuality. Tasha shamed a sexually active girl, referring to her as a 'slut.' Instead of affirming and providing safe and healthy ways for the girl to explore her sexuality, Tasha seemed to

rejoice in the pupil's feelings of shame. Further, while the participants in the study addressed bullying in schools, they tended to silence queer youth and to ignore queer-phobic victimisation. For example, citing the fact that she taught in a State with no formal social support structures for queer youth and opposed anti-bullying laws based on sexual orientation, Danna observed, "we don't have a lot of people that would be out as far as Homosexuality... [Students] make comments or jokes' about gays or lesbians. [Queer-phobic bullying is] probably not any major issue just right here in our community" (p. 29). This was despite teachers in this study feeling their schools had an open sexuality discourse.

In an Australian study that drew from a larger project called *Free2Be*, Ullman (2017) surveyed 704 same-sex attracted and gender diverse youth about their schools' gender climate. The findings suggest that teachers' positive attitudes towards gender diversity created an inclusive gender climate in schools and helped gender diverse youth create a sense of belonging in the schools. In a US study, Swanson and Gettinger (2016) examined teachers' attitudes, knowledge and behaviour towards supporting LGBT youth in schools. Teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and behaviour were assessed against three levels of school-based support structures for LGBT youth: Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA), the anti-bullying policy and LGBT teacher training. The study found that in schools with an active GSA, anti-bullying policy, and teacher training related to LGBT youth, most of the teachers thought it was important to support LGBT youth in schools, but only some provided that support.

The findings from the literature suggest that teachers are active participants in gender policing of learners and in perpetuating or turning a blind eye to queer-phobic bullying. The findings also suggest that teachers' positive attitudes towards gender diversity influence the school's gender climate and help to create a sense of belonging for gender diverse youth. Further, the existence of formal social support structures positively impacts teachers' attitudes, knowledge

and behaviour in relation to queer youth. These structures include social support (school clubs and societies), policy (school-based pro-queer policies and queer-phobic bullying policies), and continuous education and training for educators on queer issues.

### *2.3.2 The Role of Peers*

Available literature suggests that peers are central in the shaping of the educational experiences of queer youth in schools. Peers can be both perpetrators of violence against queer youth and their ‘allies.’ For example, Levesqu (2019) investigated the interactions amongst members of a high school GSA in the US. The study examined the intersection of and inequality produced within gender and sexual identities. The findings showed that within the GSA, ‘straight’ boys were absent. For example, Johnny, self-identified as gay, gave the following reason for this absence: “... because the girls...they won’t get bullied like the boys. Well, like if a boy goes, they’re going to tease him and be like, ‘Oh! He’s gay!’ but if a girl goes, they’ll say she’s a supporter” (Levesqu, 2019, p. 213). In the school’s coming-out event, the only boy in attendance as part of the GSA had a name tag with the sentence, ‘I am an ally but straight’ written on it. According to Levesqu (2019), the findings suggested that straight girls were privileged, not criticised about how they conducted their ally work and their heterosexual privilege remained unchecked. This led to some lesbian, bisexual and queer girls leaving the GSA. Further, the study found that assault and harassment were gendered and unequal. For example, Yvonne and Johnny, participants in the study, were drag queens in the school. While Yvonne was assaulted and harassed by administration staff and peers in the school, Johnny received support from peers and allies against the harassment perpetrated by the school administration.

Allen’s (2019) study examined how heterosexual students witness homophobia in two New Zealand secondary schools. The findings were that when heterosexual students name



homophobia, it did not trouble the ‘othering’ and ‘victimisation’ of queer youths. The findings further show that the victim/perpetrator binary was not neat and clearly defined. For example, some heterosexual students understood homophobia was wrong but also supported school policy that was homophobic while others intervened in homophobic incidents in support of queer youth.

In a Canadian study, Lapointe (2014) reported how members of some GSAs worked together to tackle “sex education, sexual health, prejudice and discrimination” in their schools (p. 707). The study focused on the participation of five members of different GSAs as a pathway to “learning about and challenging stereotypes; prejudice; and discrimination directed at lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) people” (Lapointe, 2014, p. 707). Four of the participants were straight allies, and one participant was gay. Findings from the study point to ways that straight allies can intervene with peers and teachers in challenging the silence of queer issues. For example, allies questioned teachers’ exclusion of LGBTQ content in the curriculum and their reinforcing myths about and pathologising of LGBTQ people, with some referring to AIDS as a gay disease. On the positive side, the GSA provided a space for heterosexual youth to learn how to support their queer friends and for one boy, who self-identified as gay, the GSA provided

positive, informative, and diverse accounts of sexuality... [where the boy has learnt that] not all gay people are into this whole you know promiscuous culture that people everyone seems to perceive them as ...there is no such thing as a decrease in AIDS if you are, have a different sexual preferences than other... homophobia hurts. (Lapointe, 2014, p. 713)

Finally, a 2016 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) report on experiences of violence in educational institutions in southern Africa (Botswana,

Lesotho and Namibia) found a high prevalence of school-related violence in the region. Specifically, the findings suggest that queer and gender non-conforming students were victims of violence. In incidents of violence, mainly older boys were the perpetrators, while young boys and girls were the victims.

The findings from the literature reviewed in this section suggest that, firstly, there is a lack of support from heterosexual male peers towards queer youth, where they feel the need to ‘come out’ as straight, especially when in the presence of queer youth and under other straight people’s gaze. Secondly, formal social support structures like the GSA, where queer youth and heterosexual allies came together, often became problematic spaces in which the latter’s privilege was taken for granted and they tended to dominate conversations in such spaces. This marginalised and silenced queer youth in spaces where they were supposed to be at the centre and share their experiences. However, for queer youth who were friends with the dominant allies in the GSA, more support and advocacy was provided. Further, formal social support structures could also be transformative spaces where, on the one hand, queer youth could be exposed to diverse forms of genders and sexualities and different forms of queerness while on the other, heterosexual allyship could be critiqued and exposed to content that has been omitted or distorted (such as the myth that HIV is a gay disease) in the school curriculum could be identified, discussed and critiqued.

### *2.3.3 The Role of Parents and Community*

The literature reviewed in this section suggests that stakeholders tend to explicitly and implicitly advance heterosexuality in schools, often denouncing queer youth and ensuring that school policies and practices remain heteronormative. For example, Shannon and Smith (2015) discuss how the Australian government and the public have perceived queer-affirming teaching and learning materials. The paper considers controversy and diversity concerning gender and

sexuality in general and two learning materials in particular, *Gayby Baby* and *All of Us*<sup>22</sup>. Interestingly, teachers were expected to create a learning environment that affirms all forms of diversity and that is directed at teaching sexuality education with sensitivity and cultural and religious diversity. This presented a contradiction in that the Ministry of Education banned the viewing of the *Gayby Baby* film during school hours. Religious leaders, parents and the media played an important role, with some going on a regional radio station to assert that “the school was trying to change people’s minds by promoting a gay agenda’ by promoting a political agenda in direct contradiction of the Department [of Education] guidelines” (p. 247). The Minister of Education also responded that “the government expects schools to remain apolitical places and that schools must comply with all departmental policies” (p. 247).

In their US study, Grossman et al. (2005) focused on parents’ reactions to their children’s transgender identities. The study found that most parents were already aware of their children’s identities. Half of the parents reacted negatively, while the other half reacted positively to their children’s transgender identities. The findings suggest that the more gender non-conforming a transgender youth was, according to a heterosexual logic, the higher their chances of experiencing physical and verbal abuse from their parents.

In sum, the findings from the literature reviewed in this section suggest that firstly, parents and community members tend to influence how queer youth are treated in schools. This includes overturning existing policy, programmes, and curricula that seek to affirm diverse genders and sexualities, with queer youth marginalised and their experiences silenced in schools. Secondly, while the findings suggest that some parents are aware of their children’s non-normative genders and sexual identities and even accept them, others are not as accepting, with some

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<sup>22</sup> *Gayby Baby* was a documentary which examined the experiences of children who have same-sex parents. *All of Us* was a teaching and learning tool kit that had short videos and class activities to help students understand the diversity of gender and sexuality and intersex experiences

queer youth experiencing rejection and physical and verbal abuse from parents.

## **2.4 Being queer in the South African Schooling System**

This section reviews literature focusing on 1) The South African policy framework, 2) Being queer in South African communities; 3) Silences in the curriculum, 4) Experiences of queer youth in South African schools; and 5) Negotiation of queerphobic violence in and around schools.

### *2.4.1 The South African Policy Framework*

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, through Chapter Two, the Bill of Rights, safeguards and protects the rights of individuals and groups, including queer people, to equality. Specifically, Section 9(3) of the Constitution states that:

The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, *sexual orientation* [my own emphasis], age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth. (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, p. 6).

Informed by the rights-based Constitution, Section 5(1) of the South African Schools Act no. 84 of 1996, *Admissions to Public Schools*, stipulates that “a public school must admit learners and serve their educational requirements without unfairly discriminating in any way” (p. b-5). In particular, the preamble to the Act states that schools should “lay a strong foundation for the development of all our people's talent and capabilities, advance the democratic transformation of society, combat racism and sexism and all other forms of unfair discrimination and intolerance... uphold the rights of all learners...” (South African Schools Act no 84 of 1996, pp. 3-4). In other words, no learner, queer or otherwise, may be unfairly discriminated against.

While the above suggests that the South African national policy framework ensures the human rights of all people, including queer people, in the sections below, I review literature related to the question: *How is this framework reflected in school policies and programmes, and queer youth's experiences in schools?*

#### *2.4.2 Being Queer in South African Communities*

Early literature in post-1994 South Africa describes how, despite a rights-based Constitution and policy framework, queer people continue to experience discrimination, harassment and violence based on their sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. For example, Kowen and Davis (2006) examined the everyday experiences of lesbian youth in Cape Town. The study found that lesbian youth experienced homophobic isolation and marginalisation from family, school and community. Friendships were central for lesbian youth's coping with homophobia and developing positive self-identities. For example, a participant shared how they

only have my friends. They are straight, but they understand. They help me along financially as they do work. They are encouraged by the fact that I look for work every day. When there is no food, there is none for all. (Kowen & Davis, 2006, p. 11)

Mkhize et al. (2010) reported on a Roundtable discussion involving civil society, government, activists, community leaders, researchers and academics held in 2006. The roundtable discussion occurred within the 16 days of Activism: No Violence Against Women<sup>3</sup> to challenge the heterocentric perspective of the initiative as it left out the LGBTQ community, and particularly black lesbians. The roundtable reflected on the GBV, hate crimes and hate speech experienced by lesbians within the context of a progressive Constitution.

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<sup>3</sup> This 16 Days as it is known "is an annual campaign marked by many activities around the world to raise awareness of and gender-based violence in communities" (p. ix).

In another report, Human Rights Watch (2011) examined the experiences of black lesbians, transgender men and gender non-conforming people. The findings showed widespread experiences of discrimination, harassment, and violence in various spaces including homes, churches, schools, workplaces, and on sidewalks. The violence took many forms, including verbal, physical, emotional and sexual configurations. Further, the participants who were largely socio-economically disadvantaged experienced heightened vulnerability to violence than their privileged counterparts. The participants highlighted how unequal genders norms that dominate culture and society produce adverse and sometimes deadly effects for queer people, such as not finishing school, being unemployed and being homeless.

There has been a growing interest in studies that focus more directly on the daily intersecting experiences of queer people and other identities (Richardson, 2006). For example, in their study Mann (2018), found that after-parties during Cape Town Pride demanded patrons not to wear open shoes, or have their hair gelled or coiffed and to wear marked American- or European-style clothing. Black and coloured gay men in Cape Town's gay village, De Waterkant, saw these demands as means to exclude, where 'no effort' resulted in 'no entry.' These demands or requirements meant that to gain access, black and coloured gay men had to assimilate through 'making it', including having a home and working in Cape Town, being visible as one who can afford life in De Waterkant, and being financially independent. Some gay men chose not to assimilate but still find an entry, while others made their own nightlife spaces in the townships, where anyone could attend.

In their study, Maotoana, Govender and Nel (2019) focused on black lesbians' social and emotional experiences in Seshego Township. The findings revealed that black lesbians experienced GBV from known (family members) and unknown (strangers) perpetrators. In

addition, participants reported turning to alcohol and other substances as coping mechanisms. According to the participants, discrimination and stigma occurred in many community spaces, from the church to home, enacted by community members. In addition, black lesbians were vulnerable to attempting, thinking about or committing suicide. This was because of the inadequate mental healthcare facilities and resources in the area. Other factors included the lack of emotional support from families and society.

In sum, some lesbian youth experience homophobic isolation and marginalisation from families, schools and communities. Black lesbians, in particular, are excluded from activist movements and national campaigns against GBV. Organs of the State do not record violence perpetrated against lesbians based on sexual orientation, gender identity or performance. The media reports and represents black lesbians as only victims of violence. Further, communities are not spaces of freedom for black lesbians, transgender persons, gender-nonconforming individuals and queer people in general. This lack of freedom extends to and from homes, churches, schools, workplaces and even pavements. Experiences of violence and discrimination exclude queer people from participating equally in society, politics, education, culture and the economy. Because of the negative experiences which continue unabated, some queer people turn to self-harm, suicide and drugs as means of coping with the queerphobic violence. In this harsh reality, there are no adequate mental healthcare facilities and workers that target queer people.

#### *2.4.3 Silences in the Curriculum*

The Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) mandates the LO curriculum in the senior phase (grades 7 to 9) and further education and training phase (FET) (grades 10 to 12) to address matters of diversity and sexuality. LO, for example, covers such topics as: “1) Development of the self in society, 2) Health, social and environmental responsibility, 3)

Constitutional rights and responsibilities, 4) Physical Education & 5) World of work” (Department of Basic Education, 2011, p. 8). The curriculum covers matters concerning sexuality under the topic of *Development of the self in society*, while diversity is addressed under the topic of *Democracy and human rights* in both phases. The FET phase has an additional topic, study skills.

However, available literature suggests a gap in the visibility and representation of queer youth in teaching materials and practice. For example, Potgieter and Reygan’s (2012) study reports inconsistencies in LO textbooks, where, in some, the lives of queer people are present, and in others, they are erased and invisible. In the few textbooks that featured diverse sexualities, gay identities were privileged over others. Further, when they are featured, gay and lesbian experiences have only been visible in the LO curriculum. For instance, queer rights activists such as Simon Nkoli, Zackie Achmat, Funeka Soldaat and Bev Ditsie, some of whom were also involved in the apartheid struggle, are not part of the history curriculum. This erasure of the contribution of queer people to the building of South Africa’s democracy and linking gay identities to LO further pathologises them and is reflected in queer existence in post-apartheid South Africa schools.

Nzimande (2015) writes that as a heterosexual, married Christian and African woman, she had to reflect on her own social identities when confronted with teaching pre-service teachers LGBTI content at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. By reflecting on the social identities and the relationships she had with LGBTI issues, Nzimande (2015) concluded that LGBTI content caused internal tensions and challenged her thinking. The internal tensions caused her to transform her thinking. At the centre of the internal tensions, Nzimande (2015) names the fear that teacher-educators have which causes them to hesitate about teaching LGBTI content to pre-service educators.



The lack of or poor representation of queer people, including youth, in the research literature and popular media is also a challenge. This is because queer people are made invisible, without lives, relations and community. They appear as non-citizens and queerness is regarded as unAfrican and therefore, not worthy of teaching in the curriculum. This underscores the investment in hate and violence. For example, in her writing on the experiences of black lesbians, Matebeni (2008) argues that South African scholarship is a “terrain rarely focused on [the black lesbian], the terrain that has contributed to our invisibility as black lesbians, disregarding our lives and our experiences” (p. 89). To address this, Matebeni recommends research about queer people by queer people. This, she argues, is likely to make possible research that looks beyond the violence and sees a queer subject with agency. In turn, this would enable learning about oneself and show the complex dynamics of power relations between the researcher and participant.

In literary studies, Andrews (2019, p. 3) writes that “queer literature by black authors or the representation of black, queer characters is still rare, even in the post-apartheid milieu.” Andrews attributes this to the notion that queerness is unAfrican, a discourse that silences not only queer people but also erases their existence in society. A few exceptions include K. Sello Duiker's novel *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2002), regarded as a pioneering work on queer black literature, as well as the works of Fred Khumalo, Zukiswa Wanner, and Chwayita Ngamlana<sup>4</sup>, which show black queer bodies negotiating belonging and visibility through their cultural and racial identities (Andrews, 2019).

Scholars have also identified race and class as factors that exacerbate the under or lack of representation of black queer people in research and literature. For example, Reygan (2016)

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, “Fred Khumalo’s *Seven Steps to Heaven* (2007), Zukiswa Wanner’s *Men of the South* (2010), and Chwayita Ngamlana’s novel *If I Stay Right Here* (2017)” (Andrews, 2019, p. 2)

examines how LGBTI people are represented in Cape Town's gay media. His findings included how written texts (editorial and commentary pages) differed from the visual texts (images representing gay life). For Reygan (2016), the written texts tended to focus on human rights, sexual and social justice and equality for LGBT people, while the visual texts made visible primarily young, white, gay, masculine, and middle-class men. This left out black lesbian township experiences and their struggles. The findings further show how ordinary images of day-to-day living were dominated by whiteness, where white, young, gay, masculine and middle-class identities became the norm.

The third area of research in the South African context focuses on the representation and exclusion or inclusion of queer issues in the school curriculum. For example, Ngabaza, Shefer and Macloud's (2016) study focused on learners, principals and LO teachers in examining how the teaching of sexuality education is aligned with the goals of gender justice. The findings suggest that the principles of sexuality education are often not aligned with community values. For instance, patriarchal gender roles which place girls in submissive roles go against the gender justice goals of sexuality education. The findings also show that while principals are pro-gender equality and challenge hegemonic masculinities, learners' experiences of the teaching of sexuality education indicate that gender justice goals are substituted for and promote heterosexual masculine patriarchal gender roles. In addition, teachers tend to use fear and the threat of negative consequences to police and regulate sexuality, especially with girls. They also tend to put responsibility for sexual and reproductive health on girls. In this scenario, learners' experiences and sexual agency are not recognised or acknowledged.

Exacerbating this erasure is the fact that research suggests that some teachers are often unwilling to teach about queer experiences. For example, in their study focusing on how LO

teachers teach, understand and see the relevance of sexuality education, DePalma and Francis (2014) found that teachers had no clear school policy to refer to in the teaching of sexual diversity. Of the 25 LO teachers in their study, nine reported that they did not teach about sexual diversity. Those who claimed to teach about sexuality education could not clearly articulate the content, and instead diverted their teaching to other topics like HIV. A teacher even commented that the discussion on sexual diversity is driven by the questions from the learners and not what they plan to teach. Furthermore, the LO teachers in the study conflated sexuality and gender with sex. For instance, according to them, lesbians must be masculine and gay boys be feminine. Additionally, LO teachers found the term sexual diversity strange. LO teachers were familiar with mainstream terms such as lesbian or gay. Worryingly, largely based on their Christian beliefs, some LO teachers did not include sexual diversity in their teaching of LO because “[t]he way I was raised as an individual, or as a person: I only knew of the man and the woman. Nothing in between.” (DePalma & Francis, 2014, p. 1697)

In another study, Mayeza and Vincent (2019) investigated how sexuality education is taught from the perspectives of male and female learners. The study had two major findings. Firstly, participants shared how sexuality education is still taught from a “gendered, heteronormative and moralistic approach” (Mayeza & Vincent, 2019, p. 472). For instance, female and male learners reported being taught that girls have to “preserve their ‘virginity until marriage’, while male learners were not taught to “abstain or preserve their sexual innocence” (Mayeza & Vincent, 2019, p. 478). Secondly, the findings found a disconnect between what was on the LO curriculum about sexuality education and what teachers were actually teaching. Teachers tend to advance heterosexuality with little or no mention of diverse genders and sexualities. For example, Rose, a learner participant, asserted that while they wish to understand more about their gay and lesbian peers’ lives, they “hardly talk about that in [our LO] class. It’s always

about boy-girl relationships...” (Mayeza & Vincent, 2019, p. 479). Another participant shared how their LO teacher “said it is not natural to be gay or lesbian... not normal . . . and God doesn’t like it [homosexuality]” (Mayeza & Vincent, 2019, p. 479).

Francis and Reygan (2016a) maintain that while South Africa remains unmatched in its progressive constitution concerning LGBT rights worldwide from a legal standpoint, in contradiction with the Constitution, the rights of individuals and groups continue to be grossly violated. Agreeing with the sentiment, Nel and Judge (2008, p. 19) argue that “homophobic victimisation is an endemic part of the South African landscape.” Similarly, Francis’ (2017a) literature review examines the experiences of queer youth in South African schools, and the ways schools attend to gender and sexuality diversity. The findings suggest that “South African schools are heterosexist” (Francis, 2017a, p. 13) and one of the epicentres of compulsory heterosexuality and heteronormativity. The school curriculum, pedagogy, and school culture are tools used to ensure compulsory heterosexuality. In this sense, gender and sexuality expectations operate within a patriarchal, heterosexual, masculinist framework.

Scholars have recommended strategies to address this. For example, Francis (2010) argues that learning about and fully grasping sexuality education means learning from all life experiences. This means that the experiences that teachers have about sex, including the relationship they have with alcohol, sexual health, and communication in relationships must inform their curriculum planning. From this perspective, in his desktop study, Francis (2010, p. 314) concluded that sex education should be broadened beyond disease and danger to include desire. In addition, the review also found that learners should be engaged as ‘knowers’ and not as ‘innocent’ concerning sex education. For this approach to work, teachers must know the content, use adolescent-friendly pedagogies, and openly discuss learners’ challenges and life experiences in learning about HIV&AIDS and sex education in schools. From these findings

Francis argues “for an approach that recognises both context and student perceptions of need” (Francis, 2010, p. 318). For him, this curriculum will ensure that the experiences of queer youth are acknowledged alongside those of other learners in the school. In the context of the taboo surrounding sex and HIV&AIDS education, however, such openness and inclusivity may not be easy to achieve. In this vein, Potgieter and Reygan’s (2012) study (cited above), opens up conversations about how the curriculum generally and the LO textbooks in particular, need to be more inclusive of the experiences of all people in South Africa and learners in schools, including all racial, social class, gender, and sexual orientation backgrounds.

The findings from this section suggest that while CAPS mandates the teaching of sexuality education in the LO curriculum specifically, teaching and learning support materials, including textbooks tend to either ignore queer issues and when they do cover them, they mostly privilege gay identities. With a few exceptions, this erasure of queer identities is also reflected in media, research and literature. Furthermore, parents and communities influence how sexuality education is taught in schools. For example, due in part to no clear policy direction, lack of adequate training and education of teachers and little to no support from school management, teachers tend to draw on community values in their teaching of sexuality education.

To address these issues, scholars argue that teachers must start with their lived experiences about sexuality and gender diversity, and from this vantage point, listen to the experiences of their learners. This means that teachers must be adequately trained to teach sexuality education.

#### *2.4.4 Experiences of Queer Youth in South African Schools*

As discussed above, available literature suggests that in the schooling context, queer youth are often made invisible and non-existent and their life experiences are ignored or erased, including in the school curriculum. This is because teachers tend to be ill-prepared to teach about or

understand queer youth, or address queerphobia in schools (Johnson, 2014). This is linked to the lack of content about queer experiences in pre-service teacher education curricula. Furthermore, in some instances, some lecturers in pre-service teacher education felt ‘discomfort’ about teaching queer experiences to pre-service teachers. In addition, unequal social norms in the larger society and schools make queer youth vulnerable to marginalisation and violence.

Yet, literature on the experiences of queer youth in and around schools is scant. A large portion of an already small number of studies that focuses on queer youth fall within the discourse of martyr-target-victim (Rofes, 2004). Specifically, research about queer youth does not go beyond the discrimination, prejudice, marginalisation, and violence they experience in school or their communities. In addition, research is mainly populated by the voices of those who dominate queer youths’ lives. This further imprisons queer youth with the martyr-target-victim identity. For example, studies by Ratele et al. (2007), Bhana (2012; 2013; 2014a), Langa (2015) and Mostert, Gordon and Kriegler (2015) queer youth are only understood from the perspective of teachers, peers, parents, school management and are only constructed as martyr-target-victim. Langa (2015, p. 317) acknowledges that “another possible limitation of the findings was that the voices of ‘gay’ boys are not covered in this article.” While the studies do valuable work in uncovering how queerphobic violence in various forms (discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion) occurring in the schooling context, these occur without the queer voice.

Francis’ (2017b) work provides a complex conceptualisation of queer youth beyond the martyr-target-victim discourse. In this work, the struggles of queer youth are there, spoken about by queer youth themselves. In this study, there is love, desire, and friendship. The study examined the personal experiences of queer youth and placed them within the institutional cultures which

sustain compulsory heterosexuality. The personal experiences are further used to critique schools as institutions, not merely noting their violence.

Other studies have focused on the role of teachers and school managers in influencing queer youth experiences in schools. These studies suggest that South African teachers and school managers are not only tasked with educating young people but are also expected to provide care and protection for learners in their classrooms. However, teachers and school managers are often perpetrators of GBV, particularly queerphobic violence in particular. For example, Butler et al. (2003) examined the coming out stories of gay and lesbian youth in schools who reported experiencing “discrimination, isolation, and non-tolerance within their high school contexts” (p. 3). Homophobic harassment was perpetrated by teachers, school managers and school counsellors. The findings further suggest that lesbian and gay youth in the study felt “avoidance, rejection and isolation” and that the school curriculum was not inclusive of queer youth experiences (Butler et al., 2003, p. 3).

Similarly, in her study, Bhana (2014a) investigated how school managers managed the human rights of gay and lesbian youth in their schools and what it meant for them. The findings suggest that the Constitutional protection of queer people has not translated into everyday social protection. Instead, the findings show that queer rights are managed through and diluted by religion, culture and race. This produces adverse effects, including discrimination, sexual silencing and bullying. The findings suggest that Christianity, African traditions, racial, and gender constructions worked together and sometimes separately to constrain the rights of queer youth but, in some instances, were affirming of queer existence. For instance, a school manager, who identified as Christian, drew on the non-judgemental aspect of his religious values to inform his interactions with queer youth.

It is not only in public schools where homophobia thrives. For example, Mostert, Gordon and Kriegler (2015) investigated teachers' (N=43) perceptions of homophobia in two private secondary schools in Johannesburg. Findings from the study suggest that some educators perceived homosexuality as a choice, while others saw it as biological. These understandings tended to raise unnecessary debates, overshadowing the violence that queer youth experienced. In addition, some of the educators claimed that they regarded queer learners as not so different from other learners and treated them equally. However, in their analysis, Mostert, Gordon and Kriegler (2015) question this view and argue that this cannot happen in a context where "homophobia remains neither acknowledged nor addressed in policy and programmes" (p. 124). Of particular concern are the findings that involved educators claiming that they were unaware of any homophobic violence by learners towards their queer peers, while at the same time acknowledging that they "had witnessed bullying and intimidation, such as teasing, mocking, ridiculing and gay bashing" (p. 125). However, others confirmed that queer learners in their schools had experienced "emotional distress, identity struggles, and a poor self-concept" (Mostert, Gordon & Kriegler, 2015, p. 125).

In an attempt to make the discrimination, harassment and violence faced in South African schools visible, several studies have explicitly focused on the experiences of queer youth. For example, a study conducted by the Gay and Lesbian Network (2011) focused on homophobia in seven Pietermaritzburg schools, with 1 301 grade 10 learners 50.96% of which were male. The study found that lesbian and gay learners experienced verbal violence as the highest form of homophobic aggression in the schools, followed by physical and sexual violence. The main perpetrators of the violence against gay and lesbian learners included peers (65%), teachers (22%) and principals (9%).



At the national level, the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention in 2012 examined the ever-presence of violence in South African schools. The study involved learners (5 939), principals (121) and teachers (239). The findings indicate that learners had been threatened (12.2%), assaulted (6.3%), sexually assaulted (4.7%) and robbed of their belongings (4.5%) inside the school.

The OUTLGBT Well-being (2016) survey focused on understanding the level of discrimination that LGBT individual's experience in social institutions, among them schools. These understandings were further used as “tools to inform practical solutions in addressing the issues faced by LGBT persons living in South Africa” (OUT LGBT Well-being, 2016, p. 1). The study involved 2 130 participants, the majority of whom identified as gay (1165), followed by lesbians (687), transgender (285) and bisexual (216). Participants were also diverse in their age and race, ranging from 16 to 55 and above. 63% of the participants were aged between 16 and 29. First, the findings suggest that 3% of the participants had not told anyone of the nature of their sexual orientation or gender identity, while 40% felt comfortable having at least some people know. Along racial lines, white individuals were the most open about their sexual orientation (74%). Fewer black individuals (51%) were open about their sexual orientation and gender identity. Second, 55% of the participants reported experiencing fear of discrimination due to sexual orientation, gender and identity. Third, participants had experienced verbal assault (55%); were threatened with physical violence (51); had things being thrown at them (34%); had their personal property or possessions damaged or destroyed (33%); experienced direct physical assault (26%); and sexual abuse and rape in school (15%).

In their study, Francis and Reygan (2016b) examined microaggression towards LGBT youth from LO teachers in rural and urban schools in the Free State province. The findings identified heterosexism, the dominance of heterosexual norms, discomfort with and the disapproval of

LGBT lives with notions of culture and religion, used to justify the various forms of microaggression in these schools. For instance, teachers used binary constructions and othering, separating queer youth, naming them as ‘them’ or referring to queerness as ‘it’. This “dehumanised, depersonalised and stripped personhood from [queer youth]” (Francis & Reygan, 2016b, p. 186). Further, teachers tended to reduce and conflate sexual orientation, gender identity and sex, where being gay meant one is transgender or intersex and being gay or lesbian was understood as a mental illness.

In sum, the literature in this section suggests that queer youth’s interaction with teachers and school managers were problematic and tended to marginalise the former and expose them to violence, including microaggression which was laced with heterosexism, discomfort and disapproval of queer life. Specifically, the literature paints South African schools as sites of violence, including queerphobic violence, largely perpetrated by teachers and school managers. In these instances of violation, religion, culture and racial identity were used to deny queer youth access to their human rights.

The second group of studies focuses on the influence of peers on queer youth experiences in and around schools. For example, the literature reviewed in this dissertation suggests that the marginalization of queer youth in and around the school is partly linked to how their peers understand masculinity and femininity, and by implication, how they position queer learners. To illustrate, in their study involving boys aged 14-16 years from schools in the Western Cape, Ratele et al. (2007) investigated how the boys understood manhood or masculinity or what it means to be a boy and a man. The findings suggest that first, the boys referred to queer learners as “fake males” (p. 116). Explaining their stance, they stated that “we try to; we don’t like gays; at least we know everyone here [including the researchers] is straight” (Ratele et al., 2007, p. 117). What was clear from the supposed ‘straight’ boys was that staying clear of and not being

associated with the openly effeminate gay boys was very important. In this way, boys constructed their masculinity and boyhood in relation to how they constructed and othered gay boys and girls. Legitimate boyhood in this way is heterosexual and masculine, and opposite and superior to femininity. For the participants, boyhood and manhood meant “when you have a girlfriend” (Ratele et al., 2007, p. 117).

Langa (2015) examined the ways in which adolescent ‘straight’ boys made sense of gay boys and being gay. In this instance, the ‘straight’ boys perceived ‘gay’ negatively, and placed gay identification as lessor than heterosexuality. The boys saw being gay within pathologizing, religious and cultural anti-gay discourses. In relating to and acting out their thoughts and beliefs about gay identification, participants disassociated themselves with not only gay boys but also acts, clothing and even colours that were viewed as gay, such as pink.

In their ethnographic study, Mayeza (2016) investigated play amongst township primary school learners. The study paid attention to the ways in which “children construct gender boundaries and police gender transgressions” (Mayeza, 2016, p. 1). The findings suggest that play was gendered and policed, with one girl suggesting that girls were not allowed to play soccer: “They [other boys from my class] like to say to me that playing with girls is not allowed and I get very angry” (Mayeza, 2016, p. 8). Playing soccer, in this instance, was a maker of boyhood that marginalised girls. However, some transgressed the gendering and policing of play and because those who transgressed the gender boundary of soccer play were athletic, competent in soccer play, and performed masculine gender, they were “constructed in derogatory ways as ‘tomboys’” (Mayeza, 2016, p. 10). As one participant asserted, ‘tomboys’ were “[girls] trying to be boys, they speak in a strong voice and do wrong things like fighting, and they smoke too. They exercise a lot to make their muscles big and strong, they are tough girls” (Mayeza, 2016, p. 10). Furthermore, boys who spent most of their time with girls and did not participate in

soccer were also derogatorily categorized as 'gay.' Thus, the term gay was used to police boys, as 'tomboy' was used against girls.

This section has reviewed the literature on queer youth's interaction with peers in and around school. The findings suggest that queer youth experience marginalisation from their peers. For example, 'straight' boys tend to not consider queer boys as 'real boys', but as 'fake males.' Consequently, they do not want to be associated with or be physically close to effeminate boys. Secondly, they regard heterosexuality and masculinity as superior to all other identities and use religion, culture and social beliefs to justify their distance from queer boys in schools. Thirdly, play tends to be gendered and policed by learners in primary schools. For example, girls who transgress normative identities of girlhood, including those who are seen as too athletic, are derogatively labelled 'tomboys.' Similarly, boys who spend most of their time playing with girls and do not play soccer are labelled by heterosexual presenting boys as gay in a derogatory manner.

Few studies focus on the influence of parents on the schools' gender and sexuality culture. For example, in her research, Bhana (2013) examined how parents understood and positioned queer learners in schools. Her findings suggest that homophobia was rife among parents. In particular, participants used culture, religion and morality to justify their homophobia, arguing that schools are for academic endeavours where "our main purpose is to set the person right so that one gets an education... they can then do their thing outside the school" (Bhana, 2013, p. 312). Parents saw queerness not only as an abnormality but as morally bad and unchristian. For example, one participant argued that they

have never heard of a traditional leader who is a homosexual because a leader has to tell people what a man can do and what a woman can do ... a homosexual person, he is a man but he is a man that is a woman. I do not think he can fit in that [school leadership]

position because he is not a real man. (Bhana, 2013, p. 123)

Other studies focus on the involvement and participation of parents in schools more generally. Understanding this could provide insight into how parents might perceive and respond to policies that seek to be inclusive of queer youth and how schools might draw on them to effect the needed change. For example, Segoe and Bisschoff (2019) examined the involvement of parents in children's academic performance in poor rural schools. Drawing from teachers as informants, the study found that parents were not active in their children's school life. One of the participants commented that parents rarely come to School Governing Body meetings and those that do are not sure how to contribute. Schools are negatively affected by the lack of involvement of parents. Parents seem to be unaware of the role they should play in the schooling journey of their children's education. A participant shared that parents seem to think that their contribution to their children's education is getting them to school. Many of the parents had little to no formal education.

Similarly, Mncube (2010) explored the ways that parents participated in school activities. The findings were that participation was gendered. Mothers of learners were more involved in school activities than fathers. Parents preferred to be in the background and not in the public eye in their participation in schools. Furthermore, in some instances when parents did participate, the relationships between them and the educators were improved. Parents started seeing educators as part of the communities, not just people who taught their children. Necessarily, parents were highly aware of what was required from them by the school as parents. This has implications for how they might influence the experiences of queer children in schools.

## **2.5 Negotiating queerphobic violence in and around schools**

Local and international research suggests that even in the context of queerphobic violence in

and around schools, queer youth, in various ways, exercise complex and dynamic forms of agency. To illustrate, at the international level, in New Zealand, Allen's (2015) study, which examined the representation of queer youth in research, found that they can be both agents and victims. For instance, while one participant described the schooling experiences of her queer peers as violent, the picture created by her lesbian peers showed two young women who were intimate with one another, embracing the love they shared for one another.

McDermott, Hughes and Rawlings' (2018) study in the United Kingdom examined queer youth's navigation of help-seeking and suicidality. The study found that LGBTQ youth found it difficult to ask for help and asked for help as a last resort when they had already reached a crisis point and/or when coping was no longer possible. While in some instances self-harming was their coping strategy, LGBTQ youth found different ways to cope, became self-reliant and in control of their distress.

Studies further illustrate how queer youth negotiate queerness within the heteronormative schooling contexts. For example, in their Australian study, Jones and Hillier (2013) compared the experiences of trans-spectrum youth with cisgender same-sex attracted peers in schools. The study investigated "identity disclosure and support; experiences of abuse; suicide and self-harm..." among the learners (Jones & Hillier, 2013, p. 287). The study found that trans-spectrum youth were rejected after the disclosure and experienced more and varied forms of homophobic, transphobia, and sexism than cis-gendered youth. Specifically, trans-spectrum youth responded to rejection in creative and practical ways, such as challenging the views of those who rejected them.

Similarly, Jones et al. (2016) examined schooling experiences of transgender and gender diverse youth. The study examined participants' "gender identity in documentation experiences

of puberty and sexuality education, treatment by staff and students, and other forms of provision” (Jones et al., 2016, p. 156). The study found that Australian schools were notorious for entrenching gender stereotypes through sexuality education, gender segregation of school life and space, like the changing rooms and toilets. The lack of teacher and student support had adverse effects for trans and diverse gendered students, affecting academic performance, increased bullying and social exclusion. Transgender youth reported that they responded and resisted by not transitioning socially, thereby defying social gender norms and sometimes avoiding schools altogether.

Khan’s (2014) study investigated queer youth experiences, challenges and agency in communities in three countries: Lesotho, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The findings suggest that queer youth were strategic in the negotiation of their queer-phobic contexts. For instance, in Zimbabwe, a participant chose to continue being in the church even though they were not allowed to wear trousers and had to wear skirts. For them, faith was more important than leaving the church because of a dress code. In Zambia, where homosexuality is illegal, queer youth used blogs to share “affirming stories of queer life, love and activism” with members of the queer community (Khan, 2014, p. 133). This was strategically done to ensure that the police did not discover the queer-affirming material.

In the South African context, McArthur (2015) examined the changes learners wanted to see to address homophobic violence in schools. The findings suggest that homophobia in schools is widespread and normalised. The effects of homophobic violence included isolation, which led to school absenteeism, feelings of anger, and sadness among queer learners. The male learners in the study recommended developing inter-generational partnerships and community-based responses involving schools, families and communities to combat homophobic violence. The participants structured the goals for addressing homophobic violence into four

interventions: 1) Requiring teachers and parents to start speaking about and against homophobia and misogyny; 2) creating spaces for learners to be equal participants in developing and implementing interventions designed to combat homophobia; 3) developing interventions that have a multi-sectoral effect, including schools, homes, social institutions such as churches and communities; and 4) developing interventions that aim to cultivate a culture of respect and tolerance within communities.

Informed by this literature, the study reported in this dissertation examined queer youth agency against queerphobic violence in and around schools. In particular, the third critical question in the study asks: *What changes do queer African youth want to see in their township school?*

## **2.6 Discussion**

This chapter begins with an exploration of how queerness is conceptualised in local and international literature. Firstly, the conceptualisation of queer youth has moved on from fixed lived experiences of victims and those who are in danger—the martyr-target-victim discourse. The literature suggests that queer knowings and understandings of queerness as unfixed, non-normative and without borders more fully capture the lived experiences of queer youth than concrete definitions of the concept. In line with this, to allow the many knowings, understandings and actions that queer bodies might enact, this study adopted an understanding of ‘queer’ as an adjective and a verb. This enables queer bodies to continue to be queer outside of neat heteronormative categories and constructions. Having such a stance on queerness makes it possible to recognise and identify the many experiences, histories, contexts, possibilities of being and queer agency that queer youth have.



Secondly, the findings from the review suggest that despite existing Constitutional and international human rights protections, queer individuals and groups continue to experience discrimination, violence, marginalisation, and silencing based on gender identity/performance or sexual orientation. It suggests that acts of queerphobic violence have become normalised in various contexts, including in schools. This includes physical, emotional and psychological violence and exclusion from the school environment through the curriculum, school spaces and ignoring the violence experienced by queer youth. In particular, such violence occurs in and around schools, with peers and teachers as the main perpetrators of the violence.

Contrary to the human rights protections they are promised in the Constitution, queer youth continue to learn in schools where compulsory sexuality and heteronormativity is enforced through school culture, school policy, curriculum and pedagogy. The findings also show that in the South African curriculum there has been an erasure of queer experiences, including within the LO curriculum, with sexuality education limited to danger and disease, and constructing learners as sexually innocent. Teachers professed to be inadequately prepared to teach about sex education and HIV and pre-service lectures feeling ‘uncomfortable’ about teaching pre-service teachers queer content.

Thirdly, evidence from the literature on queer youth experiences suggests that when gender and sexual diversity are included in the curriculum, the government, parents and communities often see it as controversial. In addition, school policies have limited queer youth to the martyr-target-victim discourse. This tends to silence queer youth experiences within the curriculum. This has several negative consequences, including making education inaccessible to queer youth, where the school culture, informed by the school policy, enforces compulsory heterosexuality and where sexuality education is not taught or when it is, it is presented from a moral, often Christian perspective. In this study, queer African youth are brought to the centre

of the research to share their township secondary school experiences. This study asks:

*What does it mean to be a queer African youth in a township secondary school?* The question is posed to capture the diverse schooling experiences of queer African youth and their wishes for change in their schools.

Fourthly, the literature also addresses the experiences of queer youth in schools. The findings suggest that schools resemble the societies in which they are located, where queer youth experience violence and marginalisation from teachers, school managers and learners are perpetrated and normalised. Such queerphobic violence includes discrimination, harassment, and physical violence. Culture, tradition, religion, and societal beliefs, all resting on patriarchal, heteronormative gendered thinking, are used to justify the queerphobic violence. The normalisation of queerphobic violence in South African schools has meant that queer youth have felt vulnerable, and isolated, and are often absent from school, with negative impacts on their education and health outcomes.

Finally, in spite of the violence, they experience in and around schools, queer learners have been found to exercise complex and dynamic forms of agency. Such queer agency involves queer youth becoming experts in understanding how they should navigate their spaces, particularly schools, to ensure their livelihoods. In other words, having experienced, and continuing to experience and witness queerphobia enables queer youth to understand their queerphobic heteronormative schooling context and how to navigate it.

The study reported in this dissertation aimed to investigate how queer African youth understand, respond to and resist queerphobic violence in township secondary schools. The

thesis takes Msibi's (2012) study, which focused on the queer African youth schooling experience, as a point of departure. Msibi's (2012) study found that while queer youth had negative schooling experiences, with violence perpetrated by peers and teachers, they also resisted and took a stand, identifying strategies for addressing queerphobic violence. The study hopes to add to this scholarship by examining 1) how queer African youth in township schools experience their schooling; 2) how they respond to and resist queerphobic violence; and 3) what they want to change in their township schools.

## **2.7 Synthesis**

This chapter reviews literature focusing on the experiences of queer people in and around their schools. The chapter begins by exploring the conceptualisation of queerness and queer youth. It goes on to review the policy framework in which schooling takes place. This is followed by a review of studies that examine the experiences of queer youth, and how they are positioned as subordinates and are marginalised within the school system. Linked to this, the review includes studies that document the queerphobic violence against queer youth in communities and schools and the factors that influence it. The literature review concludes with a review that focuses on how, despite the prevailing queerphobia that queer youth face at school and in broader society, they often exhibit agency in responding to resisting their marginalisation and the violence they experience.

The next chapter presents the theoretical framework that informs analysis in the study.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Understanding the Schooling Experiences of Queer African

### Youth: Towards a Theoretical Framework

#### 3.1 Introduction

This study examined the experiences of queer African youth and the ways in which they respond to and resist queerphobic violence in their township secondary schools. The main research question in the study was: *How do queer African youth experience, respond to and resist negative experiences in township secondary schools?* In the previous chapter, I focused on literature across diverse geographies, paying attention to the experiences of queer youth in schools. The literature mainly highlights the experiences of queer youth who are in secondary schools and how queer youth resist and respond to queerphobia and the violence that comes with it. Findings from the literature review suggest that context is key in whether or not and how queer youth are agentic against queerphobia and violence in and around their schools.

This chapter begins with a focus on the conceptual framework developed from the literature reviewed in the previous chapter. The chapter then focuses on the theoretical foundations and concepts on which this study is built. A theory is a collection of ideas that are grouped to enable a greater understanding of the phenomenon (Collins & Stockton, 2018). Selecting a theory, therefore, becomes somewhat like choosing a way to consider the society and a position in that society at a particular time. Nealon and Giroux (2012, p. 6) argue that theory provides an understanding that “everything comes from somewhere and functions in a particular context or set of contexts; there is no such thing as a “natural fact”.” Collins and Stockton (2018) state that while a theoretical framework speaks to how theory is used, it also acts as a mirror

reflecting the researcher(s) principles and how the knowledge generated will be understood. As such, the theoretical framework is a map of the research inquiry (Adom, Kamil, & Agyem, 2018). This study uses the theoretical framework to understand and explain the phenomenon under study.

In this dissertation, I examine not only how the participants experience their schooling as queer learners, but also their agency in responding to and resisting their marginalisation in their schools. Therefore, I begin the chapter by examining the concept of agency. This is followed by a critical discussion of the theoretical framework. Specifically, the framework draws on Connell's gender theory and Queer theory.

### **3.2 Conceptual Framework**

The study analysed in this dissertation aimed to explore how queer African youth experience, respond to and resist experiences of marginalisation and violence in their township secondary schools. This conceptual framework is drawn from Chapter Two of this dissertation where literature was reviewed (local and international) related to this phenomenon. The findings from the review suggest that three critical and interrelated concepts are key to explaining queer youth experiences and responses to violence and marginalisation in and around their township schools. These are compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980), queerphobic violence (Morris, 2000; Young, 1988), and queer agency (Butler, 1990, Hall, 2003; Marshal, 2010).

Compulsory heterosexuality, as conceptualised by Rich (1980), defines how both males and females are forced to be sexually available to each other. This makes heterosexuality the norm that learners and the entire schooling community should abide by. Compulsory heterosexuality is influenced by prevailing gender norms and gender stereotypes which are in turn explained through culture, religion and social norms and beliefs. These norms work together to produce

schooling contexts where heteronormativity, heterosexism and heteropatriarchy thrive.

Queerphobic violence is a coming together of queer-a-phobia (Morris, 2000) and violence (Young, 1988). Morris' (2000) concept of queer-a-phobia draws on Derrida's notion of absolute alterity, which means absolute otherness or absolute difference. Morris (2000) locates the emergence of phobia as created through the construction of the other and that which is different. Further, Young (1988) proposed that "many groups suffer the oppression of systematic violence... [where people] live with the knowledge that they must fear random, unprovoked attacks on their persons or property, which have no motive but to damage, humiliate, or destroy the person" (p. 287). Thus, queerphobic violence explains various forms of violence (including harassment, discrimination, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia) and the consequences thereof (isolation, vulnerability, marginalisation, erasure/silencing/invisibility and victimhood) experienced by queer people including queer African youth in township schools.

Queer agency occurs where the subject-agent exists in a context that legitimises and illegitimises certain cultures and ways of being (Butler, 1990). This process of signification, or becoming a subject, enables certain subjects to exist and marginalises others. For example, "when a subject is said to be constituted [formed], that means simply that the subject is a consequence of certain rule-governed discourses that govern the intelligible invocation of identity" (Butler, 1990, p. 185). In other words, when a person is considered a person, it means that they have followed all the societal norms that describe how a person's gender identity, expression, sexuality and sexual orientation should be thought of and enacted. For Butler (1990, p. 184) agency does not happen outside the context of "matrices of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality [which] operate through repetition" but within it, where "new possibilities for gender that contest the rigid codes of hierarchical binarisms" exist (p. 185).

The three concepts, compulsory heterosexuality, queerphobic violence and queer agency, work together to explain the lived experience of queer African youth in a township secondary school. The section below discusses agency in more detail.

### *3.2.1 Understanding Agency*

Some scholars define agency as involving the individual as an actor, or a being that acts (Burke & Stets, 2009). Nealon, and Giroux (2012, p. 255) define agency as “the power to do something” or the ability to act upon a situation, a subject or construct. In this definition of the concept, agency is placed in relation to a subject in history, where the subject has agency, and the ability to construct history. The making of history rests with everyday individuals who have “the ability to respond to historical contexts and, with any luck at all, change them in the process” (Nealon, & Giroux, 2012, p. 255). This idea of agency raises some questions, including what sort of ‘power’ is needed to ‘do something’?; where does such power emanate from?; and can agency exist without power?

Pillay (2017, p. 2) extends the understanding of agency as power, to include “ability and competence,” where subjects critically act on and respond to their contexts. For Biesta et al. (2015), actors, not subjects, “always act by *means of* their environment [so that] the achievement of agency will always result from the interplay of individual efforts, available resources and contextual and structural factors as they come together in particular and, in a sense, always unique situations” (p. 624). Similarly, for Emirbayer and Mische (1998), agency includes a deliberate focus on the individual in terms of routine, purpose and judgement and the interplay of these aspects in different contexts in how agency is achieved. In other words, agency will not be the same in every context or the same context should it be revisited (see also Burke & Stets, 2009). Scholars propose that agency be considered as a meeting of the past while working towards being in the future and engaging in the present (Emirbayer & Mische,

as cited in Biesta et al., 2015) where the past, present and future form a “*chordal triad*” (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998, p. 972).

Biesta et al. (2015) include the time and context in which agency plays out as important to understanding it. In their earlier work (Biesta & Tedder, 2007), they trace and consider agency from the perspective of the legal and commercial sectors, in which the agent “is granted the capacity to act autonomously on behalf of the” principal (p. 132). In other words, agency is a state and/or context in which one can determine their action, thought, and act on their own without external influence. In other words, “agency [is] the ability to exert control over and give direction to one’s life” (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p. 132).

Nealon and Giroux (2012) argue that a person or a collective of people are not “master of... [but rather] are subject to their historical context” (p. 7). They further argue that context plays a vital role in understanding how the agency of the subject is constrained and/or enabled (Nealon, & Giroux, 2012). For them, the subject is “defined by its place among various social positions” (Nealon, & Giroux, p. 7). Therefore, one is subject ‘to’ something or in relation to someone. This understanding opens conversations of power relations with a structure or in relation to others. For Butler (1990), the subject exists in a context that legitimizes and illegitimizes certain ways of being and cultures. This process of signification enables certain subjects to exist and marginalises others. For example, “when a subject is said to be constituted [formed], that means simply that the subject is a consequence of certain rule-governed discourses that govern the intelligible invocation of identity” (Butler, 1990, p. 185). For Butler (1990) agency does not happen outside the context of “matrices of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality [which] operate through repetition” (p. 184), but within it, where “new possibilities for gender that contest the rigid codes of hierarchical binarisms” exist (p.



For this study, understanding the agency of queer African youth means firstly understanding them as agents. This enables the recognition of agentic acts in their everyday lives. This means that queer African youth can “respond to their historical context.” The ability to act in this historical context means that they are competent in their ability to act. This competency is built from knowing, understanding, living and acting in their context and its surroundings (in this case, township secondary schools). This requires reflection on previous experiences when they were agentic. Reflection with action helps queer African youth understand the power they have as an individual or a group, in which space, with which person (peer or teacher), and at what time during the school day. The reflection thus enables navigation of the relations and space with agency.

### *3.2.1.1 Structure and Agency*

Scholars have argued that agency is not enacted outside a structure but within it. Whether the structure enables agency or limits it depends on the configurations of the structure. For example, Layder (2006) considers agency and structure as a dualism and notes that understanding this dualism, and putting agency and structure together, is not to highlight or inspire opposition and antagonism. Rather, as the author argues, “while possessing their characteristics, [agency and structure] are interlocked and interdependent features of societies. In short, they mutually imply and influence each other, [neither are they] opposed to each other in some kind of struggle for dominance” (Layder, 2006, p. 2). From this perspective, agency-structure refers to “how human beings both create social life at the same time as they are influenced and shaped by existing social arrangements” (Layder, 2006, p. 5). In this study, I wanted to understand how queer African learners are shaped by the social life of township schools, while at the same resisting and reshaping already existing social arrangements in and

around their schools.

However, as Sayer (1992) notes, there have been some opposing views regarding agency and structure. For example, some scholars view structure as a means for agency, and neglect the agent, or the individual. For Sayer (1992, p. 97), this has led to “a dehumanizing social sciences” where the focus is on the context and structure rather than those existing in it. This neglects how the agents negotiate and respond to the structure. Further, from the perspective of a focus on structure actions are seen more as the behaviour of human beings that is determined by structures. They regard agents as social role players constructed by structures to act in a specific role within those structures (Dowding, 2008). For Dowding (2008) this is not to say that the agent has no power to act, but rather that the ability to act is with the structure and in some form, the ability is structured.

According to McRobbie (2009), agency is regulated and administered according to what is enabled by the frame, including the cultural, political, societal and institutional pillars. For example, as Migdalek (2016) argues, young people tend to be entangled within normative notions of sexual orientation. It is this entanglement that limits and bounds the perspective of their embodiment and that of others, where limited notions of embodiment also limit the different ways of being. McRobbie (2009) argues that the embodiment of gender is reflected in gender performance, where teachers and learners' bodies and how they embody gender is policed and regulated. Further, while some ways of being may feel authentic and untainted by external forces, they are inevitably influenced by the patriarchal society in which they exist. According to Migdalek (2016)

[t]hese subjectivities, so often steeped in inequitable patriarchal hierarchies of gender, wield significant influence on ways in which individuals might choose, be inspired, or come to embody as such. As such agency does not necessarily denote autonomy. (p.

In other words, making a decision is embedded within gender-stereotypical norms which in part, shape what agency looks like.

Of particular relevance to the study reported in this dissertation is Evans' (2013) argument that agency has been defined from a heterocentric masculinist perspective, in which it can only be enacted by men. From this perspective, the "meaning of agency in women is immediately compromised, in that the focus and meaning of agency has, across time and place, already been defined by men and associated with them and their actions" (Evans, 2013, p. 48). Such a patriarchal understanding of agency does not only deny the existence of agency of women, but also of those who do not fall within gendered binary existence, including queer people, and in this case, queer African youth in township schools.

Scholars have also examined agency in relation to African children and youth. For example, Abebe and Ofosu-kusi (2016) explore how African children and youth are constructed as vulnerable and innocent, and in rare instances, as experts on their context who can negotiate and thrive in contexts of violence and poverty. According to Abebe and Ofosu-kusi (2016), the African child and youth "are seen as growing up in contexts removed from forces of modernity, infrastructure and technology" (Abebe & Ofosu-kusi, 2016, p. 304). From this perspective, children and youth in Africa remain in fixed, unchanging societies, in which they do not influence and are not influenced by it.

Challenging this view, Bordonaro and Payne (2012) argue that

[children and youth have] ambiguous agency... [which is] in stark contrast to established and [hetero]normative conceptions about childhood and moral and social ideas about the kind of behaviour young people should demonstrate, the activities they

should engage in, and the spaces and places deemed appropriate for them to inhabit. (p. 366)

For Bordonaro and Payne (2012), this acknowledgement disrupts conceptions of what a child is, what a child can do and where they can be. It challenges situated hegemonic understandings of agency and ideas of powerlessness and allows for a widening lens for viewing agency, groups constructed as vulnerable and non-agentic, such as African youth, including queer African youth, a group with which this dissertation is concerned. In particular, in this study, I wanted to examine how a group of queer African youth experienced, responded to and challenged their marginalisation in their township schools.

### **3.3 Gender Theory**

Connell (1985) argues that the ideology of patriarchy “requires the creation of gender-based hierarchy among men [and women]” (p. 110). For Connell, maintaining the patriarchal gender order involves maintaining hegemonic masculinity and its subjugation of subordinate masculinities and femininities. For example, in her 1995 work, Connell examines the subordination of same-sex desiring men and women by the dominant heterosexual men within gender relations amongst men and women (Connell, 1995). This subordination occurs in various ways, including “political and cultural exclusion; cultural abuse; legal violence; street violence; economic discrimination and personal boycotts” in communities and institutions (Connell, 1995, p. 78). According to her, these practices of exclusion, subordination, marginalization and violence sustain not only compulsory heterosexuality but also more directly the hegemonic, heterosexual, patriarchal masculinities. It is against this backdrop that power relations become key to understanding the hierarchical nature of the gender order in which heterosexuality is compulsory to hegemonic masculinity. It is within this hierarchy that queerness, the focus of this dissertation, is subordinated and powerless.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) note that while there have been notable constraints that are experienced by subordinated and marginalised masculinities and femininities, such as issues related to economic and political power, there do exist possibilities for agency among these groups. Of particular importance to this study is their assertion that in rethinking hegemonic masculinity, there should also be a rethinking of subordinated masculinities and femininities, and in particular, “recognizing the agency of subordinated groups and the mutual conditioning of gender dynamics and other social dynamics” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 847). In this study, I wanted to understand how, despite being positioned as subordinated in much of the existing research, queer African youth in township schools may also be agentic. In particular, I wanted to understand how such factors as the township schooling context, culture, religion, societal beliefs, economics and politics, function to enable or inhibit agency among queer learners. I aimed to examine how queer African youth experience schooling in a context that not only seeks to sustain heterosexual dominance, but also positions ‘othered’ forms of sexuality, gender performance and identity as subordinate, illegitimate, and requiring policing and even punishment. To do this, I used Connell’s gender theory and the understanding of gender and power and the subordination of gender non-conforming and sexual minorities to place the experiences of queer African youth in a hetero-patriarchal system of relations.

### **3.4 Queer Theory**

In addition to gender theory, queer theory, frames my analysis in this study and provides a lens for understanding and making sense of the schooling experiences of queer African youth in selected South African township schools. Butler (1993, p. 228) states that “the term ‘queer’... will have to remain that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes”. From this view, queer theory it would seem, not only implicates the past, but also

the present and future in how it is (re)imagined.

In terms of its origins and evolution, queer theory, according to Watson (2005), “emerg[es] directly out of liberal ideas of equality, building on feminist and other liberatory political movements that pursued questions of identity categories and how power is distributed among and between them” (p. 68). Linked to this, linguistically, Hall (2003) states that queer theory can be used in three forms, as an adjective, a noun and a verb. As an adjective, the word ‘queer’ is unfixed and untethered. For Hall (2003), this “means that there is no easy answer to the question above, no single word, no simple slot into which complex personalities, behaviours, desires, abilities, and ambitions can be placed” (p. 13). As a noun, as discussed by Butler (1993), queer was originally meant to shame. Similarly, Hall (1993, pp. 13-14) maintains that the noun ‘queer’ has meant a “lesser version of a heterosexual... [to be] a ‘queer’ was something that you did not want to be... and if it is impossible to change, then certainly be silent and celibate.” As a verb, and in particular, a form of a transitive verb, queering the system, analysing it and challenging injustice (Hall. 2003). For Butler (1993), initially, the term queer was used to shame gay and lesbian individuals and groups as it was “linked to accusation, pathologization and insult” (p. 226). However, queer people have since reclaimed the term to construct their identities. For Butler (1993), reclaiming the term has resignified it and moved it from shaming to affirming. This process of resignification enables the queer to construct new meanings and understandings from that which was used to pathologise. In this regard, the use of the term ‘queer’ to refer to a gender diverse identity and as a way to question and challenge the normalisation and legitimisation of heterosexuality (Halberstam, 1998).

In this study, queer is used as a reclaimed term, to affirm queer lived experiences of youth in township schools.

### *3.4.1 The queer subject*

Drawing on Derrida and Foucault, Talburt (2000, p. 17) states that a subject is “produced historically, culturally, discursively... always already inscribed by culture before they are born.” In other words, an individual subject comes into the world already culturally inscribed. Informed by the work of Butler (1993), for Talburt (2000), queer becomes and continues to become more than what it was constructed to be. In other words, queer becomes more than an identity but also an action. Drawing from its history, “efforts to shift the [conceptualisation of ‘queer’] from noun to verb, from identity to practice, from modality of being to the modality of doing will be neither linear nor complete but contextual and practical” (Talburt, 2000, p. 2). From this perspective, this study aimed to understand how queer African youth might construct, respond to and challenge their marginalisation in their township school context. In other words, I wanted to understand how they use their agency to negotiate being queer in their context.

Similar to Talburt (2000), Morris (2000) notes that the instability of sexuality is queer, where a “queer sensibility attempts to subvert the apparent neat and tidy relation between sex and gender” (Morris, 2000, p. 15). Further, queer sensibility provides a lens through which to differentiate between how identity has been constructed broadly and “what it might mean to be a person” (Morris, 2000, p. 15). Reclaiming the concept ‘queer’ has had several implications. The first is

...historical, in which the term “queer” has been negative; and has typically been used to refer to effeminate men ([pejoratively referred to as] fags) or masculine women (or dykes) or weirdos... [There lies its reconstruction, in which] the re-appropriation of this negative word has upset some members of the gay/lesbian community. But others feel that queer now means pride.

The third is the contemporary meaning of queer, where “queer now takes on a rude-positive connotation announcing the coming of a prophetic age” (Morris, 2000, p. 21). This means that the word queer has been and will continue to be unstable and will mean more than what it currently does. Morris (2000) argues that queer means more than what has been constructed outside of heterosexuality and “refers to anyone who feels marginalised by mainstream visions of sexuality. Straight queers are welcome in the parade, too” (2000, p. 2).

It is this understanding of queer by Morris (2000) that I adopt in my analysis in this dissertation. To do so, I draw on one of the three tenets put forth by Dilley (1999, p. 462) on queer research: “examination of lives and experiences of those considered non-heterosexual (the other two include the juxtaposition of those lives/experiences with lives/ experiences considered “normal”; and the examination of how/why those lives and experiences are considered outside of the norm)”. In particular, the first research question aimed to examine what it means to be a queer African youth within a township schooling context. The second question in the study aimed to explore the ways in which the participants construct, respond to and resist their marginalisation in their context. The third research question looked at what queer African youth wanted to change about their schooling experiences.

### *3.4.2 The Use of Queer Theory in Education Research*

Queer scholars have critiqued how education has centred heterosexuality and how the construction of heterosexuality as normal provides a base for the exclusion of other forms of being (Ingrey, 2018). To address this, education scholars, particularly those whose work focuses on schools, have used queer theory. For example, Morris (2000) stated that queer theory may assist teachers in how they teach students about sexuality as a complex identity. For Morris (2002), queer theory is vital in that it helps all those in education to understand that “naming kills” (p. 27). To address how naming kills, education researchers “might help foster



understanding and even empathy toward those who have been labelled in damaging violent ways” (p. 27).

Meyer’s (2012) work on the shift in how scholars and activists have applied and understood queer theory and the meanings that it holds warrants extensive citation here. Noting what Talburt (2000, p. 2) refers to as the “haunting [history] of queer by identity,” where queer is a harmful word, Meyer (2012) argues that “it has come to represent new concepts that, when applied in school settings, can have a liberatory and positive influence on the way school and sexualities education, in particular, work today” (p. 9). For Meyer (2012), the theory has, for example, disrupted what is known about bullying and harassment in schools, where “much of the information about bullying and harassment fails to address the underlying social forces at work” (p. 9) (see also Epstein, 2001). Citing the work of Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003) on masculinities, Meyer (2012) asserts that what this does is constrain behaviour and identity and create limitations on how individuals and groups perform their gender and feel about their bodies. This leads to situations where certain “behaviours act to create and support social hierarchy that privileges mainstream identities and behaviours over marginalised ones” (Meyer, 2012, p. 9). For example, behaviour is constantly policed and under surveillance by teachers and other learners. Learners in schools are often told to act more like a boy or more like a girl when they deviate from the norm. Failure to adhere to this command may lead to harassment and discrimination (Meyer, 2012). It is through gender codes and gender norms, that, for example, “girls’ opportunities to be assertive, physically strong, and competitive and boys’ opportunities to be creative, sensitive, and cooperative” are constrained (Meyer, 2012, p. 10). When boys and girls do explore these socially unsanctioned ways of being, they experience “gendered harassment, which includes homophobic harassment, (hetero) sexual harassment and harassment for gender non-conformity, [as] one way that society polices and reinforces

this heterosexual matrix” (Meyer, 2012, p. 10). To address this, Meyer (2012, p. 10) argues for the need for teachers to be aware of “how traditional heterosexual gender roles reinforce and maintain harmful power dynamics.” Such awareness and understanding allow the questioning of taken-for-granted and normalised forms of behaviour and enables the challenging of educational structures where schools become sites where the hegemonic ideology is challenged and transformed. Through the curriculum, the school culture, school activities “normalize gendered and heterosexual behaviour” (Meyer, 2012, p. 12).

In a similar vein, drawing on Britzman’s (1995) queer pedagogy, Quinlivan and Town (1999) use the concept ‘queer as fuck’ through which they assert that queer pedagogy has done what other pedagogies have failed to do for lesbian and gay youth, which is to show the complexity of identity and also challenge the constructed and constricting binary of identity. They further argue that taking queer into the realm of education and out of the academy and adult queer politics enables “youth to move beyond the minoritizing discourse which currently frames their schooling” (Quinlivan & Town, 1999, p. 243). Further, Ingrey (2018) notes that applying queer theory in education enables a more inclusive knowledge about identity, away from the binary of only just gay and lesbian. In this study, using queer theory enables me to move beyond the marginalisation that queer learners encounter in their schools, and to examine how they might respond to and challenge their experiences.

### *3.4.3 A Critique of Queer Theory*

Several scholars, including South African scholars, have argued against the uncritical use of queer theory (Epprecht, 2004; 2008; Msibi, 2012, 2013, 2018; Tucker, 2009). These scholars highlight several shortcomings of queer theory. The first is its emergence from the west and its attachment to a particular history that is not reflective of an African context. Linked to this, in contradiction with the African principle of a communal society in which individuals are

dependent on each other, queer theory emphasizes the individual.

While Epprecht (2008) considers queer theory as problematic, and argues that it “is important to acknowledge but not promote [it] as a research strategy in Africa” (p. 15), informed by the work of Jerrod Hayes (2000), his earlier work suggests ways in which queer theory can be carefully used within the African context (Epprecht, 2004). In this work, queer theory is used “less as an adjective to describe (or, presumably, a sexuality-based identity) than as a verb to signify a critical practical practice in which non-normative sexualities infiltrate dominant discourse to loosen their political stronghold” (Epprecht, 2004, p. 7). From this perspective, in this study, I examine how queer African youth in township schools experience their schooling, and also how they construct and negotiate their *agency* to challenge their marginalisation. This questioning is seeking action, a verb to those who are “non-normative sexualities [as they] infiltrate [and subvert] dominant discourse” (Epprecht, 2004, p. 7) through their interactions with teachers and peers.

Epprecht (2004) further states that in using queer theory, one cannot ignore the intersectionality of “class, race and ethnicity [and gender] in the construction of sexualities” (p. 16). Epprecht (2008) proposes the use of queer theory as a means to uncover “what is commonly implicit” and makes us aware of the various “often extremely subtle ways in which same-sex sexuality is rendered invisible or stigmatised in hegemonic culture” (p. 15). By focusing on schools in the township, my study explores the influence of the socio-cultural contexts of the communities in which the schools are located. The construction of the townships was based on race, and through apartheid laws, their development included widening the economic gap between white people and Africans in particular (Harber and Muthukrishna, 2000; Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013).

The second critique includes Plummer's (2005) assertion that radical lesbians have not fully accepted queer theory and have instead constructed it as subtly advancing the project of male domination, thereby making the lesbian experience invisible. Citing the work of Sheila Jeffrey (2003), a radical feminist who has critiqued queer theory, Plummer (2005) suggests that the queer movement and its marginalisation of "women-identified-women and radical lesbians..., [has made it] impossible to see the roots of women's subordination to men" (Plummer, 2005, p.370). According to Plummer (2005), Jeffrey has also criticised the use of inaccessible language by queer theorists. This has made queer theory elitist and exclusionary, where only those in academia may be able to access it (Plummer, 2005; Stein & Plummer, 1994).

A third critique is that while there is a need to consider queer theory critically, such a critical view of queer theory should not relegate certain communities due to their location and historical background as the only ones that can claim queerness or can be queer (Tucker, 2009). This would be problematic, as it constructs the privileged as the only group that can be queer. As Tucker (2009, p. 16) maintains, "while the mechanisms for queer pursuits may be remarkably different in different locations, it would be unfair for researchers simply to assume that those elsewhere cannot be queer." Using the term queer can attain "the possibility of knowing subversion" (p. 16). In this study, I aimed to illuminate how the participants not only experienced their schooling but also how they responded to and even resisted those experiences. Tucker (2009) cautions that researchers should not construct communities "as too poor, too uneducated or too constrained to be queer" and communities should not be denied the "emancipatory dimension of queer beliefs... simply because they have not yet fully engaged with or have chosen not to follow a particular path towards subverting power" (p. 16). From this perspective, Msibi (2012) used queer theory to study South African queer township learners and those who are perceived to be queer and how they experienced schooling. In this

study, Msibi (2012) deployed queer theory as a means “to counter dominant African narratives which construct queer individuals as simply powerless, disgraced and in need of empowerment” (p. 516). It is this work that has in a way set a tone for some of the recent work on queer theory within African contexts. Although Msibi (2012) does not highlight this explicitly, in many ways, the work uses queer theory from a more communal perspective (rather than from an individualistic standpoint). More explicitly, Msibi's (2013) study positions itself as avoiding terms that emerge from the west such as ‘gay’ and ‘queer.’ For Msibi (2013), such a deliberate intention was a means to “escape the confusion caused by blind acceptance of western terms which, I argue, can further entrench the victimisation and exclusion of those tagged with such labels” (p. 106). In this regard, he argues that

... while the theorisation of ‘queer’ through queer theory offers a powerful tool for understanding complexity and agency among individuals [which my study pays attention to] who experience a range of sexual identities, desires and practices, the fact remains that many people outside western contexts (as indeed inside them) will not understand how ‘queer’ is being conceptualised. (p.107)

In his more recent work, Msibi (2018) advances this understanding of queer theory in the African context in which he positions himself (the researcher) “as not an expert in the field, nor [as only engaging] with research to expose facts. Instead, the researcher might be seen as an activist in the field” (p. 23). In this dissertation, I adopt this approach to construct my participants as experts on their lives and context and co-constructors of knowledge in the research process. I sought to understand, from their perspectives, the various ways in which queer African youth in resource-poor township schools experience their schooling and how they are agentic in responding to and resisting their marginalisation where it occurs.

### **3.5 Discussion**

As stated above, this study used gender theory and queer theory as a theoretical framework for understanding how queer African youth experience, respond to and resist marginalisation in

their township schools. First, informed by gender theory (Connell, 1985, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), which views human relations as based on gender hierarchies aiding the dominance of hegemonic patriarchal masculinities, this study assumed that in township secondary schools, queer African youth occupy a subordinate position. In this situation, where gender hierarchies dictate relations, queer bodies exist on the margins of the school community, and are often exposed to discrimination and violence. However, informed by my belief that these learners are not just victims of this marginalisation, I viewed my participants as agentic beings who have the agency to challenge and resist the violence. I used queer theory to understand what factors enabled my participants to engage their agency to challenge heteronormativity within their schools and how they were able to do so.

Second, informed by queer theory (Butler, 1993; Morrison, 2000), which suggests that sexuality is fluid and exists in a spectrum rather than a binary, this study was premised on the assumption that queer African youth go to school in largely heteronormative township schooling contexts. Their schooling experiences go beyond queerphobic and discriminatory experiences, beyond silence, shame and exclusion. Using queer theory, I wanted to centre their experiences and voices as queer youth in the schools. This was done, in part, to break away from constructing them and queer bodies generally, as only victims, but also agents in their own lives. In this study, I wanted to examine the participants' agency in responding to and subverting the powerlessness and violence they often experience in schools and other spaces. To do this, as discussed in Chapter One, the study generated data using three critical questions: 1) What does it mean to be a queer African youth in a township school?; 2) How do queer African youth in a township school construct and negotiate their agency in relation to teachers and other learners? How do they respond and resist their negative experiences from their peers and teachers?; and 3) What changes do queer African youth want to see in their township school?

### **3.6 Synthesis**

This chapter presents the conceptual and theoretical framework that informed data generation and analysis in this study. The related concepts were compulsory heterosexuality, queerphobic violence, and queer agency. The study aimed to examine how queer African youth experienced, responded to and resisted queerphobic violence in township secondary schools. Thus, the chapter first examines agency as a key concept in the study. This understanding of agency helps to explain how and why queer African youth responded to and resisted their marginalisation in these schools. The chapter then discusses the theoretical framework, beginning with gender socialisation and moving on to a discussion of queer theory. Together, the two theories illuminate the position of queer African youth in the gender hierarchy in relation to teachers and their peers within their township schools. In particular, they help in understanding how queer African youth subvert and challenge the violence they often experience in their township schools and the agency they engage in doing so.

The next chapter presents the research design and methodology I used to answer the research questions in this study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Research Design and Methodology

#### 4.1 Introduction

This study sought to examine the schooling experiences of queer African youth in township secondary schools. The study explored the agency of the youth in resisting and responding to their marginalisation and the violence they encounter in and around secondary township schools. The study's research question was: *How do queer African youth experience, respond to, and resist negative experiences in a township secondary school?* The previous chapter presented a conceptual and theoretical framework for this study. In this chapter, I describe and critically reflect on the study's research design and methodological aspects. The chapter discusses the research paradigm, the methodological approach, and the data generation and analysis methods. I conclude the chapter with a reflection on the ethical considerations that emerged in my study.

#### 4.2 Research Paradigm

A paradigm includes “ontological (what kind of being is a human being? what is the nature of reality?), epistemological (what is the relationship between the inquirer and the known?), and methodological (How do we know the world and gain from it?)” components (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 22). In addition to these three components, Creswell and Poth (2018) have added axiology, referring to the researcher’s values and standpoint. These components shape the researcher’s view on research, what research is, the aim of research and how to go about doing research.

Informed by the above understanding, this study is located within the constructivist paradigm. In the constructivist paradigm, “individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live



and work” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 24). In this study, that world is the township schooling context. In seeking an understanding of the schooling world of queer African youth, I will “develop subjective meanings of their experiences... [where] meanings are varied and multiple, leading [me] to look for the complexity of views rather than narrow the meanings into a few categories of ideas” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 24). Aligned with this understanding, first the study aimed to understand and “rely as much as possible” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, pp. 24-25) on the perspectives of queer African learners regarding their experiences of inequality in and around township secondary schools. Second, research located in this paradigm acknowledges the participants’ power and agency, and the researcher is accountable throughout the research and analysis processes, using theory to interpret social actions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, I wanted to understand the complexity of views my participants regarding their experiences and responses to them, and particularly, their responses to the marginalisation they encounter in township secondary school. Furthermore, the constructivist paradigm regards knowledge as co-constructed through “interactions among investigator and respondents” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111). From this perspective, in this study, I was interested in how the participants individually and together as a group constructed knowledge about being queer in township schools.

The study reported in this dissertation also aligned itself with aspects of the critical paradigm. Research located within the critical paradigm seeks to understand social justice issues, including, among others, social and economic inequality, unequal social norms, conflict and violence and challenge these where they occur. Further, “[t]his paradigm assumes a transactional epistemology, (in which the researcher interacts with the participants), an ontology of historical realism, especially as it relates to oppression; a methodology that is dialogic, and an axiology that respects cultural norms” (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p. 35). In this

regard, one of the three critical research questions in the study sought understand how the participants responded to and resisted to the violence they experienced in and around their schools (*How do they respond and resist their negative experiences from their peers and teachers?*) and another to engage them in imagining the changes they wanted to see to address the violence (*What changes do queer African youth want to see in their township school?*). To do this, as will be discussed in the section below, the study adopted participatory visual methodology (PVM) as an approach to research.

### **4.3 Research Approach**

Informed partly by the constructivist paradigm, this study adopted a qualitative approach to research. As discussed above, methodologically, research informed by the constructivist paradigm is characterised by dialogue between the researcher and those participating in the research. The dialogue is dialectic and is open to different, multiple experiences, opinions and beliefs. The aim is to develop a nuanced understanding of the participants' perspectives and their responses to the experiences they encounter in the environment.

Further, a qualitative approach aims to go beyond the measurable, quantified and controlled measures or variables, but rather to hear participants' voices and perspectives on the issues in order to arrive at "a complex, detailed understanding of the issue... [achieved] only by talking directly with people" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 48). By directly having conversations with queer African youth, as this study aimed to do, we might see the impact of and resistance to queerphobic violence from those affected the most. It is within this qualitative approach that groups or individuals find the space to share their voices. Creswell and Poth (2018) further state that speaking directly with people enables a sense of empowerment for participants to share their experiences and reduces the dominance of the researcher over the research process and participants. This study aimed to ensure that the queer African youth voices were heard

and that my influence over the research process did not become a dominating but rather a collaborative one.

Researching about queer experiences in township schools is not easy. Thus, in this study, adopting a qualitative approach enabled extended engagement with participants in the field. This allowed the participants to get to know me and me to know them. This longer period of engagement also assisted in establishing trust between me and the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, this kind of engagement allowed the participants to share some of their experiences that they would not otherwise share with a researcher. In other words, the approach allowed us to address the, often prevailing, silence surrounding the experiences of queer people and the taboo against speaking about these in many communities and institutions in South Africa.

In line with the constructivist paradigm, qualitative researchers argue that reality is socially constructed, with a deep interconnectedness between the researcher, participants, and the research phenomenon. As discussed above, researchers' values are not dismissed in this research approach but are part of the inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). In this instance, I also reflect on my own queer township schooling experiences as the participants critically reflected on theirs.

Informed by the qualitative approach, this study used PVM to address the research questions. PVM involves using visual tools such as drawing, photography and collage to engage participants in articulating their experiences of and challenges with the phenomenon under study and to engage in dialogue aimed at critiquing the status quo and developing strategies for change (Chambers, 1994). For Stringer (1999), PVM is valuable in engaging participants from marginalised communities. The methodology helps participants co-construct their experiences

and perspectives on the issues that emerge from their interactions in the research context (Stringer, 1999). As discussed above, this study also borrows from aspects of the critical paradigm. However, while research located within the critical paradigm may involve an intervention to transform the disempowering and oppressive context within which the oppressed people are situated (Creswell & Poth, 2018), in this study, informed by their visual productions, the participants planned social action they felt could address the problems they experience in their township schools (Stringer, 1999).

In this study, I started from the premise that queer youth in schools rarely discuss their schooling experiences and challenges. To address this, I decided that we would use our research meetings as a space where they could freely express themselves about the issues they encounter as individuals and as a group. The meetings, I imagined, would help us better understand how this group of learners experience school and what issues or challenges they face in and around their institution. Through this engagement, what needs to be changed can then become visible (Treffry-Goatley, Wiebesiek & Moletsane, 2016). Understanding that it could be difficult for them to speak freely about their experiences, which are often silenced in schools and communities, I adopted PVM to make it possible for this marginalised group (queer African youth) to engage freely and to ‘speak’ through their visual creations (Treffry-Goatley, Wiebesiek & Moletsane, 2016).

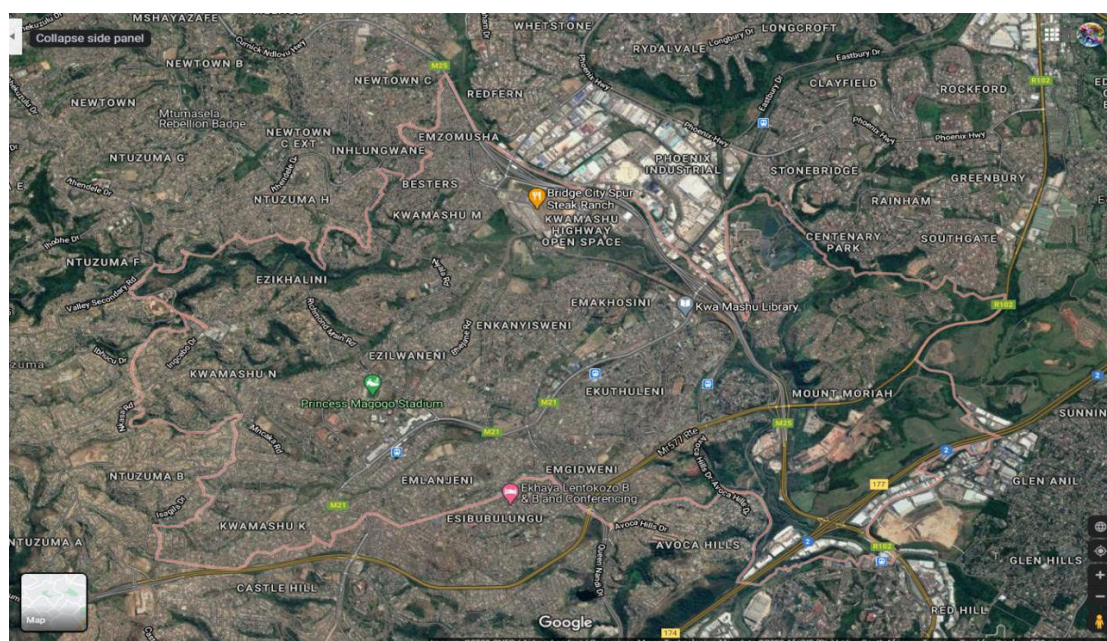
Researchers have also found that the participatory nature of PVM dismantles the hierarchies that traditional research methodologies encourage between the researcher and the researched (Haffejee et al., 2020; Moletsane et al., 2009; Wang, 1999). PVM pulls apart the seams that position the researcher as objective, dominant, and all-knowing and the participants as the researched objects of inquiry (Pant, nd). To this end, in this study, I acknowledged, at the beginning and throughout the study, that while I came into the research with prior township

schooling experiences, these were layered with biases and subjectivity. I emphasized my belief that the participants were the experts in their own lives and that I was keen to listen and hear what they had to say about these experiences. Acknowledging this opened up the reality that the participants are the ones who knew their particular township schooling context and how it impacted on their lives as queer learners in the schools, and as such, would be treated as knowledgeable about their situation and as co-researchers within the research process (Altenberg et al., 2018; Wiebesiek & Treffry-Goatley, 2017). While I acknowledge the participants' marginalised positions in their school and society, using PVM makes it possible for marginalised people and groups to express themselves relatively freely within the research process. Thus, I worked hard to ensure that throughout the fieldwork I purposefully addressed the power imbalances between myself and the participants and among the participants within the research process. To enable this, I placed the research tools in the hands of queer African youth who are a marginalised group in the schooling context (Francis, 2017; Msibi, 2012).

#### **4.4 Research Setting**

The study aimed to investigate how queer African youth experience, understand, respond to and resist violent experiences in a township school setting. Being queer in the township setting can often be dangerous and even life-threatening. Schools in the township are not removed from this experience. For this reason, I initially wanted to work in uMlazi Township where I grew up and went to school. I was familiar with uMlazi Township and where I experienced queerphobic violence first hand and learned which sections of the township to avoid. In ensuring that this study did not heighten the level of vulnerability of the queer youth, I contacted the Durban Gay and Lesbian Centre (see Appendix E). The centre helped connect me with teachers who were already working with queer youth. The centre linked me with one teacher in an uMlazi Township school. However, the school principal refused me permission

to conduct the study in the school. According to him, there were no gay or lesbian learners in the school. This is even though the centre had introduced me to a teacher working against anti-queer bullying in the school. I then contacted a second teacher, this time one located in a school in KwaMashu. The teacher agreed to assist me in identifying and contacting learners to recruit into the study. This time, the principal gave permission for the study to proceed (see Appendix B). Figure 4.1 below is an aerial map of KwaMashu.



**Figure 4.1 General Reference Map of KwaMashu Township (The red line outlines the area of KwaMashu.) (AfriGIS, 2020)**

Like most townships in South Africa, KwaMashu near Durban is a product of apartheid engineering. In Chapter One, the socio-economic and educational context of KwaMashu was discussed. This includes its crime statistics from the SAPS. The statistics have continuously placed KwaMashu amongst South Africa's most violent townships, along with the neighbouring townships of Inanda and Ntuzuma (SAPS, 2020). For example, the Inanda Police station was one of five police stations that reported the highest number of murder cases in the country (June 2020 to April 2021) during the COVID-19 pandemic (SAPS, 2020). This makes KwaMashu one of the most violent townships in South Africa, affecting all social institutions,

including schools.

KwaMashu is described as “poor but vibrant” (Ferreira, 2015)<sup>5</sup>. Interestingly, the township is the setting for the South African television soap opera *uZalo*. Of particular interest to this study is that the soap opera has a queer African male character, GC, played by Khaya Dladla, who self-identifies as gay off-screen. GC seems to be accepted by both friends and the community in the soap opera, including the church congregation. *uZalo* portrays queerphobia as something outside of the KwaMashu Township and as foreign and backward. Queerphobia is seen through the arrival of GC’s parents from the rural areas who force him into an arranged marriage with a (heterosexual) woman, this after he had told his father that he was gay and in love with another man (Maduna, 2017)<sup>66</sup>. While GC defies and refuses to proceed with the traditional wedding, this is the only instance in which queerphobia is addressed in the drama. In August 2017, the soap opera drew approximately 91 million viewers, 72% of the total viewership in South Africa between 20:00 and 21:00 (Maduna, 2017). In the show little is shown about how GC navigates homophobia, violence, love and desire in the township. Instead, KwaMashu is painted as a community free from queerphobic violence and accepting of queer people. As queer youth in this study have shown, this is not an accurate depiction of life for queer people in KwaMashu.

The schools in this study get learners from KwaMashu and two other townships, Inanda township and Ntuzuma township. This trio makes up what is known as the Inanda, Ntuzuma and KwaMashu (INK) precinct. INK has a combined population of 510 000 (StatsSA, 2011). The poverty and unemployment rates in the area are alarming. StatsSA (2011) reported that in the three townships, of the adult population only 5.5% in KwaMashu, 2.3% in Inanda and 5% in Ntuzuma have higher education qualifications. The majority of adults had some secondary

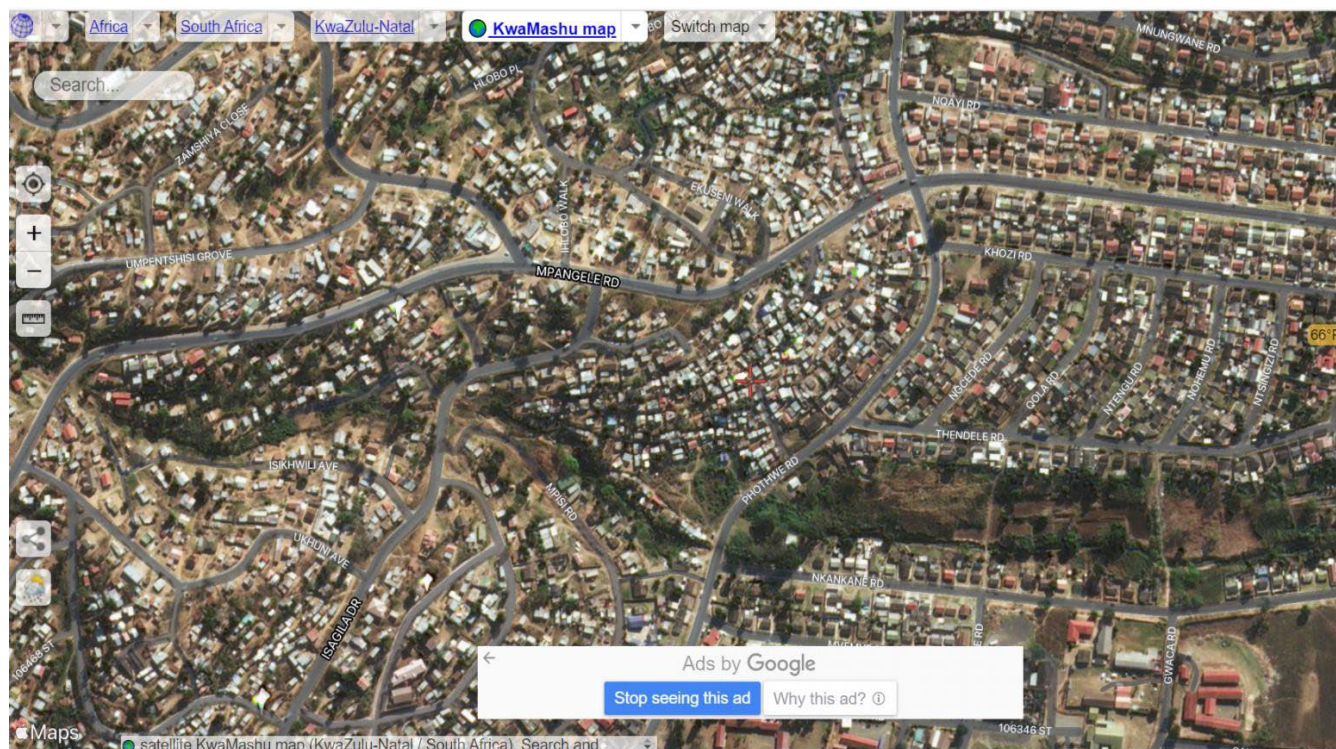
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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.channel24.co.za/TV/News/SABC1s-newUzalo-Were-not-Generations-20150210> Accessed on 07/10/2020

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.thedailyvox.co.za/uzalo-gets-lit-gc-walks-wedding-lizeka-maduna/>



education: 37.4% in KwaMashu, 37.6% in Inanda and 39.1% in Ntuzuma. Most households were without income (25.2% in KwaMashu, 23.7% in Inanda and 18% in Ntuzuma). Linked to this, a large number of households live in informal housing or shacks (see Figure 4.2).



**Figure 4.2 Part of KwaMashu Township: Showing shacks which indicate poverty (Satellites, 2021)**

The lack of higher education and secondary school attainment places the majority of the population in the INK Area in poverty and the ranks of the unemployed. This cannot be separated from the violence that persists in these three townships.

The setting for this study (where most of the participants were enrolled) included five high schools in the township: Emaweleni High School, Engadini High School, Ngaphesheya High School, UMgwaqo High School, Zimbali High School<sup>7</sup>. All five were identified as quintile three schools<sup>8</sup>. According to the Department of Basic Education (DBE), quintile three schools

<sup>7</sup> These are pseudonyms to protect the identity of the schools

<sup>8</sup> The quintile school system was designed to direct the resources to poor schools in poor communities. Quintile one to three being the most poor receive the most funding from government than schools categorised as quintile four to five



[o]ne of five groups into which all South African public ordinary schools are placed, and where the grouping is according to the poverty of the community around the school. Quintile one is the most poor quintile, quintile two is the second-poorest quintile, and so on. (Department of Education, 2006, p. 24)

[illegible]

83

The ablution facility is divided into toilets for girls and toilets for boys. The toilet facility is not well maintained, with lights that do not work and stalls that no longer have doors. As researchers have found, toilets tend to be sites of violence in schools, including GBV (Ngidi et al., 2020; Ngidi & Moletsane, 2018).

While qualitative research literature suggests that data generation should occur “in the field at the site where participants experience the issue or problem under study” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 181), I decided to hold my data generation workshops with the participants away from the schools in this study. The reasons for this were mainly ethical. In our first interaction, the participants clearly stated that they would not want to work within the school premises, noting that the school was not a safe environment for learners like themselves. This was made even more clear when a group of boys, just a few steps outside the school during our first meeting, threatened to physically hurt one of the participants. The school security guard, who witnessed this, did not react. Working with this group within their schooling context would have heightened their visibility and vulnerability. Therefore, the workshops discussed below were held at UKZN, where I was studying. Permission was obtained from parents and guardians to transport the children from KwaMashu to the venue, a seminar room that I had booked for use on Saturdays, Sundays, and school holidays.

To transport the participants to and from the township for the workshop, I hired a vehicle to pick me up from campus and then proceeded to KwaMashu to collect the participants. I accompanied the driver to KwaMashu because the participants were minors. I also did this for the parents to be assured that their children were indeed going to be spending the day with me. This was also done to ensure that the participants got to the venue safely. The participants would then be driven back to KwaMashu at the end of the day.

Using UKZN for our workshops had both advantages and disadvantages. For example, holding the workshops on campus addressed the vulnerability and visibility of the participants in their school. While they were ‘out’ to their friends, some were not ‘out’ to their communities or families. The campus gave the participants a sense of safety and freedom. Being away from their school and the township enabled the participants to have a space to be creative without surveillance. The venue also provided a sense of excitement for the participants as they were venturing into a new space. The disadvantages or limitations included that our sessions sometimes started late and ended early because of the travelling time between the campus and the township. It was essential to get the participants back to KwaMashu before dark to ensure their safe arrival. This made some of our sessions short.

#### **4.5 Participant Recruitment and Selection**

Recruiting queer youth in a township context was challenging. Because of queerphobic violence, queer African youth often make their queerness less visible. Therefore, being identified as participating in my study was likely to threaten their safety and well-being. The possibility of experiencing queerphobic violence made it difficult to identify and recruit them into the study. Msibi (2012, p. 522) stresses that the challenge lies in getting “access both ethically and logistically,” and recommends that teachers be used as an important avenue through which one can gain access to learners.

I initially recruited one participant with the help of teacher who was introduced to me by the Durban Lesbian and Gay Community and Health Centre. While I met the teacher inside the school and spoke with her in the Head of Departments’ open-plan office, she indicated that the school and offices would be unsafe for my research. She led me and the two learners she had invited to her car and left us to talk. One of the two learners later dropped out because his mother did not want him to participate. According to him, his mother believed that participating

in the study would make him ‘gayer.’ The remaining participant helped recruit nine more participants, using snowball sampling (Creswell, 2012) to identify and recruit willing youth. I asked him to get peers who identified as gay, lesbian or queer from his school and neighbourhood to participate in the study, and to ask them to do the same. Three participants were from his school, and others were friends from his neighbourhood but attended other high schools in the INK area. In total, I was able to recruit 10 participants. Table 4.1 below presents a profile of the 10 participants<sup>9</sup>. Notably, only one participant identified as lesbian. The queerphobic violence in many townships could have discouraged some potential participants, particularly those who identify as lesbian, from participating in the study, as the visibility could put them at risk.

**Table 4.1 Participants Profile**

Pseudonyms	Age	Grade	Sexual Orientation (self-identified)	Schools
Thamisanqa	16	11	Gay	UMgwaqo High School
Nkululeko	16	11	Gay	UMgwaqo High School
Mphathi	18	10	Gay	UMgwaqo High School
Alex	16	11	Lesbian	UMgwaqo High School
Jabulani	15	8	Gay	Engadini High School
Nathi	15	9	Gay	Emaweleni High School
Okuhle	17	11	Gay	Ngaphesheya High School
Bradley	15	9	Gay	Zimbali High School
MaZuma	17	11	Gay	Ngaphesheya High School
Lyah	17	11	Gay	Emaweleni High School

<sup>9</sup> Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the participants

#### 4.6 Data Generation

Data in qualitative research is generated through the participant's engagement in the research process (Creswell, 2013). This study addressed three research questions. Table 4.2 below summarises the data generation methods used to address each question:

**Table 4.2 Data Generation Process**

Research Question	Data Generation Method	Data Source
1. What does it mean to be a queer African youth in a township school?	Drawings	Drawings, captions and transcripts from discussions
2. How do queer learners in a township school respond to and resist their experiences of violence and discrimination in and around and their school?	Cellphilms	Brainstorming discussions; cellphilm storyboards transcripts of the cellphilms, and transcripts of the discussions.
3. What do queer African youth want teachers and other learners to know about their schooling experiences?	Interviews with participants	Interview transcripts and research journal

As shown in Table 4.2, the study engaged the participants in a series of workshops to generate data. In addition to the two participatory visual methods (drawing and cellphilm making) that we used in the workshops, I also had one-on-one interviews with each of the ten participants.

#### 4.6.1 Drawing

To address the first critical question: *What does it mean to be a queer African youth in a township school?*, I engaged the participants in a drawing workshop. The prompt for the drawing was: *Make a drawing of what being a queer learner looks like in your school. Your drawing should show how you see your school, including how and where you experience violence and how you avoid/prevent it.* The prompt aimed to show how the participants viewed the school, how they navigated a typical school day as queer learners, and the meanings they made of their experiences. I discussed the prompt with the participants, inviting them to ask questions until I was confident that they understood what was being asked. I then gave them coloured A4 paper, pens, pencils and colouring pens. I encouraged them not to think about the aesthetics of their drawings, but to rather focus on the ideas they wanted to communicate.

When the drawings were completed, I invited the participants to curate their drawings into a mini exhibition. I then invited each participant to talk about their drawing and answer questions and receive comments from the group. The questions used to guide the discussion about the drawings included:

- Tell us about your drawing and the spaces in your drawing. What happens in these spaces?
- How do teachers and other learners interact with you in these places? How do you feel when they treat you this way? How do you respond?
- Are there any other places that are now coming to mind that you have not drawn would want to now? If so, can you tell us why you did not include them in your drawing? Can you tell us what happens in these places?

The discussions of the drawings were in isiZulu and they were audio-recorded and later transcribed and translated for analysis.

The discussion from the first drawing exercise was not very successful because most participants were not yet comfortable sharing their experiences with me and the other participants in a group setting. Nevertheless, some of the drawings were used in the analysis. Thus, a second drawing workshop was held. In the second drawing activity, the prompt was: *Create a drawing in which you show your experiences in the school.* The prompt was deliberately open-ended to allow the participants to decide what aspects of their school experience they wanted to share with the group and with me. For the activity, the participants worked in pairs. Participant A would tell participant B their experience(s) in the school and what happens to them in particular spaces in and around the school. Participant B would then draw what they heard, and then they would switch roles. At the end of the session, Participant B – the drawer – would present to the rest of the group what the drawing was about, what they heard, and what they thought about the experience shared with them. The reason for taking this approach was for participants to share their experiences with one person before being asked to share with the larger group. The drawer was tasked with asking questions that would allow them to draw. In the second workshop, the participants were able to present to their peers and answer questions in the discussion. Again, the discussions, conducted in isiZulu, were recorded and transcribed verbatim, and then translated into English.

Theron et al., (2011) argue that the use of drawings may place participants at ease. The scholars maintain that this is especially useful when there is a challenge in expressing thoughts or discussing a sensitive topic. Further, Mitchell, de Lange and Moletsane (2018, p. 24) assert that with drawing, participants have “immediate access or agency which leads to giving them a sense of empowerment”. In this study, the drawings enabled the participants to articulate their experiences in their township schools and to start a dialogue about them.

#### 4.6.2 Cellphilm Making

To address the second critical question: *How do queer learners in a township school respond to and resist their experiences of violence and discrimination in and around and their school?*, I engaged the participants in Cellphilm making (see Appendix A). Cellphilms are short films created by groups of participants using cellular phones or tablet computers (Dockney & Tomaselli, 2009). Cellphilms enable participants “to engage with an issue/topic through collaboratively planning, filming, and sometimes, showing the video” (Mitchell, de Lange & Moletsane, 2018, p. 28). This method enables deeper communication amongst participants and fosters agency, preparing a fertile ground “for reflexivity on the lived experiences and how they might be changed” (Mitchell, de Lange & Moletsane, 2018, p. 29).

I hosted a four-hour cellphilm making workshop with the participants. Due to the low socio-economic status of the participants, I knew that not all learners would have access to their own cellular phones. To address this problem, I provided four tablets to be used in the workshop. In the cellphilm workshop, the participants worked in groups of five, each producing one cellphilm, making two cellphilms in total. The workshop started with a brainstorming session on how the participants responded to and resisted their experiences of violence or discrimination in and around and their school. Each group went into separate spaces to do their brainstorming. The groups were given tablets to record their discussions. When the two smaller groups finished the brainstorming, they presented a summary of their discussion to the whole



group, which was also recorded. After the discussions, I asked the groups to pick an issue(s) from their brainstorming session to make a cellphilm about. Each group developed a storyboard, in which they used six frames to depict the scenes they were planning for their film. Each scene, placed in a frame, described what was happening at each point in the story. Figure

Group Members:

Story Board Date:

Scene 1

Scene 2

Scene 3

Scene 4

Scene 5

Scene 6

4.4 presents an example of a storyboard.

**Figure 4.4 An example of a storyboard template**

When the storyboards were complete, the groups practised shooting their cellphilm. The participants then filmed the cellphilm. The filming of the cellphilm took a number of tries, as the participants wanted the cellphilm to be perfect. In some instances, they started over because of noise interference or the angle of the shot. When the participants were happy with the cellphilm, it was saved. The participants insisted on first screening the cellphilm for me before showing it to the larger group. After that, the films were screened to the whole group

where the issues they raised or did not raise were discussed. Both the small and large group discussions, conducted in isiZulu, were recorded and transcribed verbatim, and then translated into English.

#### *4.6.3 Semi-structured Interviews*

To address the third critical question: *What do queer African learners want teachers and other learners to know about their schooling experiences?*, I conducted semi-structured individual interviews with the 10 participants. I asked each participant to choose from their drawings the one that they related to the most. Three questions guided the interviews, with additional questions posed where needed:

- Why did you choose this particular image? What does it mean to you?
- What would you add to (or change about) the drawing you chose and the caption?
- What do you want teachers and other learners to know about your experiences as a queer learner in the school? Why is this important to you?

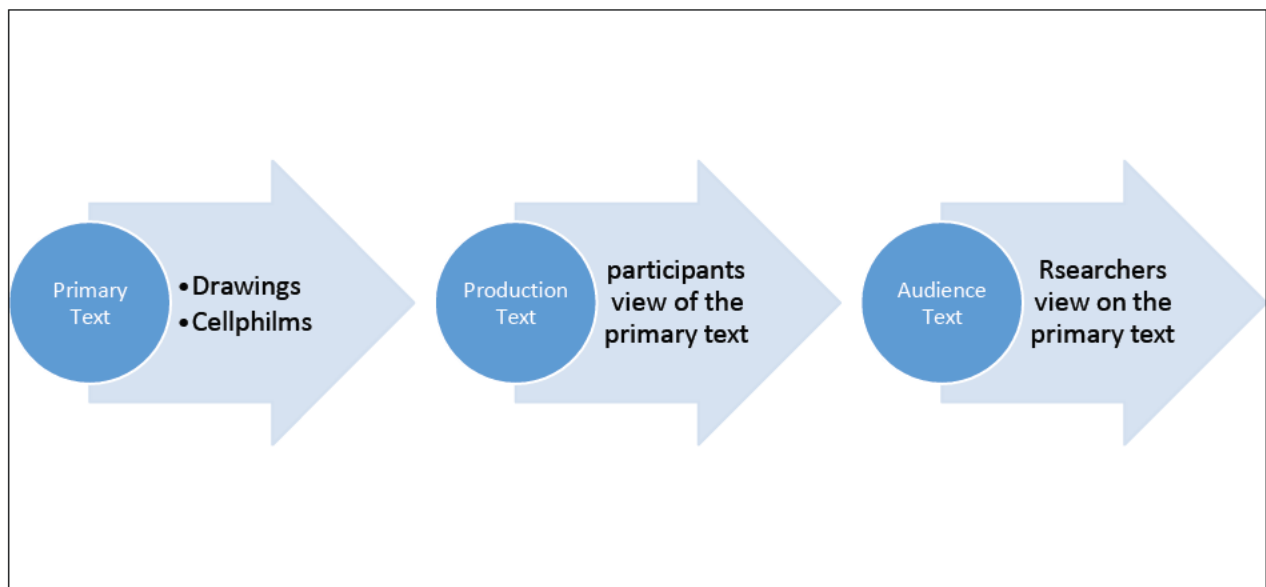
The semi-structured interview allowed the participants to articulate, in their own words, not only how they experienced schooling as queer learners in the township setting, but also what they wanted teachers and other learners to know about these experiences. In doing this, I wanted them to begin thinking about possibilities for change where the discrimination and violence they often experience would be a thing of the past. The interviews, conducted in isiZulu, were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, and then translated into English for analysis.

### **4.7 Data Analysis**

The data generated in this study was qualitative. Qualitative data is centred on meanings which are not only generated in texts and language but are also found in visual and sound products (Dey, 1993). In this study, the meanings were drawn from visual artefacts (drawings and cellfilms) and textual data (interview transcripts).

#### 4.7.1 Visual Data Analysis

The two visual products (drawings and cellphilms), were analysed using Fiske's (1987, 1992) three layers of analysis of visual texts. According to Fiske's model, the first layer is the primary text which is the visual artefact that the participants have produced (e.g., the drawing, storyboard and cellphilms). The second layer, the secondary text, is what the participant had to say about the visual artefact they made. The last layer is the audience text, which involves what the audience (including other participants in the workshops, others outside the workshop who may view the exhibition or the cellphilms and myself as the researcher) says about the visual productions or the primary text. Figure 4.5 illustrates.



**Figure 4.5 Fiske's three layers of textual analysis**

#### 4.7.2 Textual Data Analysis

The transcripts from the drawing and cellphilms workshops were also analysed as part of the data set. I read and reread the original isiZulu transcripts against the English translations to ensure the accuracy of the translation, but to also minimise the effect of the 'lost in translation' phenomenon in research. In constructing meaning from these transcripts, I used thematic analysis to analyse the textual data. Braun and Clark (2006) assert that "thematic analysis is a

method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (p. 79) or recognising the common ideas that frequently occur or appear in texts (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

This study used thematic analysis strategies advanced by Braun and Clark (2006) to analyse the transcripts. Braun and Clark’s approach to thematic analysis is organised into six stages. Stage One involves the researcher's immersion into the data itself (Braun & Clark, 2006). In other words, the researcher must understand every part of the data generated before analysing the data. In this study, immersion with the data meant that I, the researcher, first listened to audio recordings, watched the participants’ cellphilm productions, and transcribed the data verbatim. The interactions with the participants were in isiZulu, their home language. This means that after transcription, the data was translated into English. It is possible that some meaning may have been ‘lost in translation’. To minimise this risk, I then read the translated data against the original isiZulu transcripts. This was possible because I am a first language speaker of isiZulu and have often done translations for researchers at the university. The immersion with the data allowed the initial codes to emerge in the second phase of data analysis.

Stage Two involved coding, the process of naming a piece of the textual data that has been generated (Cohen, Lawrence & Morrison, 2018). Coding turns vast amounts of data into segments where “examining, comparing, conceptualising and categorising the data” occurs. (Cohen, Lawrence & Morrison, 2018, p. 668). This study used open coding which entailed me reading each line and asking of the data *What is this about?* As I did so, I always kept in mind the three critical question posed in the study. I commented on each line of the transcribed word document using a word or a phrase which indicated what the line was about. I used both semantic and descriptive labelling in constructing words and phrases.

In Stage Three of the process, I created themes from the codes I had developed in the previous stage. To do this, I used a table separated into three categories. The first category was titled units of meaning, and this housed the codes. The second category was labelled units of meaning grouped into categories. This contained the categories which had been highlighted in the same colour representing similar ideas/experiences. The second category is where the sub-themes were constructed. The third category contained the sub-themes, and here these were grouped into themes. The themes were formed from the underlying thread that cut across the categories.

In Stage Four of the data analysis process, I reviewed the coded data and themes generated. Braun and Clark (2006) state that this part of the process involves refining the themes, where some themes collapse into others and others break away to form separate themes, and in some instances, new themes emerge. In this step, I refined the themes by re-reading them and the codes and data extracts. Overall, this stage helped me to align the themes with the data.

In Stage Five, after reviewing the themes, I gave each a name/label which I then defined. Braun and Clark (2006) state that defining and naming themes is to state the theme's core while expressing what part of the story one is telling. The names of the themes and their definitions speak to each research question and tell the participants' experiences, in this case, queer African youth in township schools.

In Stage 6, the final stage, the themes are presented as the findings from the study. The findings will be presented in Chapter Five.

#### **4.8 Ensuring Trustworthiness and Rigour**

Qualitative research seeks to understand participants' experiences of the particular phenomenon being researched (Myburgh & Poggempoel, 2007). In this instance, the phenomenon is the experiences of queer learners in township schools. First, to ensure

trustworthiness in this study, I followed Myburgh and Poggempoel's (2007) basic assumptions that guide qualitative inquiry, including that:

- the qualitative researcher seeks to provide a thick description of the research process;
- presumptions or biases of the researcher should be set aside - 'bracketing';
- participants involved in the study should be the ones who are best suited to unpack the phenomenon in how it plays out in their context;
- the language used should enable both the participants and the researcher to be involved in the research process; and
- the researcher understanding that participants have multiple lived experiences, realities and views.

These assumptions informed my research approach in this study, including providing detailed descriptions of the research process, participant recruitment, and approaches to data generation and analysis. To ensure trustworthiness, I used Lincoln and Guba's (1985) concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

#### *4.8.1 Credibility*

To ensure credibility, Shenton (2004) considers the use of research methods that are well established. In this study, these include participatory visual methods (drawing and cellphilm making) and semi-structured individual interviews. Informed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), triangulation (in this case, of data generation methods) was used as a form of ensuring credibility. The use of multiple data generation methods has assisted in getting a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It has also enhanced this study's credibility and ensured that the data is rich and robust.

#### *4.8.2 Transferability*

In this study, to ensure transferability, in this dissertation, I provide a thick, detailed description of the research setting, participants, the research process and evidence for my findings using direct quotes from the participants themselves (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Overall, the thick descriptions of the context, methods, and phenomenon under study strengthen the study's transferability, enabling readers/other researchers to understand the context, the participants and process and possibly be able to conduct similar studies in their own contexts.

#### *4.8.3 Dependability and Confirmability*

Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend using an external audit to confirm or contribute to the dependability and confirmability of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that the external audit trail is conducted by a researcher who was not part of the research process or product. In this study, I asked a fellow researcher to critically engage with the data and findings from my study to gauge whether and how the latter reflects the former and to critically examine whether and how the findings, analysis, and conclusion are coherent. Shenton (2004) also recognises triangulation as a means of establishing confirmability in a study. Triangulation (using more diverse research methods in the form of two participatory visual methods (drawings and participatory videos), and semi-structured, one-on-one interviews, further assisted in establishing the confirmability and dependability of this study.

#### *4.8.4 Reflexivity: Locating myself in the research*

I am cognisant of Berger's (2015) warning that the researcher's position may affect the research process and the meanings made from the data. To minimise this, as Berger (2015) suggests, I reflected on my positionality throughout the research process. By so doing, I turn the research lens from my participants' inward towards myself. I take responsibility for the research and the knowledge produced. In this way, the knowledge generated in this research is not objective and

not independent of me as the researcher (Berger, 2015).

As discussed in Chapter One, I come into this study as an ‘insider’ to a certain extent, as one who shares similar experiences with my participants. I claim a queer African cisgender male identity, have attended township schools all of my life and I am from a poor township similar to the one where my participants lived. Like them, I experienced my schooling in a context of high levels of queerphobic violence against those who identify as queer. I nevertheless understood the participants’ initial mistrust of me as a researcher. To address this, I informed them of my sexual orientation and my schooling background. This, I believe, impacted the research process. Due to my own experiences, I understood some of the experiences that they shared. However, I did not fully know how these looked to them, how they experienced them and what they meant to them in their context. Being an ‘insider’ did grant me a foot in the door to their world. It enabled them to take me to spaces of their world that I did not experience or had experienced differently. While this was not always the case with every participant, I believe that it chipped away at the power imbalance between an adult queer male researcher living outside of the township and the young queer participant living in a township. In some instances, when I had one-on-one interactions with some of the participants, they assumed that I knew their experiences. This assumption was because I had disclosed my sexual identity, origin and schooling experience. Some would use words like *‘they are just irritating you know...’*, indicating that they did not need to explain because I ‘know’ as they saw me as one of them. In these instances, I made sure that I became the ‘outsider,’ because while I had similar school experiences as a learner, I did not have their particular experiences, nor did I respond the same way. To ensure this, I kept a research journal. At the end of each workshop, I reflected on what happened, how I responded and why I responded that way.



#### **4.9 Ethical Considerations**

First, I obtained ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal research ethics committee (Protocol number: HSS/1027 /018M – Linked to HSS/0852/014CA). Written consent was sought from the parents of participants under 18 years (see Appendix D). Participants were also asked to sign assent forms before participating in the study (see Appendix C).

Second, my first meeting with the teacher and the participants in this study alerted me to the risks attached when queer youth participate in research. Such participation adds another layer of visibility. The participants become a group that meets at a particular time and place, creating a noticeable pattern. As queer youth already face discrimination and violence, they become visible and often targets of discrimination and violence in and around the school by becoming a group. To minimise the risk, I asked the participants where they wanted us to conduct the workshops. I believed they were experts in their context and could assess their own risk. Our discussions made it clear that they would feel safer if the workshops were held away from the schools and over weekends. I considered the community hall but it was always booked for community events like weddings and funerals, so I decided to use UKZN as a venue. This minimised the level of discrimination and violence that the participants might encounter.

Third, in considering anonymity and confidentiality in this study, I aligned myself with de Lange and Geldenhuys (2012) who argue that while visual methods can never be completely anonymous, keeping the school and the participants anonymous and using pseudonyms to protect their identities and schools is essential.

Fourth, in participatory visual research, Mitchell, De Lange, and Moletsane (2018) emphasise reflexivity as an ethical tool. Reflexivity helps to ensure that we do the “least harm and most

good” (De Lange & Geldenhuys, 2012, p. 498). According to them, the research process must remain democratic. It combines the process with meaningful participant engagement and the product, rather than a rigid focus alone (Mitchell, De Lange & Moletsane, 2018). Overall, participants were consulted about critical decisions regarding where to conduct workshops and when to meet.

#### **4.10 Synthesis**

The main question in this study was: *How do queer African youth experience, respond to and resist negative experiences in a township secondary school?* This chapter discusses and reflects on the research design and methodology used to address this question. The study was located in the critical paradigm and adopted a qualitative research design. In line with this, it used participatory visual methodology to address the research questions. Tools for data generation included drawings, cellphilms, and semi-structured individual interviews. Using these research methods enabled my participants to co-construct knowledge, share their experiences, and think critically about how they responded to and resisted queerphobic violence. The chapter concludes with reflections on the ethical issues that were considered in the study.

The next chapter presents the findings from the study.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Experiences of Marginalisation and Agency among Queer African Youth in a Township Secondary Schools: Research Findings

#### *I don't want peace. I want Freedom*

*I don't want peace. I want Freedom. I have had peace, I have seen it, had it hold my hand, had it sleep right next to me and allowed it to swallow me whole, swallow my voice and cage me in its fog.*

*For the sake of peace, peace allowed him to walk in, to come in, in inside me, whenever he wanted to, whenever he wanted to have his way with me, peace allowed this. For the sake of peace, I was no longer me, and in the sake of peace, peace was him. peace turned me into the person I feared the most. peace was what I feared the most, peace, but only peace allowed this.*

*I no longer want peace. I never wanted peace. I want Freedom. I would rather have war than peace, peace civilizes violence, normalises it, makes it acceptable, addible, attractive and sensual. peace has made war of our bodies. I want Freedom.*

*(Nkonzo Mkhize, 2018)*

#### 5. 1 Introduction

The main research question in this study was: *How do queer African youth experience, respond to and resist negative experiences in township secondary schools?* To address this question, the study sought to address the following critical questions:

1. What does it mean to be a queer African youth in a township secondary school?
2. How do queer African youth respond and resist their negative experiences from peers and teachers?
3. What changes do queer African youth want to see in their township secondary school?

The previous chapter discussed the research design and methodology. This study is located

within the critical paradigm and constructivist paradigm. In summary, this meant working *with* a marginalised group (Queer African youth) to understand and critique their experiences of marginalisation in and around their township secondary schools. To undertake this kind of work, the study used a qualitative approach to research. This enabled queer African youth to share their schooling experiences, placing their voices at the centre of the inquiry. To generate data, this study adopted PVM. Aligned with the critical theory, PVM centred queer African youth within the research and placed the research tools in their hands. In particular, the study used drawings and cellphilms to generate data to examine how they experienced their schooling, how they responded to and resisted the negative schooling experiences they encountered.

Dey (1993) writes that in qualitative analysis

... often, we want to do more than describe: we want to interpret, to explain, to understand—perhaps even to predict. We want to know how and why, as well as what. The way we do that is to analyse our data. In doing so, we go beyond our initial description; and we transform our data into something it was not. (p. 31)

This chapter analyses the data generated from the study and presents the research findings.

## **5.2 Research Findings**

In this chapter, I present the findings to the research question: *How do queer African youth experience, respond to and resist negative experiences in township secondary schools?* I divide the chapter into three sections, each dedicated to one of the research questions. I conclude the chapter with a discussion that integrates these three sections and highlights the interconnectedness, complexity and dynamic nature of the participants' experiences of marginalisation in and around their schools.

### 5.2.1 Being Queer in a Township Secondary School

The first critical research question in this study was: *What does it mean to be queer African youth in a township school?* To address the question, two drawing workshops (discussed in Chapter Four) were held with the participants. The first workshop used the prompt:

*Make a drawing of what being a queer learner looks like in your school. Your drawing should show how you see your school, including how and where you experience violence, how you avoid/prevent it.*

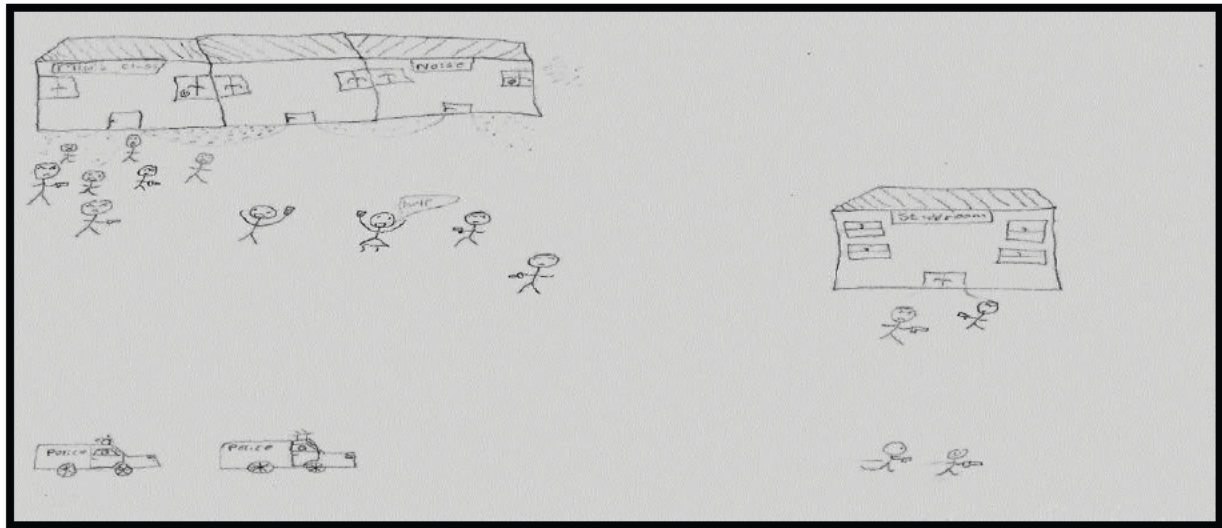
As explained in Chapter Four, in our first drawing workshop, I sensed a level of discomfort from participants in sharing their experiences in a large group setting. To address this, a second drawing workshop was held which used the prompt: *Create a drawing in which you show your experiences in the school.* Participants were asked to work in pairs in which each told their story to their partner who would use what they heard to create a drawing. This was done to mitigate the discomfort of having to share the story with the entire group and to begin to build trust among the participants.

My analysis of the data (drawings and notes from discussions) generated several themes: 1) Geographies of violence; 2) Experiences of microaggression in and around the school; 3) The politics of and paradoxes of ‘coming out’; and 4) The complexities of support for queer learners in schools. These are discussed below.

#### 5.2.1.1 Geographies of violence

Township secondary school spaces are, like the communities in which they are located, governed by unequal gender norms and hetero-patriarchal relations amongst the inhabitants. The findings suggest that queer African youth who participated in the study found their township schools and their spaces restrictive and violent to them. For them, some spaces were

no-go-areas, where they experienced queerphobic violence for the most part. For example, MaZuma's drawing alerts us to the violence he experienced and witnessed in his township school.



**Figure 5.1: MaZuma's experiences of violence in school**

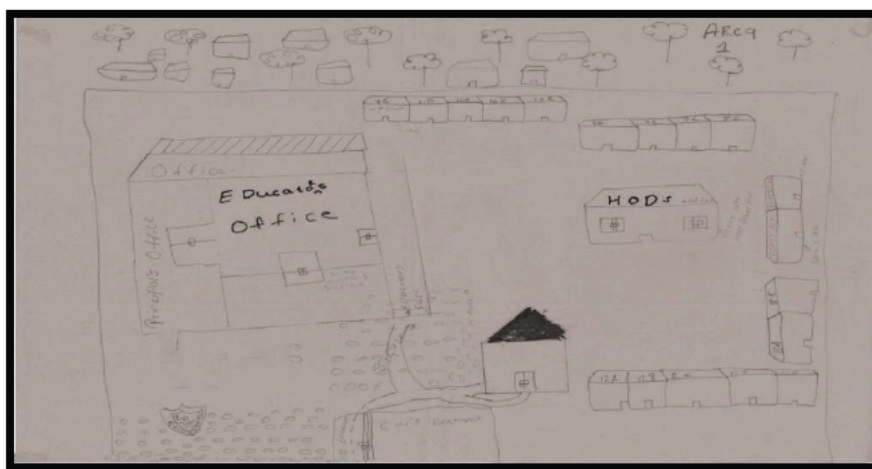
In the second drawing workshop, MaZuma (see figure 5.1) explained his schooling experience to Mphathi, stating that:

I'm going to share something that happened this week. During our break time, I was in class, and I heard a noise from outside of the learners that was quite unusual compared to the everyday. Learners from grades 10, 9 and 8 were shouting and all of a sudden, boys from our class with other classes came in with weapons like knives... we saw boys who had come to robbery [sic] our school. Yes, a robbery at school, they pointed at the learners and went into the school office. Luckily there were male teachers, in fact, a few of them in the office when they entered.

MaZuma's experience shows the unrelenting violence in township schools. The drawing (Figure 5.1) describes how men and boys held hostage learners in the school with guns. The men and boys are the stick figures with objects in their hands representing dangerous weapons, like guns" the sentence is included to better describe the drawing. In this instance, the violence permeated every space in the school, including

classrooms, staffrooms, the general school grounds and even outside the school grounds. Notably, the violence is often gendered, with boys as the main perpetrators of aggression against girls and queer learners in the school, sometimes using dangerous weapons such as knives. The heterosexual, patriarchal, masculine violence shown here characterises the experiences of queer African youth in and around their township schools.

For Alex (see Figure 5.2 below), the violence happened mostly around the toilet facilities in the school.



**Figure 5.2: Alex's Experiences of Violence in and Around the School Toilets**

In her presentation of her drawing in the first drawing workshop, she reported that:

The toilet, I never set foot there! ... there are toilets for both boys and girls... The place that I absolutely don't like is the HOD's office. Mr Mqadi's [pseudonym] office I just don't like him... I don't like that office especially him. I really don't like him; I even wrote to him that I don't like him, guys, I hate that teacher. The boy's toilet I don't like and don't even go inside ever because I hate it.

Similarly, for Mpathi (Figure 5.3) violence was mostly inflicted by boys in his classroom and school toilets.



**Figure 5.3: Mphathi's experience inside the classroom and the toilet**

In one incident, the boy who inflicted the violence was his desk mate. As his workshop partner, MaZuma, narrated:

Mphathi was sitting with his desk mate. As they are sitting, his deskmate [sic] says to him, they should go to the toilet and that he wants him to feel him. The deskmate that is saying all of this is straight according to our knowledge. Mphathi refused. His deskmate pushed him onto the wall. The teachers were at the office though some boys were there but weren't paying attention to what was happening.

In the group discussions, Thamsanqa shared how the corridors near his class and neighbouring classes were no-go-areas for him. Thamsanqa also cited the toilets as one of the spaces that he also does not go to, because of the lack of safety. He reported that he would rather wait until the school day ends and he reaches his home in order to use the toilet than to go to the one at school. Nkululeko, another participant, added what was referred to as the quad as another dangerous space for him in the school and which he avoided at all costs.

In a study on pervasive sexual violence against orphaned learners in and around the school, Ngidi and Moletsane (2019) found that boys who fell victim to sexual violence and bullying



mostly experienced this in the toilets and out of view from teachers and security personnel, but also in other spaces in and around the school. Similarly, the findings in this section identify various spaces in the school as unsafe and violent areas for these queer learners, suggesting that, for them, the geographies of violence in township secondary schools covered all spaces, particularly those not monitored by adults (teachers and security personnel).

#### *5.2.1.2 Experiences of microaggression in and around school*

The analysis of transcripts from the discussions of the drawings suggests that the queer African youth who participated in this study experienced microaggression within their township schooling contexts. For example, Alex, shared her experiences of condemnation and negative judgment from the schooling community:

He [security guard] is the talkative and judgemental type. All the time when we meet or bump into each other he will call me aside and ask me why is Nkululeko so silly ...  
He went on to say god doesn't like the person that I am.

In the extract above, Alex sees the security guard and teachers as judgemental and religion/God as a tool that they use to condemn her identity. Similarly, Nkululeko related how the security guard tended to seek him out, suggesting that former avoided him. However, the security guard has a clear intention to ensure that Nkululeko and Alex 'convert' back to 'heterosexuality' – suggesting that 'the person that I am (Alex)' is not a real person. Studies by Bhana (2014), Msibi (2012), and Langa (2015) illustrate the role of religion in the marginalisation of queer learners in various spaces in which it is used to regulate how bodies may perform their gender (see also Bhana, 2013). The school's security guard, for example, uses religion to police learners as they enter the school, ensuring that heterosexuality is accepted as the norm in the entire school context.

Nathi also points to other learners, boys in particular, and teachers as judgemental against queer learners. Adding that the condemnation goes beyond name-calling, he states:

We have gays in my school, and most of the boys are used to judging them. They call them names... all those names and they are told that as a boy you have to remember your place, do not force yourself into something that you are not. Yeah, that is all... they help not to be depressed by the other learners. And the other teachers they hate gays, and they judge them too. They abuse them in class, once you do a small mistake, they hit you, they abuse you. I am done.

Nathi's story highlights how compulsory heterosexuality is enforced for all those who inhabit schools, including queer learners, and is a norm that cannot be subverted. Here, the 'remembering' calls on queer youth to perform what they have been taught: heterosexuality as normative and natural. Remembering is a call to reject any form of alternative gender identity that queer boys may express, 'something you are not.' Therefore, by not 'remembering' their 'place', denouncing allegiance to heteropatriarchy and thus not succumbing to its dominance, queer youth are seen to undermine its existence. The violence that follows in the form of negative judgement, hate, and physical violence, coming from teachers and other learners, is, to a certain extent, a means of punishing and disciplining queer youth for being queer.

In his discussion of his drawing, Mphathi referred to the discrimination and marginalisation that queer learners experience in their township school because of their gender expression that is not in line with the essentialist heteronormative gender binary:

Being judged, it's something that happens in school, and it happens a lot. Others judge you because of your personality maybe because you are gay or a lesbian while they are straight. They leave you out of activities and they do them alone because they don't want you there. Sometimes they judge you because of your gender. Just like if you are

a boy or a girl then you not supposed to do certain things. They judge me about who I am my sexual orientation... Teachers don't pay attention to it. But maybe if you report it then they do respond and fix the problem to be included in activities.

In this instance, discrimination is founded on who queer youth are sexually and emotionally attracted to. According to the participants in this study, learners, teachers and security personnel in their schools disapprove of their same-sex relationships. Similarly, Mostert et al. (2015) point to how learners in a middle-class suburban school, particularly heterosexual males, were judgemental towards queer youth. This points to how homophobia seems to be everywhere, whether in rural schools, township schools or private schools in South Africa. Some of the consequences of being discriminated against are alienation through exclusion from activities. Mpathi also reveals that it is not only queer youth that are excluded. Rather, any learner who expresses difference is excluded, this in the pursuit to normalise heterosexuality (Msibi, 2012). A study by Francis and Reygan (2016) examined microaggression towards lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender learners in schools. Their findings suggest that such aggression happened at the hands of learners, teachers, including LO teachers, and security personnel (see also Bhana, 2012; Msibi, 2012, 2018). According to Francis and Reygan (2016), while the problematic word *isitabane*<sup>10</sup> was not used by teachers or security personnel, it was inferred. Similarly, in this study, the inference was made by the security guard calling Nkululeko 'silly' and Alex being questioned, and accused of wanting to be a boy. The findings have implications for interventions that involve all teachers and those involved in the education sector.

#### *5.2.1.3 The politics of and paradoxes of 'coming out'*

Available studies have shown the politics of 'coming out' and being visible for queer people.

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<sup>10</sup> (an isiZulu derogatory word equivalent to moffie and faggot, see Msibi 2012)

For example, Jones and Hiller (2013), in their Australian study found that the more subversive (and visible) queer youth were, the greater the rejection and abuse from peers and family members they experienced. In this study, analysis of the transcripts of the drawing discussions suggest that the participants saw how queer youth who did not fit into the 'ideal' queer person mould, a script written from a hetero-centric logic, were marginalised and experienced physical violence. For example, they suggested that the more visible you are and the more you subvert the norm, the less likely you are to experience the harshest punishment. To illustrate, Liya commented that:

In our school, umm well, what can I say? There are two of us that choose to cross-dress sometimes, and I'm the one who does it the most because I wear a wig as well as make-up. They don't judge me, and then there are those that I'm always hanging around with, they don't cross [- dress], they don't even wear wigs or do anything at all. They are the ones that get discriminated. They are always asked why they don't do anything and end up being called fake and a whole lot of other things.

Liya's experiences of being 'acceptable' while other queer youth in his school are marginalised further illuminate the dynamics of coming out and visibility. As Francis (2017) writes, coming out helps some queer people while others experience marginalisation. Unlike those who try to blend into the heteronormative school environment, for Liya being known for bending gender rules and what it means to be an African gay youth in a township school, got him acceptance. The discrimination faced by Liya's friends, including being called fake and not authentic, further illuminate the heteronormativity that govern school contexts.

MaZuma also cites the negative experiences of a learner in the school who sometimes dresses in drag as an example of how queer learners are mistreated:

There is a learner called Yvonne. So, this person has a problem in school because what makes Yvonne experience problems at school is because he becomes a drag queen in school. So, the teachers have problems with the learner. It's not that the teachers have a problem with him, but Yvonne comes to school with his hair done and with lipstick on along with mascara and make-up.

Adding to this, Okuhle noted:

In grade 10, there is a boy, it's this other boy who got ice blocks poured over him, imagine cold ice block being poured on your head. It's just that Yvonne doesn't know what, how can I say this, he makes it too obvious to everyone that he is gay. His personality is strong, everything that he does, he exaggerates it.

Jones et al. (2016) investigating the schooling experiences of gender diverse and trans-spectrum youth found similar findings in their survey study. Particularly, the study found that schools uniform codes of conduct were gendered. Like Yvonne, gender diverse and trans-spectrum youth were restricted to what uniform they could wear. Male learners were not allowed to wear female-assigned school uniforms, and vice versa. The restriction on school uniforms caused negative schooling experiences for gender diverse and trans-spectrum youth, such as depression. This further highlights a heterocentric script that dictates what queerness can be, who can embody queerness and how queerness can be embodied. For example, even though Okuhle and MaZuma agreed that Yvonne was 'overdoing it,' and they 'try to hold back on other things and be like we are hiding when we are at school to feel welcomed,' they also acknowledged the unwarranted violence and discrimination she experienced. Here, assimilation into the dominant way of being or what other learners and teachers permit, enables Okuhle and MaZuma to have a conditional sense of 'feel[ing] welcomed' and not beaten by other learners in the school. Yvonne, on the other hand, who refuses to conform to the

heteronormative script, is marginalised.

#### *5.2.1.4 The complexities of support for queer learners in schools*

In my analysis of the group discussions, participants reported that some heterosexual/heteronormative-presenting learners in their classrooms and teachers supported them. For example, Thamsanqa explained how his class was safer and that his classmates understood him. Similarly, Alex stated that:

What I like about my class, even though there are those who are annoying, most of them are very understanding of me. They love me and I love them. I know not everyone will be accepting and fond of me I'm not money. There is also those who don't like me, and so do I.

Teachers reportedly had complicated relationships with queer youth in schools. While some appeared to be supportive, by for example, teaching pro-queer youth content, others did so grudgingly and even rejected it. For example, Okuhle observed:

Like in Life Orientation, the teacher might be all right, but other teachers might be all right and worse, they would teach this content [sexuality diversity] and then reject it after teaching it. You see... Others as well, like I am saying, it depends on which teacher it is.

Teachers rejecting of queer youth and experiences after teaching sexual diversity, could be understood as teachers not being aware of the hidden curriculum. Msibi's (2012) study also found that some teachers were supportive and protective of queer youth, particularly when the latter entered the staffroom seeking assistance. In my study, the participants received support not only from some teachers but also from learners. Significantly, Thamsanqa indicated that learners in his class over time got used to him, while in Alex's case, some learners still did not

like her.

### *5.2.2 Responding to and Resisting Queerphobic Violence in and around School*

This section of the chapter answers the second research question: *How do queer African youth respond to and resist negative experiences with their peers and teachers?* To address the question, data was drawn from the two drawing workshops held with the participants. In addition, two cellphilms workshops were conducted with the participants. The prompt for the cellphilms was: *How do you respond to and resist experiences of violence or discrimination in school?* To respond to the prompt, participants were asked what issues they would like to show in their cellphilm. After listing the issues and saying why these particular issues were significant, they were asked to produce a cellphilm using one or a combination of the issues that they listed showing how they respond to it. They were then asked to create cellphilms in which they showed what they did when faced with violent interactions in and around schools. My analysis of the data from the visual products (the cellphilms, storyboards and drawings) and the textual data (post-viewing discussion transcripts), generated the following themes: 1) Moving through school on our own terms, 2) Finding belonging, friendship and love, 3) Queer African youth taking up space and fighting back, and 4) Troubling hegemonic and (hetero)normative school culture: Being queer as resistance.

#### *5.2.2.1 Moving through school on our own terms*

The analysis of the drawings and the discussions linked to them suggests some agency from the participants in how they moved around the school and navigated the spaces that often marginalised them. On the surface their movements might seem mundane from the maps they drew, but a closer look at the discussions shows strategy in how the participants navigated the school space. For example, Nkululeko chose not to walk across the quad, while Alex and Thamsanqa did. Nkululeko gave his reasons for choosing not to walk across the quad:





Thamsanqa has a different perspective on the quad. For example, he states:

I'm just always by the quad... Ayi outside you see there by the grade 12B to 12E, I'm not familiar with the learners there... So, since I'm not familiar with... I think they are judgemental, and I don't have time for that... Ay, I wouldn't know about the whole school since I'm not the kind of person who goes around the school. I'm just always by the quad.

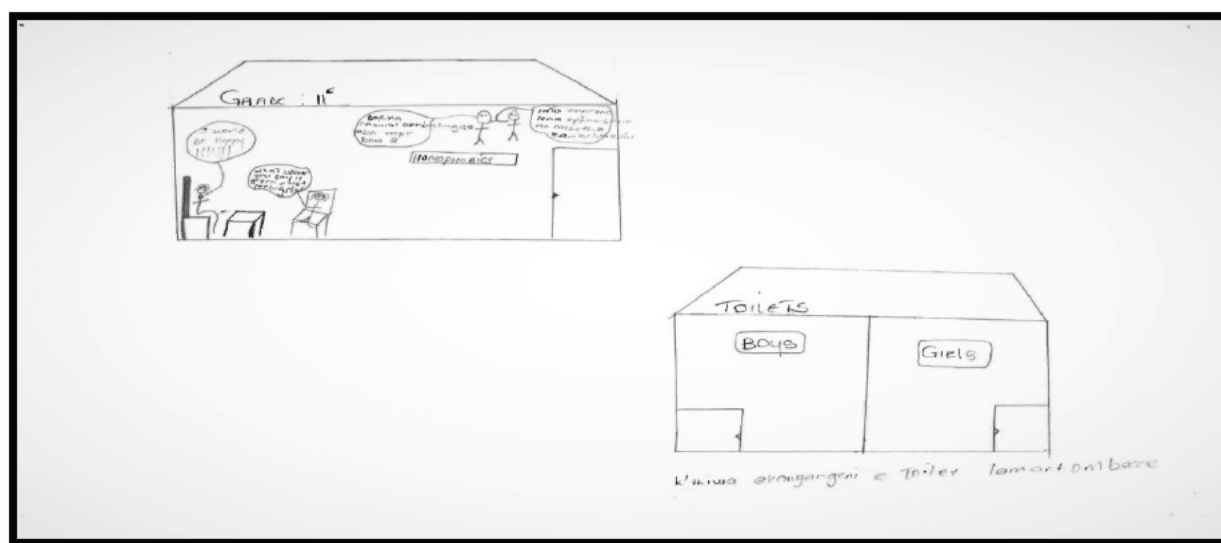
Instead, as a gay learner who is '*just always by the quad*,' Thamsanqa sees the passages immediately after his class as a no-go area. Thamsanqa, would rather stay away from the other classe' passage than face discrimination.

Therefore, as queer learners in a heterosexist school environment, the participants in this study negotiated their safety in their schools by choosing the least violent routes within the school. They exercised their agency by choosing where to walk and where not to walk within the school. These agentic acts underscore the capacity of queer youth to assess their vulnerability and to make decisions and choices about their own safety.

#### *5.2.2.2 Finding belonging, friendship and love*

My analysis of the drawings and the group discussions suggests that the participants in this study, even though they were largely marginalised in their queerphobic schooling contexts, found ways to feel a sense of belonging, friendship and love. For example, Nkululeko 'adopted' younger children in the lower grades as his children. In my interaction with Nkululeko, he shared that helped his children with negotiating their queerness at school. Parents of the children were not aware of the relationship, as the children were not 'out' to their parents. Similarly, Alex had a girlfriend, and Thamsanqa found a sense of belonging in his classroom. To illustrate, in her drawing, Alex drew her interaction with her girlfriend in her classroom

indicating how love exists in the context of queerphobic violence (see Figure 5.5).



**Figure 5.5: Alex's drawing of their experiences in specific spaces in schools**

Nkululeko, reporting on the drawing he made of Alex's experience of schooling, stated:

Okay, what I heard was Ayo (Alex's girlfriend) asking Alex how she would react if she were to tell her, she is attracted or has feelings for her. Alex replied that she would be happy.

Alex said that she loved and was loved by her classmates and by her lesbian partner (some 'love me and I love them'. In finding love and being openly in love with another girl, Alex breaks the heteronormative rules of how intimate partners should be organised. In institutions where heterosexuality is compulsory, she defies the dominant narrative where opposite-sex attractions are naturalised as the only ways of performing sexual desire and intimacy. Similar to participants in Francis's (2017) study, Alex was open about her love interests and that of her classmates.

Linked to love, for the participants in this study friendships provided a sense of mobility and access to certain spaces. For example, Nkululeko reflected on his friendships:

In the kitchen we all eat together with my friends from class. When I leave the kitchen,

I go to the grade 11C classroom then we go to the tuckshop to buy. After buying we go to the grade 8B classroom with Alex.

Alex also notes the belonging that she has in her classroom and the kinship that Nkululeko has with other learners in the lower grades:

In 8B, we go there to look for young learners with Nkululeko, some of them are beautiful young learners. Nkululeko says he has children there, three children.

Freedman (2008) writes that kinship from a heterosexual lens is gendered, limiting and hierarchical. Freedman argues that kinship should be understood as a social construct and not founded on biological sex (Freeman, 2008), making it possible for Nkululeko to become “a parent” to younger learners in the school. Freeman (2008) states that unlike heterosexual relations

in queer life such gendered and even generational crossings, at least, are eminently possible: consider the male-to-female transsexual who has been a nephew but becomes a niece and then an aunt, or the ageing, biologically male “house mothers” of Jenny Livingston’s 1990 film *Paris is Burning*, who acquire their maternal role as homage to their longevity rather than their youthful fecundity. (p. 310)

Like the “house mothers” of Jenny Livingston's 1990 film, *Paris is Burning*, as an older gay African male youth in grade 11, Nkululeko has become a ‘housemother’ to some of the grade 8 learners in his township school. What makes him a house mother in this instance is his age

and institutional memory in the school. While this is possible for Nkululeko to have ‘kids, it is the exception, not the norm. However, within the norm, there are cracks, which Nkululeko has seen and exploited.

Thamsanqa provides a different perspective. For him, there is safety when one is with one’s friends and in one’s own space:

[The classroom] is safer because the people I hang out with are my friends and I get along with everyone in the class.

For Mphathi, safety is found within in a lower grade classrooms:

During the break I go out to grade 9A class, I have two friends there. During the break, we go out to buy and eat in the classroom. If not, we outside the class or go to other classes around the school.

Nathi also reported how without Liya’s friendship he would have not known what to do when faced with queerphobic violence in their school. Liya, similar to Nkululeko sees his role in the friendship with Nathi as providing protection from queerphobic violence.

In examining the everyday experiences of lesbian youth in Cape Town, Kowen and Davis (2006) found friendships to be central to lesbian youths managing homophobic isolation and marginalisation from family, school and community. In this study, exercising agency also meant developing a sense of belonging in a largely heteropatriarchal secondary school space. For example, Nkululeko becomes a parent, while Thamsanqa finds safety in his classroom and Alex can move around the school and find love in other spaces.

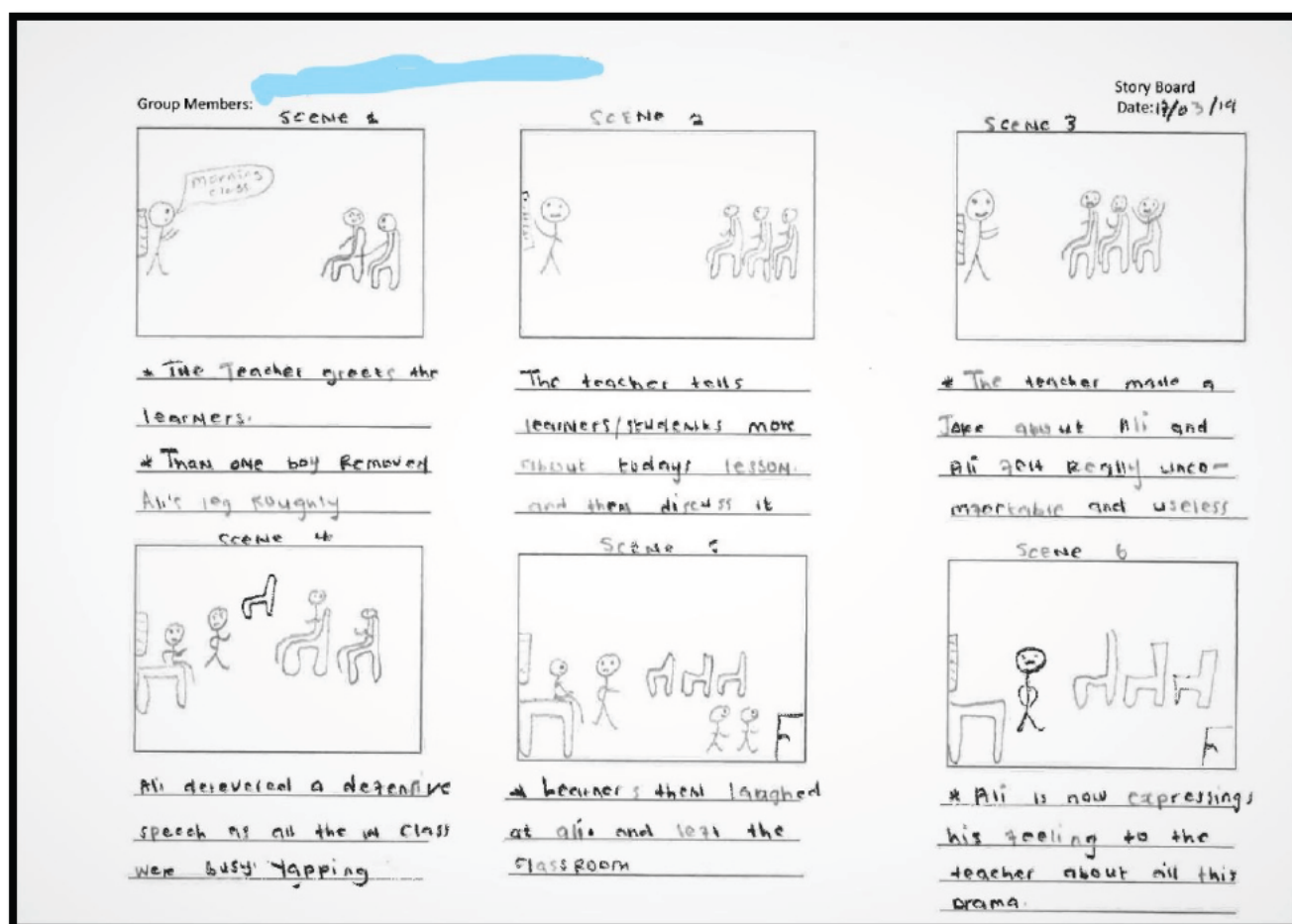
Rasmussen (2009) sees school toilets not as a prison for the marginalised but has possibilities of “different inhabitations” (p. 444). In this study, these possibilities were present in how the

classroom, particularly with Alex's experiences, was queered to be a space where love could be found and/or declared. For example, Alex, with her partner, changes the classroom space from a site of queerphobic violence to one in which love can be expressed by two queer African youth. Layder's (2006) work encourages an understanding of agency and structure as not superimposing on one another, but as each maintaining their characteristics. In other words, institutions like schools cannot fully control and determine the existence of those who inhabit them, including queer African youth. Instead, as the participants in this study have shown, they are agents within the structure, making Alex's love a possibility.

The findings in this study suggest that for queer youth, being recognised and accepted within the school (by peers and teachers) is a process that they have to achieve or make for themselves. Some of my participants were aware that they did not belong and felt like outsiders within the school. This was due, in part, to the discrimination, marginalisation and violence they experienced in and around the school. Yet, there is hope.

#### *5.2.2.3 Queer African youth taking up space and fighting back*

My analysis of the cellphilm and group discussions about the cellphilm participants showed how violence continues to be part of the queer African youth experience. Yet, queer African youth showed how they respond to and resist within these contexts – illuminating agency. For example, in their storyboard (Figure 5.6) Mphathi's group show how queer youth respond to and resist queerphobic violence.



**Figure 5.6: Storyboard created by Mphathi's group**

In Table 5.1 below, I summarise the cellphilm the group made from the storyboard.

**Table 5.1 Description of the Cellphilm from the storyboard**

MaZuma, Okuhle, Mphathi, Nathi, Jabulani	
Scene 1	The teacher greets the class. A straight learner touches Ali's leg roughly.
Scene 2	The teacher tells the learners about today's class. The lesson is about puberty.
Scene 3	The teacher made a joke about Ali. Ali felt really uncomfortable and useless.

Scene 4	Ali delivered a defensive speech as all [of the learners] in the class were busy yapping.
Scene 5	Learners laughed at Ali and they left the classroom
Scene 6	Ali is now expressing his feelings about all this drama.

In scene 4 (see Table 5.1), Ali, a queer learner character in the cellphilm, delivers a *defensive speech*. Here, the only option that Ali has is speaking back. For him, this is the only means of agency currently available to him as queer African youth. This shows that agency for some queer African youth takes the form of self-acceptance. The ‘*I am who I am and you will not be able to change that!*’ reflects self-acceptance and personal agency. The self-acceptance of queer learners enabled them to recognise the violence they experience and to demand justice.

In our post-screening group discussion about the cellphilms, participants also observed that in general, their teachers did not know what to do in situations where they have to address queerphobic violence. To illustrate, they stated that it was often useless to report cases of violence because teachers did not take them seriously. Nkululeko, for example, asserted that he did not report his experiences of queerphobic violence in school because teachers gossiped about him, indicated by them laughing at him when he enters the teachers’ staffroom. For MaZuma, his teachers saw him as a source of knowledge about same-sex relationships, including marriages, asking him to lead conversations in the class around these issues. He reported that ‘*they would ask if I am okay in explaining to the class, it would be up to me.*’ MaZuma used this to his advantage as it occurred on his terms. At the same time, Okuhle observed the complexity of taking up space in the religious studies class. To illustrate, he

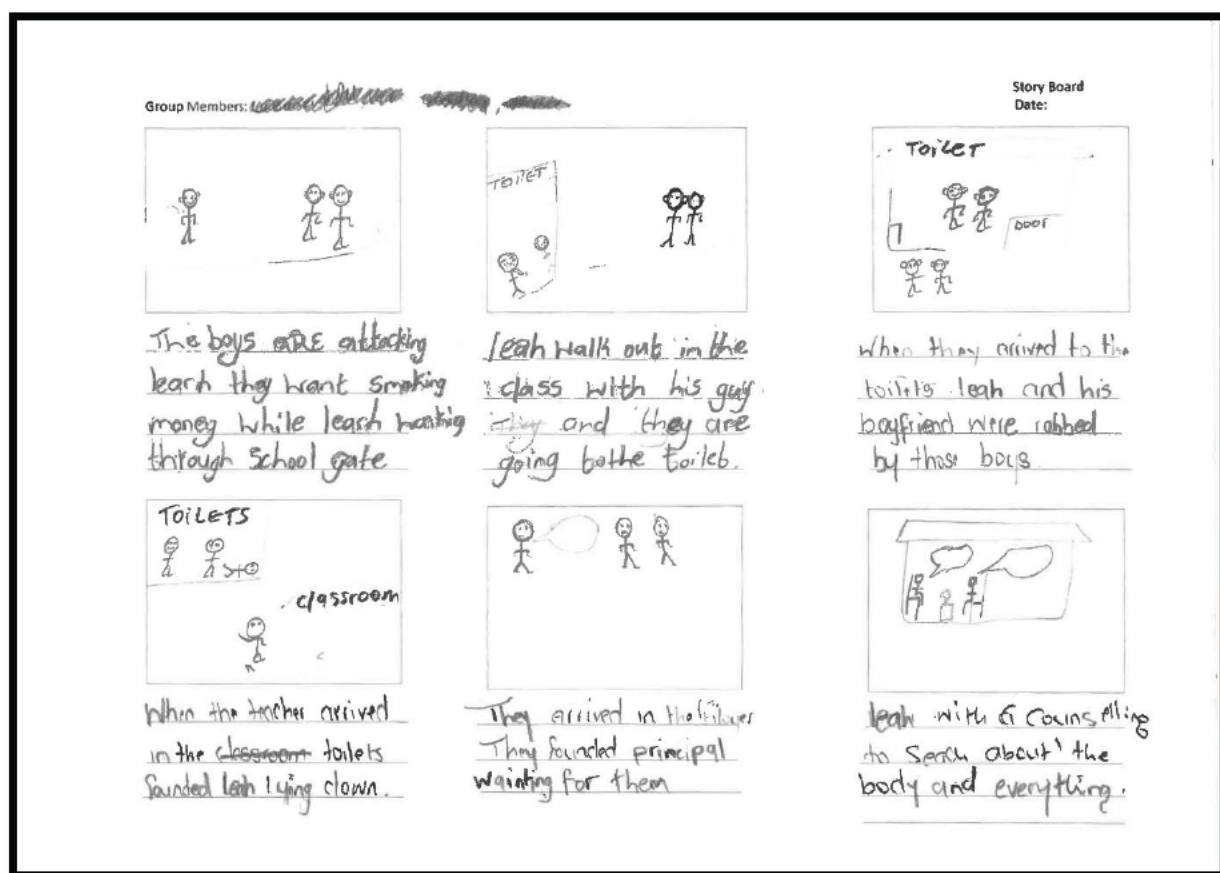
highlights how the teacher could not handle heterosexist violence unleashed by the learners. Thus, while taking up space and speaking back, he was left '*alone stranded in front of the class explaining, some of them are laughing at you. In grade 11 they used to throw papers at me.*' In this instance, agency in the form of taking up space is intertwined with queerphobic violence.

Abebe and Ofosu-kesi (2016) Bordonaro and Payne (2012) argue that little research recognises the agency of African youth. African youth are seen to be shaped by their context with no influence on what occurs. The cellphilm examined in this section challenges this view and instead shows queer African youth as experts of their context and lives. In the cellphilm, queer African youth have learnt self-acceptance. This form of agency is outside of heteronormative expectations (Bordonaro & Payne, 2012).

#### *5.2.2.4 Troubling (hetero)normative school culture: Being Queer as resistance*

The storyboards created by the participants in this study also show how being queer was used to resist sexual harassment and GBV in and around the school. This has troubled the (hetero)normative school culture. For example, the storyboard below (Figure 5.7) shows queer African youth ignoring or defying queerphobic violence.





**Figure 5.7: Storyboard by Nkululeko's group**

**Table 5.2: Scenes from the storyboard**

Nkululeko, Liya, Bradley, Alex	
Scene 1	The boys are attacking Liya. They want smoking money while Liya is walking through the school gate.
Scene 2	Liya walks out of class with his guy and they are going to the toilets.
Scene 3	When they arrived in the toilets Liya and his boyfriend were robbed by those boys.

Scene 4	When the teacher arrived in the toilets they found Liya on the ground.
Scene 5	They [boys] arrived [in the class] and they found the principal waiting for them.
Scene 6	Liya went for counselling.

The storyboard (figure 5.7) shows the various ways in which queer youth encounter queerphobic violence. For example, in frame 2 (scene 2), knowing that they might be attacked, either verbally or physically, in defiance, Liya and his partner leave the classroom together to go to the toilet. What makes this act of going to the toilet agentic is the awareness of the imminent possibility of violence. Bradley for example, observed, *‘should the boys be caught in the toilets, they will be beaten up,’* and Nkululeko adds that *‘it is where they are mostly abused.’* Not surprisingly, a group of boys follows them and attacks them in the toilets. However, instead of remaining silent, as is usually the case, the bullies are reported and punished, and Liya receives counselling. The narrative in this storyboard is surprising as township schools rarely have counsellors, and the few that do, are poorly trained, and are, according to the participants, inexperienced, and underqualified pre-service student counsellors. Thus, the presence of counsellors and counselling services in school is more aspirational than reality.

Gqola (2011) writes that the work of Zanele Muholi centres on the need to see the agency within the lives of black lesbians, asserting that:

Paying attention to Muholi’s images requires grappling with the competing and nuanced meanings highlighted in the represented subjects. They underline the importance of seeing the agency – life choices, decisions, failures, confusions, discoveries, rejections – of the Black lesbian in the picture. They make it hard to safely

see only the victim of heteropatriarchal violence, but invite us to engage with the many layers present in the world that is Black lesbian South Africa. (p. 624)

Gqola's observation helps to understand the agency of queer African youth in this study. The cellfilms, in particular, have shown how queer African youth are experts in their own lives and use this expertise to navigate violent spaces in the school and relationships with peers and teachers.

### *5.2.3 Intervening to change the schooling experiences of queer youth*

This section of the chapter addresses the last research question in this study: *What changes do queer African youth want to see in their township school?* To address the question, I conducted open-ended individual interviews with all participants. I used the participants' visual products as prompts in the interviews to understand their perspectives on what needed to be changed for them to feel safe and accepted in their schooling context. The chapter also draws on data from group discussions of these visual products. The following themes were generated from the analysis of these data: 1) Kumelebazi ukuthi nathi singabantu; 2) Changes in school-based policy, teacher education and curriculum; 3) Separate schools for queer learners; and 4) The support of parents.

#### *5.2.3.1 Kumele bazi ukuthi nathi singabantu*

A recent study by Francis and Khan (2020) focused on queer activists working with teachers and school managers to address heterosexism in schools through forum theatre, an art-based form. The study found that teachers and school managers had experiences with queer people from an early age. The stories included "fear, distrust, and repulsion" (Francis & Khan, 2020, p. 248). Similarly, the findings from the textual and visual data suggest that the participants clearly articulated the importance of their humanity. As queer African youth, they collectively acknowledged that their humanity was unseen and not recognised in schools. For them, this

needed to change. For example, MaZuma explained:

They (teachers and other learners) must know that the person (queer youth) is human, they must just respect them, maybe they see them (queer youth) as like an animal because they are different to other learners, the way they do things is different, the way they think, they see it as different. Maybe that would change, even change for those who are still coming to our school, to learn in a good space not like how we are learning.

For Alex, this requires the intervention by queer organisations to educate and train teachers:

Yeah maybe they should be told at school, a member of the queer community to visit our school and explain to them that they (queer youth) are also humans, we are also humans in this way and that way, because the way teachers look at us, they say we are seeking attention, that what we are doing we will eventually stop it, like as if the way we are living our lives is not way to live.

Starting with early experiences of sexuality and gender diversity might contribute to undoing heterosexism. For the participants in Francis and Khan's (2020) study, starting from such experiences helped in recognizing the pain, abuse and violence inflicted on queer people. Forum Theatre gave participants the time and space to interrogate their investment in heterosexism and imagine how it can be changed, their limitations, and possible resistance from groups such as parents, colleagues, school managers and community members/institutions.

During the group discussions, the participants agreed that teachers, learners and the entire schooling community needed to recognize their humanity as the first step in addressing the queerphobic violence they have experienced in their schools. For example, Mphathi stated that when queer learners experience queerphobic violence, they cannot even report it to teachers because teachers do not see them as part of the school.

About queer belonging, Freeman (2008, p. 299) writes that “to want to belong, let us say, is too long to be bigger not only spatially, but also temporally, to “hold out” a hand across time and touch the dead or those not born yet, to offer oneself beyond one’s own time.” Queer African youth, with the wisdom of experience in their context, see the importance of their existence and belonging in township secondary schools. This belonging they yearn for transcends their existence, in that it seeks to affect those queer African youth who are yet to come to the school.

#### *5.2.3.2 Changes in school policy, teacher education and curriculum*

In the cellphilm made by MaZuma’s group, the participants suggested that to enhance the safety of queer learners in schools, there is a need to change school policy, teacher education and curriculum. These three parts of the school are what enabled queerphobic violence to grow and exist without challenge within the schooling context. For example, scene 1 (Figure 5.6) of the storyboard made by MaZuma’s group shows how the LO teacher makes queerphobic jokes in front of the class. This grants peers the permission to also unleash queerphobic violence onto queer learners or others with any form of difference outside heterosexuality.

In the one-on-one interview with Okuhle, he provided the following perspective on what needs to change about school policy and what he has done about it:

I even tried with my friend, with the teacher Mkhathini [pseudonym] who is responsible for cases. We went to him with a proposal that just like the RCL (Representative Council of learners) that there should be an organisation that will address issues that are of this nature. They went with that proposal; I don't have it right now. We typed it, we gave it to the teacher, they called us into their office, they asked us questions, we answered well, there seemed like there was hope that we are fighting for the learner. My friend they are straight, they are okay, they are a girl, she is alright. They date boys. There was hope, they were asking us questions, we wrote down, he was shaking his

head in agreement while writing down. They asked us if there was anyone in the school who has experienced this, we said yes there is, they asked who, and I said I did, they wrote that down. A parents meeting was called, the teacher told the parents of our proposal but the School Governing Body did not approve the proposal.

In his interview, Mpathi highlighted the inequality of justice, where those who break the school code of conduct are suspended but when this relates to queer African youth perpetrators are not punished:

On a regular basis [not taken seriously] ... What they must do is that when we report, maybe they should take serious steps against the person, I don't know how, maybe they could call a meeting be told that their actions don't belong in the school, as it happens with others who misbehave, and be suspended from school, they should do that with us, they should do that we report as well... nothing, actually when we report we are the ones who are blamed, one of them (teachers) is a pastor here at school, he is the one in charge of the cases like these at school, when you go to report to him he just laughs at you and says that god did not a create a person like you, he created Adam and Eve, he did not create a third person.

Available literature suggests that teachers generally and LO teachers in particular lack knowledge and training about sex, sexuality and gender and are therefore ill-equipped to teach about these things. For example, in their study, DePalma and Francis (2014, p. 1687) found that LO teachers needed regular “training, teaching materials and practical guidelines based on existing policy.” These measures were to address the oppressive discourse that went against the rights of queer African youth in schools. These efforts would also address situations where teachers were queerphobic even when it was not their intention (Msibi, 2012).

Available literature also suggests that formal social support structures for queer youth, have, in some instances, a positive impact on the schooling experiences of queer youth. The structures, when designed to serve the needs of queer youth, not only provide social support, but are also avenues for social justice. For example, Lapointe (2014) examined how queer youth and their peers worked to question anti-queer notions and myths in schools through the gay-straight alliance (GSA). They found that straight allies can work together with queer youth to challenge the silence around queer content in the curriculum and queer issues. In these structures, allies also learn how to support their queer peers. Similarly, Swanson and Gettinger (2016) found that the presence of a formal social support structure, like the GSA, had a positive impact on the schooling experiences of queer youth. The formal social support structure was also accompanied by a school anti-bullying policy and teacher training which were centred on the queer youth schooling experience. The positive impact of this support was that teachers were able to support queer youth. In this study, the participants also pointed to the need for an explicit school policy, curriculum and teacher training, including the school's code of conduct, an inclusive curriculum and teachers that are well trained to address the needs of queer learners in township schools.

#### *5.2.3.3 Separate schools for queer learners*

In my analysis of the post-screening discussion of the cellphilm by MaZuma's group, some participants felt that they have had enough of the heterosexual, patriarchal normative township school. To address this, they wanted to attend queer schools. For example, participants saw queer schools as a means to get an education which they were currently not receiving in the heteropatriarchal township school. The following discussion illustrates:

Jabulani: No, I am saying because we are abused in these ways, there hasn't been a school for

us gays, that is what I am saying.

MaZuma: Really!

Okuhle: So that we can have peace

Jabulani: Siz o understand-ana

MaZuma: There has to be psychologist.

Okuhle: We can obtain distinction

MaZuma: That's right

Jabulani: You will see.

MaZuma: So that we are able to focus in class

Jabulani: Because we cannot focus and move forward with our lives not this.

MaZuma: Well, learning and education is hard, and you told yourself that you want to get out of this school.

The extract above illustrates the aspirations of queer youth for a schooling environment free of marginalisation and violence. Participants acknowledge the importance of getting an education and how it may assist them in getting out of poverty. However, queerphobic violence denies them the right to education. Thus, for them, having a school for queer learners would not only gain them access to education, but would provide them the opportunity to excel academically where “[they] can obtain distinctions.”

Having a school for queer learners would also provide opportunities for supportive friendships. For example, Ueno et al. (2012) investigated friendship segregation among gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth and ‘straight’ youth. In their study, they found that friendships were segregated because of structural constraints. Structural constraints include youths’ networks (the people they are in contact with) and youths’ homophily (race, class, gender performance and sexual orientation). The homophily social markers are understood to be “friends’ preferences to



interact in their group” (Ueno et al., 2012, p. 971). For example, youth who share a similar class rank are more likely to be friends with one another and not be friends with other youth from different class ranks. Similarly, the personal preferences of being with peers who are of a similar sexual orientation are based on the notion that ‘birds of a feather fly together’ (McPherson, Smith-Love & Cook, 2001). Yet this may not be true all the time. In this study, MaZuma shared how he and Yvonne did not get along. Similar sentiments were shared by other participants, where they did not get along with other queer peers in their schools.

Ueno et al. (2012) also observe that school activities tend to be gendered. For example, co-educational schools use the gender binary as an organising principle for all school activities including sports and matric dances. They state that organisational culture plays an important role in fostering relations across diverse identities, including sexual orientation (Ueno et al., 2012, p. 986). In this study, my participants identified the queerphobic violence they experienced in township schools as contributing to their sense of alienation (not belonging) and their desire to have their own school. The alienation they experienced was not just about the lack of friendships, but the lack of access to education and educational success that are a result of the violence and marginalisation in the school. As a solution, they desired their own school in which they could be free from the violence and where they could have the opportunities to succeed academically.

#### *5.2.3.4 The support of Parents*

Available studies have shown how the lack of parental support for queer youth has negative effects on their well-being and education outcomes. For example, Bhana’s (2013) study showed that many parents are queerphobic. In this study, in our one-on-one interview, Liya discussed how devastating it is when parents are not affirming of one’s queer identity, and how queer African youth especially cannot share the problems that they encounter in schools and the

community with their parents. However, Jabulani provided a different perspective about parents, and observed how it helps to have supportive parents:

Nkonzo: They [boys] go to your school?

Jabulani: Eh-eh, I just know them, they go to school near Gundi's house.

Nkonzo: The way they behaved when speaking to you, do other boys at your school also behave like that towards you?

Jabulani: No, because if they were to do that they would get suspended right away.

Nkonzo: What those boys were doing and saying, do they usually do that [say Jabulani must be physically attacked because he is gay]? Do they do that often?

Jabulani: I don't know, maybe they do... oh to me?

Nkonzo: Yeah.

Jabulani: Yeah, when they see me.

Nkonzo: And how do you feel about it?

Jabulani: I feel really sad, but I ignore them, because there is nothing else to do about it and that is what my mother told me to do.

Nkonzo: So, your mother knows that some boys treat you in this way?

Jabulani: Yeah.

Nkonzo: Does it help that she knows?

Jabulani: Yeah, it does help because I am able to speak to her.

Having a supportive family was also important for Nkululeko. The family provided a sense of belonging and protection. For example, Nkululeko reported:

Last week on Sunday I came back home with my friends. To be honest my friends do not enter my home. But they [my family] were like no, they [my friends] should enter the house and sit down. They [family] even went to buy my friends cool drink. But when they [my family] came back my friends had already left, they even asked why

they left. My uncle then said to me they want to talk to me about something. I have three uncles and three brothers. They [uncles] said they have nothing against me even though they do not understand because they are now old and do not know what is going on. So, they [uncles] said they have no problem with me and they have never had a problem with me, also because I respect them they will not have a problem, they even said I should tell them if someone is making me do things that I do not want. I was so scared at that time, they said they have no problem with me, I must live my life my way, and forget what people say.

Nkongo: I want to know how you feel about that?

Nkululeko: Ayibo! I don't know, I'm up there, I'm floating, flying high!

Other participants expressed mixed sentiments about their parents. Some parents were accepting, while others were not. Some parents even went as far as discouraging friendships with queer peers.

The role of parents in the lives of queer African youth cannot be underestimated. Yet, little research exists on parents and their role in queer youth lives in South Africa (see, for example, Bhana, 2013). Exceptions include a recent study by Mayeza (2021) which examined what lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, pansexual and queer youth in a South African university thought about and the realities of coming out and their parents' reactions to their coming out. Mayeza (2021) found that some participants saw coming out as conforming to heteronormativity, where heterosexuality is normal and queerness is the 'other.' Coming out was also dependent on what participants thought about how their parents would react and their general relationship with their parents. Participants further noted gender norms and religion tended to determine how they anticipated their parents' reaction and how these norms were the foundations of parents' reactions, including "acceptance, rejection, forms of violence, and

silence” (Mayeza, 2021, p. 292). In Chapter One, I highlight the generally queerphobic context in which township schools are located. Therefore, it is surprising and unique that some of the parents/guardians of the participants in this study were supportive of their queer children. Future research is needed that would examine the factors that make some parents of queer children supportive and others not unsupportive.

### 5.3 Synthesis

This chapter reports on the findings from research which addressed the question: *How do queer African youth experience, respond to and resist negative experiences in township secondary schools?* Available research has shown that violence is constantly present in and around South African schools, making schools a site of violence. It is within this context that the above findings, learnings and this discussion are to be understood.

In response to the first critical question (*What does it mean to be a queer African youth in a township secondary school?*), firstly, the findings suggest that schools attended by the participants were organised around patriarchy and affirmed heterosexual norms that produced queerphobic violence. The findings also suggest that the violence against queer learners occurred in various spaces in and around the school, with little support or intervention from adults, who were themselves often perpetrators of the aggression. Secondly, the study indicates that queer youth experience microaggressions, like being called silly or questioned about their queerness. They also experience aggression like name calling or being left out of activities. Their sexuality is constantly policed and rejected for subverting heterosexuality and the heteronormative school culture.

Thirdly, the findings suggest that the kinds and intensity of queerphobic violence they experience depend on where one is on the gender performance, identity and sexual orientation

spectrum. For example, participants observed how queer youth in their schools who challenge, reject and subvert the heteronormative script experience less queerphobic violence from peers, with little or no intervention from teachers. This is because, in the eyes of queerphobic peers and teachers, they tend to neatly follow a heteronormative script of what the 'ideal' African queer youth looks like. This is why we can see Liya 'pass' and be considered 'real', while his queer friends are referred to as 'fake.' It is also why we see Okuhle and MaZuma 'hide' parts of their queerness, while Yvonne who disregards the heteronormative script, is severely punished.

Fourthly, the findings suggest that there is a glimmer of hope. While small in number, some teachers and peers are reported to be supportive of queer learners. According to the participants in this study, the support is complicated and messy. For example, while a teacher might teach content related to queerness, they might be simultaneously homophobic. Further, the study found that some parents of queer learners are supportive of their children.

Responding to the second critical research question (*How do they respond and resist their negative experiences from peers and teachers?*), the findings from this study suggest that in the restrictive, heterosexist school contexts, queer youth have become experts on how to navigate the space and negotiate the relationships they have in and around schools. For example, queer learners use techniques such as avoiding certain spaces (such as toilets) to avoid being attacked. Others deliberately go into spaces where they know they would be attacked to challenge and subvert the norms scripted for them in these spaces. Linked to this, some find or build relationships of love, belonging and friendships with peers using such markers as age and gender identity, including forming friendships with younger peers or other queer learners like themselves. Beyond these positive relationships, queer learners in this study had to respond to and resist queerphobic violence. To do this they fought back and troubled the hegemonic

(hetero)normative school cultures, through, for example, self-acceptance and openly living their queer lives as a form of resistance and agency.

The third research question addressed in this chapter was: *What changes do queer African youth want to see in their township secondary school?* Firstly, the findings suggest that the experiences of queerphobic violence stem from dehumanising queer youth and not recognising them as human beings, the first thing they want to change in their schooling environment. The participants recommended engaging NGOs to conduct workshops for teachers to educate and train them on queer issues.

Secondly, participants in this study recognised the organisation of their township schools around patriarchy and heterosexuality as the only mode of being. To address this, they recommended changing school policy that is often constructed from a heteropatriarchal perspective with the intent to suppress and eliminate queerness from schools. The participants also highlighted the poor preparation their teachers exhibited for handling queer issues, including in the curriculum or in dealing with the violence queer learners experience from peers and other teachers. This, they felt, would be addressed by providing teacher education and training that includes queer content to address queerphobic violence or affirm queer youth in schools.

Thirdly, recognising the queerphobic violence they experienced and witnessed, participants in this study desired to have schools for queer African youth. Convinced about the importance of education, especially because of their poorly resourced backgrounds, they saw this as an opportunity to provide them access to quality learning they are denied because of the marginalisation and violence they experience in their schools and as means to have peace and freedom while at school.

Fourthly, the kind relationships between queer African youth and their parents/guardians impacts their sense of self, belonging and general well-being. Some participants indicated how poor relationships can negatively affect what they can share with parents. For them, their parents' acceptance and affirmation would enable their queer children to speak up and speakback, thereby exposing the queerphobic violence that they experience in and around schools.

The next chapter discusses the findings and concludes the dissertation with implications for policy and practice and for future research.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

# **Understanding the Schooling Experiences of Queer African Learners in a Township Schools: Reflecting Back and Looking Forward**

### **6.1 Introduction**

As discussed in Chapter One, the study reported in this dissertation was informed by my understanding that the personal is political. My own experiences and personal struggles in township schooling contexts, the collective struggles of queer African people in communities and the lack of research that places queer African youth at the centre, informed my motivation for conducting this study. For example, as a learner in a township secondary school, I experienced queerphobic violence, including name calling, social exclusion, physical violence and marginalisation from teachers and peers on a daily basis. These experiences were shaped by harmful logics of culture, religion, heterosexism and unequal gender norms, stereotypes and expectations. The experiences had negative consequences on my and other queer youth's educational experiences. Linked to this, in Chapter One, I reflected on how and why I came to identify myself as gay and queer. Identifying as gay helped me find friendship, love and community, while my queer identity has helped me to see beyond my struggles and into critical activism. For me, questioning or queering has been key in developing my activism rooted in feminist principles (see Chapter Three).

As discussed in this dissertation, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (No. 108 of 1996) provides a conducive policy environment for the equal protection of the rights of all individuals and groups in the country, including queer people and youth in schools and communities. For example, the Equality Clause Sections 9(3) and 9(4), prohibit discrimination



on the basis of sexual orientation. Informed by this, the South African Schools Act (No. 84 of 1996) Section 5(1), *Admissions to public schools*, mandates that any learner must be admitted to and served without unfair discrimination. Yet, research suggests that South African schools generally, and township schools in particular, are among the most violent, remain poorly resourced in terms of infrastructure and teaching and learning resources, and the teaching staff is mostly poorly trained or demotivated (Coetzee, 2014; Harber, 2001; Msila, 2005; Zoch, 2015). These factors impact negatively on the schooling experiences of all learners, with those identifying as queer getting the brunt of the negative impacts of this context (Bhana, 2014; Msibi, 2012; OUT LGBT Well-being, 2016; Reddy et.al, 2016).

Linked to this, the literature reviewed in this dissertation suggests that while there has been growing attention on LGBTQI+ experiences in schools, research has neglected the voices of queer African youth in schools. Instead, the perspectives of adult stakeholders (teachers and parents) about the schooling experiences of queer African youth tend to dominate. Linked to this, available scholarship tends describe these experiences from a deficit point of view and to ignore the agency of queer learners in their own lives (see Chapter Two), a gap this study sought to address. Therefore, informed by my belief that queer African youth are experts in their own lives and context, and have the agency to act towards addressing their marginalisation (albeit within a homophobic and violent context), this study aimed to place their experiences of schooling at the centre of the research. The study addressed this question: *How do queer African youth experience, respond to and resist negative experiences in a township secondary school?* The following critical research questions were used to answer the main research question above:

- What does it mean to be a queer African youth in a township school?
- How do queer African youth respond and resist their negative experiences from their

peers and teachers?

- What changes do queer African youth want to see in their township school?

The previous chapter, Chapter Five, presented the findings from the study. The purpose of this chapter is to reflect on this study. It includes my methodological reflections, personal-professional reflections, and reflections on the findings and their significance. I conclude the chapter and the dissertation with implications from the findings of this study.

## **6.2 Overview of the Study**

The study reported in this dissertation addressed the question: *How do queer African youth experience, respond to, and resist negative experiences in a township secondary school?* Chapter One of the dissertation introduced the study, its context, its purpose and the research questions it posed. Informed by my own experiences as a queer learner in a township school and evidence from available research, I argued that queer African youth continue to experience discrimination, stigma and violence in and around their schools. In such contexts, queer youth tend to be marginalised, surveilled, policed, and as a result, they constantly feel powerless, sometimes even drop out of school and often experience suicidal thoughts (Lalbahadur, 2018; McArthur, 2015). Thus, I wanted to understand the experiences of queer African youth in township schools, explore how they draw on their agency in ‘speaking against’ discrimination from their peers and teachers in their schools; and identify what they feel needs to change in township schools to better support their education. In my view, addressing these critical questions, beyond documenting the current lived experiences of discrimination among queer African youth in township schools, will help identify how they respond to and resist such violence, and based on this, what interventions are needed in the schools.

Chapter Two of the dissertation examined literature on the schooling experiences of queer learners internationally and locally. The chapter begins with an exploration of how queerness is conceptualised in local and international literature, moving from fixed understandings of their lived experiences as those at risk or the martyr-target-victim, to queer people as knowers and actors in their own lives. While acknowledging the marginalisation and violence queer learners continue to experience in schools and the lack of appropriate or effective interventions implemented in the education system, the literature suggests that queer learners can exercise complex and dynamic forms of agency and are experts in understanding how they should navigate their spaces, particularly schools, to ensure their safety. In line with this, to unearth their knowledge, understandings and agency, this study investigated how queer African youth understand, respond to and resist queerphobic violence in township secondary schools.

Chapter Three discusses the conceptual (compulsory heterosexuality, queerphobic violence, and queer agency) and theoretical framework used to generate and analyse data in this study. The chapter discusses Connell's gender theory and queer theory. Together, the two theories illuminate the position of queer African youth in the gender hierarchy in relation to teachers and their peers within their township schools. As a framework, the theories help in understanding how queer African youth subvert and challenge the violence they often experience in their township schools and the agency they engage in doing so. The theoretical framework is used not only to centre the queer African youth voice but also as a means to think through the critical research questions, within a township schooling context.

Chapter Four critically discussed the methodological approach and research design of the study. The study was located within the constructivist paradigm and critical paradigm. The study therefore did not only seek to understand the participants' experiences but also aimed to critique, *with* queer African youth, their schooling experiences and to imagine alternatives for

their well-being in schools. I adopted a qualitative approach and used PVM (specifically drawing, cellphilmimg and semi-structured interviews) to address the research questions. This was to ensure democratic participation and free conversations with the participants, in which their voices would be privileged and take centre stage. Importantly, the approach enabled my participants to co-construct knowledge, share their experiences, and think critically about how they responded to and resisted queerphobic violence.

Chapter Five reports on the findings from the research responding to each of the critical questions posed in the study. In response to the first critical question (*What does it mean to be a queer African youth in a township secondary school?*), the findings suggest that the schools the participants attended, organised around patriarchy and heterosexual norms, were characterised by queerphobic violence. According to the participants, in these schools violence against queer learners occurred in various spaces in and around the school, with little support or intervention from adults, who were themselves often perpetrators of the aggression. Such violence included name-calling, bullying, and physical assaults. Responding to the second critical research question (*How do queer African youth respond and resist their negative experiences from peers and teachers?*), the findings from this study suggest that in spite of their heterosexist school contexts, queer youth are often able to navigate the space and negotiate the relationships they have in and around schools. To do this, they not only use strategies such as avoiding certain spaces (such as toilets), but also deliberately going into areas where they know they would be attacked to challenge and subvert the norms scripted for them in these spaces as a form of resistance and agency.

In response to the third research question (*What changes do queer African youth want to see in their township secondary school?*), the findings suggest that informed by their experiences of queerphobic violence as stemming from the dehumanisation of queer people, the changes queer

African youth wanted to see in the schools included changing school policy, improving teacher preparation by, for example, engaging NGOs to conduct workshops for teachers to educate and train them on queer issues, and changing the curriculum to include queer content to address queerphobic violence or affirm queer youth in schools.

This chapter reflects on the study, including the research process and the findings from the study.

### **6.3 Methodological Reflections**

This study sought to provide a space for a group of queer African learners attending township secondary schools in KwaMashu, near Durban to reflect on the erasure, silencing, marginalisation and violence they experience in society generally and in schools in particular. In addition to reflecting on their experiences of schooling, the participants also described how they resisted and what needed to change in their schools. To do this, I adopted a qualitative approach, which directed the research process and my relationship with the participants towards more democratic and participatory processes that privileged their voices and perspectives. For this purpose, the study used PVM, with its underlying feminist principles of equality and participation. PVM pushes researchers to think about and act from a position of collaboration, co-construction of knowledge, researcher reflexivity and participant agency where marginalised groups are acknowledged as knowers and actors in their own lives and contexts (Haffejee et al., 2020; Moletsane et al., 2009).

In this study, I used two participatory visual methods to address the critical questions: drawings and cellphilm making. In addition, I engaged the participants individual interviews, with their visual artefacts used as prompts. These methods enabled us to co-construct knowledge *with* rather *about* queer African youth and how they experience their schooling. I wanted them to

not only be able to freely describe their experiences of marginalisation and violence in and around their schools, but to also describe how they respond to and resist those encounters. For example, in response to the research question, *What does it mean to be a queer African youth in a township school?* in their drawings and cellphilms the participants illustrated how they navigated peer/teacher relationships, school geographies and constructed relationships that mattered to them. Overall, the participatory visual methods were generative and enabled a democratic space in which we co-developed a nuanced understanding of the schooling experiences of queer African youth in the township schools they attended.

To address the last research question (*What changes do queer African youth want to see in their township school?*) I conducted open-ended individual interviews with each participant, using their visual products as prompts to understand their perspectives on the changes they deemed necessary for their safety and inclusion in their schooling contexts. The semi-structured interviews enabled the participants to further articulate, in their own words, not only how they experienced schooling as queer learners in a township setting, but also what they wanted teachers and other learners to know and change about these experiences. Thus, data generated through this method supplemented and elaborated on the visual data analysed in this dissertation. However, upon reflection, the interview method, even though it elicited responses using the participants' visual artefacts (drawings), was a more researcher-led than was my intention in this study. To some extent, it limited our ability to fully collaborate and co-construct knowledge on the phenomenon. That said, by the time I conducted the interviews, the participants could freely express their views to me (because we had been together for an extended period and had been using participatory methods). The interviews were therefore, generative in enabling me to adequately address the research question.

Working with young people, particularly on a difficult and taboo issue like sexuality and sexual orientation was always going to be challenging and required some creativity in methodology. Not only is being queer taboo to speak about and enact, but as argued throughout this dissertation, those whose identity is marginalised are often exposed to violence. For these reasons, it is often difficult to engage queer people, particularly young queer people, in research that seeks to reflect their perspectives and document their voices (Msibi, 2012; Richardson, 2008). To mitigate these challenges, I used PVM to enable some creativity in how the participants expressed themselves. For example, in the second drawing workshop, which aimed to make participants comfortable to speak in a large group setting, I asked them to work in pairs in which one partner drew the other's experiences as narrated to them. In doing drawings this way, each participant shared their experiences, and the participant who listened and drew had to share the drawing and what they heard with the larger group. My analysis suggests that this allowed participants to build trust in one another, as they each had to listen to each other's stories and share these with the larger group. This limited the dominance of certain experiences of over others. As discussed in Chapter Four, the strategy reduced the pressure/responsibility of having to share a personal experience to a large group, but also ensured that all experiences were given equal prominence. It enabled agency, because the owner of the story was given permission in the end to either confirm or add certain details after their partner in the activity had shared what they heard.

PVM also provided some fun for the participants. As other PVM scholars have noted (see for example, Chambers, 1994; Moletsane et al., 2007), working with young people, particularly on a difficult issue such as the one investigated in this study, requires using methods that keep them actively engaged and that are enjoyable. As Ngidi and Moletsane (2018) write, "[p]articipants also acknowledged that, while their work was very important, and the issues

they addressed were serious, using drawing was fun and enjoyable” (p. 114). Similarly, a participant in Sibeko and Luthuli’s study (2018) said “[a]ll I can say is that the sessions were fun and we learnt a lot from them” (p. 133). In this study, the participants shared how they had fun, particularly in cellphilm making. In presenting their cellphilm, MaZuma’s group had pride in and were confident in what they had produced.

## **6.4 Discussion**

The findings from this study tell stories of queer African learners’ experiences of township secondary schooling. The findings were structured in three sections. Each of the sections were dedicated to answering one of the research questions. While this approach seems to compartmentalise or partition the experiences of queer African youth, the intention is not to present them as separate. As my analysis shows, the schooling experiences of queer learners are interconnected, interrelated, fluid, messy and complex. To navigate this complexity, the study used queer theory to understand participants’ schooling experiences (Calafell & Nakayama, 2017; Grzanka, 2019), especially within educational contexts where they confront queerphobic violence, discrimination and marginalisation (Mayer, 2012). Queer theory in the context of education “seeks to heighten the visibility of the issues, complicate and intensify critique and theory, while challenging homophobic and heterosexist nonsense—for the children’s sake; for all children’s sake” (Pinar, 2009). In this study, the participants reported experiences of queerphobic violence occurring in almost every part of the township school geography. These experiences were intertwined with acts of agency. Furthermore, queer African youth reported how they constructed relations belonging, friendship and love. The participants in this study declared what needed to change about their educational context in order to access education. Queer theory, therefore, revealed the extent of queerphobic violence in township schools, the negative effects it has on the educational experience of queer youth,



how they have resisted and responded to queerphobic violence and what interventions are needed to change their schooling experiences.

#### *6.4.1 Being Queer in a Township Secondary School*

To address the first research question in this study (*What does it mean to be queer African youth in a township school?*), two drawing workshops (discussed in Chapter Four) were held with the participants. From my analysis, as presented in the previous chapter, four themes emerged: 1) Geographies of violence; 2) experiences of microaggression in and around the school; 3) the politics and paradoxes of ‘coming out’; and 4) The complexities of support for queer learners in schools. These are discussed below.

##### *6.4.1.1 Geographies of violence*

Similar to the findings of Ngidi’s (2021) study of violence against orphaned learners in township schools, the findings of this study point to the endemic nature of queerphobic violence in the participants’ schools. According to the participants, reflecting the reality they faced in their communities, almost every space within the school setting was a site of violence generally, and queerphobic violence in particular. As my analysis suggests, the queerphobic violence was fuelled and sustained by the prevailing unequal gender norms and hetero-patriarchal relations and structures in and around their township schools. For example, as scholars have argued, in gender unequal contexts, schools tend to be sites of compulsory heterosexuality, in which hegemonic and heterosexual masculinities dominate (Connell, 1985). Specifically, the findings in this study suggest that each space in the school, including the grounds, classrooms, toilets, corridors and teacher staffrooms, was a site of violence for these queer learners. The participants in this study experienced queerphobic violence because as Butler (1994) has argued, the school is a space in which heterosexual “bodies, genders and desires [have been] naturalized” (p. 194). Therefore, queerphobic violence signals the

consequences of being non-heterosexual in a heterosexual and heterosexist space.

Available literature reviewed in this dissertation identifies South African schools as sites of compulsory heterosexuality, and where queer youth experience exclusion, marginalisation and queerphobic violence. For example, Mayeza's (2016) study in township primary schools found that, even schooling in the early years, "children construct gender boundaries and police gender transgressions" (p. 1), particularly those outside of the heteropatriarchal norm. For these children, soccer, and by implication, the soccer field, was a practice and a space reserved for heterosexual boys. Girls who dared to play soccer and were competent at it were labelled 'tomboys' and censored as "[girls] trying to be boys, they speak in a strong voice and do wrong things like to fighting, and they smoke too. They exercise a lot to make their muscles big and strong, they are tough girls" (Mayeza, 2016, p. 10). For McArthur (2015, p. 55), in the school, the "normalisation of homophobia and homophobic violence" becomes part of the school culture. Citing a case of an openly queer learner from the study who experienced name-calling and being mocked inside the classroom, McArthur (2015) concluded that this was another means of asserting heterosexual dominance and reminding queer learners that they did not belong in any space in the school, including the classroom. This has implications for school-level policy and teacher practice (discussed later in this chapter). Using Connell's gender theory and queer theory has revealed that township schools have become places of violence for all learners. Connell's gender theory made visible the general gendered nature of violence in township secondary schools. Queer theory enabled me to examine critique the violence from the perspectives of the queer youth participants in this study. It is the queering of the violence that enables the mapping of it, as experienced by queer African youth. The findings suggest that gender inequality working with heteropatriarchal normative logics produce geographies of violence which victimise queer youth.

#### *6.4.1.2 Experiences of microaggression in and around schools*

A second theme emerging from the study was that queer learners in these township schools experienced subtle discrimination or microaggression from peers, teachers and school support staff. While such aggression does not involve physical violence, the every-day, non-confrontational and unnoticeable discrimination still has lasting negative effects on queer learners. This includes a constant reminder about the strict code of compulsory heterosexuality, in which those who transgress are marginalised and possibly punished. This form of discrimination is often linked to intersecting cultural, religious and social norms and beliefs aimed at ensuring compulsory heterosexuality in social interactions (Rich, 1980).

To illustrate, in their study, Francis and Reygan (2016b) found that LO teachers used subtle forms of discrimination, which they justified with claims about cultural and religious mandates. The study found that heterosexism ran rampant in the participating schools, which “dehumanised, depersonalised and stripped personhood from [queer youth]” (p. 186). Similarly, Langa (2015), working with adolescent ‘straight’ boys, found that the participants, saw gay boys as lesser than heterosexual boys. For the participants, being gay was religiously and culturally wrong, and was pathologised and constructed within anti-gay discourses. In this study, the participants reported how compulsory heterosexuality masked as microaggressions were used daily through logics of religion, culture and social belief to shame, judge, compel and condemn queer youth. Using queer theory enabled the uncovering of microaggressions that the queer African youth in this study experienced. The findings suggest that microaggressions are a mask, hiding queerphobic harassment and heterosexism, which intend to make heterosexuality compulsory, and the norm. Queer theory makes it clear that microaggressions cannot be taken for granted but need to be interrogated. Microaggressions are daily and

widespread experiences for the queer African youth in this study.

#### *6.4.1.3 The politics and paradoxes of 'coming out'*

The findings in this study showed some paradoxical trends in the ways in which peers and adults interacted with queer learners in the schools. For example, according to the participants, while all queer bodies live under domination and are subject to queerphobic violence, some in this study who were openly gay or lesbian seemed to be accepted while others were not. This suggests that the prevailing hetero-patriarchal norms enabled some queer learners to have 'legitimacy,' especially if they did not disrupt the gender order and regime (Connell, 1985). In this context, the 'ideal queer body' is the one that tends to mimic the masculine and heterosexual body, while the marginalised queer body tends to exhibit feminine characteristics. This creates a hierarchy among queer youth. Inspired by the gender regime (Connell, 1985), the hierarchy accepts, empowers and privileges queer bodies who do not disrupt, question, or doubt the dominance of heteropatriarchy. At the bottom of the hierarchy is the undesirable queer body, which, through its existence, casts doubt on the assumed naturalness and purity of heterosexuality, the patriarchal system and the dominance of masculinities. As reported in Chapter Five, Liya did not experience queerphobic violence (as the ideal queer body), while MaZuma and Okuhle were witness to, and in some instances, subjects of violence (the known/assumed queer body), and Yvonne and Liya's friends were constantly subjected to queerphobic violence (undesired queer body).

Similarly, literature reviewed in this dissertation also reports that queer youth who are further away from the heteronormative ways of gender expression and identity, tend to experience more intense policing, surveillance, harassment and violence. For example, in their study, Jones and Hillier (2013) found that compared to cisgender same-sex youth, transgender youth experienced more rejection once they disclosed their gender identity. This may be why, for

example, as Mkhize et al. (2010) note, the experiences of black lesbians in particular, are often left out of interventions that seek to address GBV nationally. Using queer theory made it possible to see clearly the relationships that queer African youth have with peers and teachers. Queering the relationships gave meaning to what such relationships mean for queer African youth and their existence in a heteropatriarchal normative, gender unequal school context. Queer theory made visible the workings of heteropatriarchy as it tries to legitimise its existence, rewarding those who do not challenge it, punishing those who do, while maintaining dominance. The findings mean that in township secondary schools ‘coming out’ when critiqued from a queer lens is not always helpful for queer youth. This is because most of the queer African youth in this study did not fit into the ideal queer body.

#### *6.4.1.4 The complexities of support for queer learners in schools*

The final theme from the findings in this study suggests that while queer learners are generally exposed to marginalisation and violence, in a few instances they also receive support from some of their teachers and peers. However, such support tends to be conditional and complex. For example, as discussed in the previous section, in a hierarchy inspired by the gender order (Connell, 1985) and born from a heteropatriarchal, normative logic, only those who are not too questioning or ‘too queer’ receive such support. Furthermore, in a context where queer people often face isolation, vulnerability, marginalisation and erasure/silencing/invisibility, fearing being labelled as queer by proximity or association, their peers and teachers may give or withhold support. In Msibi’s (2018) study, participants (men who have sex with men) who were teachers in rural and township schools, and who had children of their own, reported that they “would never want their children to be gay” (p. 81). The participants’ internalised queerphobia can, in part, help in understanding the complex and conditional support available for queer learners in schools. For those who inhabit queerphobic school contexts, including

those who are themselves, queer, the prevailing heteropatriarchal norms tend to sow seeds of hate towards those who are not heterosexual, including the self. This may result in the complex and conditional withholding or withdrawal of support for queer individuals, leaving them open to queerphobic violence in and around the school.

Available literature, while affirming that teachers are key to efforts aimed at addressing queerphobic violence in schools, also identifies teachers as part of the problem of queerphobic violence in schools. However, there is hope, even though complex, as some teachers and peers do support queer youth in schools. In his study with queer African youth and teachers, Msibi (2012) found that some teachers were responsible for attending to queer youth issues. In one example, a teacher claimed that, "I'm used to it now. Whenever these children come to the staffroom the other teachers just look at me. I'm the one expected to help them. I'm sure if I was not married they would also think that I'm gay" (Msibi, 2012, p. 525). The teacher is careful to indicate that she was married, and therefore, not gay. Marriage in this instance may be considered an achievement that gains a person legitimacy as heterosexual. This dismisses any doubts of one being queer, and the consequences that may come thereafter. Learners have also been reported to provide support for queer youth in complex ways. In her study, Allen (2019) reports on a lesbian couple whose friend had been continuously harassed because she had intervened to halt the harassment by peers. In the interaction, the friend was physically assaulted, not because they were lesbian but because they were defending their lesbian friends (Allen, 2019). For these reasons, support for queer learners in school tends to be both conditional (as long as the supporter is not assumed to be gay) and complex. In this study, the participants reported similar trends. Using the theory of gender socialisation suggests that schools have two worlds: the world of the living, i.e. heterosexuals, and the world of the wounded, unwanted and dead, i.e. queer persons. For heterosexual peers and teachers to

provide support they have to provide proof that they are heterosexual, through marriage or borrowing any part of the patriarchal social script and reciting it. Providing support for queer youth means heterosexual peers and teachers need to have one foot in the 'queer' world, while the rest of the body exist in the heterosexual world.

#### *6.4.2 Responding to and Resisting Queerphobic Violence in and around School*

The second research question in the study was: *How do queer African youth respond to and resist negative experiences with their peers and teachers?* To address the question, data was drawn from the two drawings workshops held with the participants. In addition, two cellphilm workshops were conducted with the participants. Four themes emerged from the findings: 1) moving through school on our own terms; 2) finding belonging, friendship and love; 3) queer African youth taking up space and fighting back; and 4) troubling (hetero)normative school culture: being queer as resistance.

##### *6.4.2.1 Moving through school on our own terms*

The findings in this study show how the participants found innovative ways to navigate their queerphobic schooling contexts, suggesting that they felt they had some agency to respond to and resist the marginalisation and violence they experienced in their township schools. Queer agency involves an agent finding ways to navigate a context in which they are deemed illegitimate and not a subject (Butler, 1991), and are silenced and made invisible.

Similarly, in their self-reflection of queer experiences in township school toilets, Ngidi, Mkhize and Sibeko (2021), reported that township schools are generally violent and school toilets are especially queerphobic spaces. According to them, in the school toilets violent hegemonic masculinities dominate. Therefore, in the township schooling context, queer agency involved the wisdom of knowing how to act and when to enter such spaces that ensured some level of

safety for queer learners in schools. In this study, participants reported that they did not use the school toilets, and when they did, males would use the female toilets, as they were relatively safer. Using queer theory enables a looking into the violence, not taking for granted the agency of queer African youth. The findings suggest that while the township secondary school is restrictive for queer African youth, they have found ways to navigate the school space. The navigation, based on prior experiences and witnessing queerphobic violence, helps in providing some level of safety – not freedom – in the school space.

#### *6.4.2.2 Finding belonging, friendship and love*

The findings in this study suggest that the participants, while negotiating a heteropatriarchal, normative and queerphobic context were able to find belonging, friendship and love. Conceptualising queer youth as only in danger and victims “undermines queer youth agency” (Marshall, 2010, p. 17). In this regard, Francis (2017b) writes that

... a focus exclusively on the agency-victimization duality seriously compromises the focus from same-sex relationships, intimacy, and desire. Additionally, we miss out on the young people’s dreams, aspirations, and their ideas for the creation of a just world. Focusing on the youth stories during the interviews, which spanned more broadly than the curriculum and schooling, has enabled me to glean more about their everyday lives, leisure activities, and relationships (p. 102).

Participants in Francis’s (2017b) study spoke freely about their desires, love and relationships. One participant detailed how their best friend was in love with them. Participants also shared what they hope for, their dreams and plans, including their plans for the future. Similarly, Allen’s (2015) findings showed how queer youth, even in a queerphobic context, were still able to find intimacy and love. This means that framing queer youth generally, and queer African



youth in particular, within victim-martyr-danger discourse is limiting and essentialises their schooling experiences and their lives. For these reasons, Gqola (2011) asks us to go beyond the experiences of queerphobic violence and to engage with the full lives of these subjects in our research. Using queer theory enables seeing within the queerphobic violence and beyond it. The findings suggest that there is more to the lives of queer African youth and that they cannot be conceptualised within martyr-target-victim discourse.

#### *6.4.2.3 Queer African youth taking up space and fighting back*

The participants in this study reported that in spite of the marginalisation and violence they often experienced in their township schools, they still found ways to resist and fight back. To understand queer agency, one has to look beyond heteronormative expectations (Bordonaro & Payne, 2012). In doing so, in this study, agency was understood as accepting one's self in the mist of queerphobic violence – fighting back, and taking up space, by, for example, being a source of knowledge (about queerness) for learners and teachers.

Available literature suggests that queer youth in other contexts have found varied ways to take up space and fight back that exist outside the heteronormative notions of agency (Jones & Hillier, 2013; Khan, 2014; McArthur, 2015). For example, in their study Jones and Hillier (2013) found that trans-spectrum youth challenged views that rejected them through their activism in which they focused in such areas as “starting a group, making speeches, or helping with education against discrimination” (p. 301). Similarly, in this study, Okuhle mentioned that he and his straight friend tried to establish an organisation within the school that would focus on queer youth experiences, but the School Governing Body shut this down. Furthermore, the participants identified self-acceptance as key to rejecting and resisting queerphobic harassment (see also Jones & Hillier, 2013). From a queer theory perspective, Okuhle's friendship becomes

a reachable possibility. Freeman (2008) asserts that from a heterosexual lens, the notion of kinship is limiting, hierarchical and gender bound, littered with notions such as Venus versus Mars or men cannot be friends with women. As Freeman argues, in queer kinship, friendships with the opposite gender are possible, possibly leading to alliance formation. Some participants in this study were able to form such friendships and alliances, and these supported them in their efforts to resist and fight back against the marginalisation and violence they were experiencing in the school.

#### *6.4.2.4 Troubling (hetero)normative school culture: Being Queer as resistance*

The participants in this study reported instances where they were able to challenge the heteronormative culture in their schools. In order to understand the ways in which queer African youth in this study troubled the heteronormative school context, the concepts of agency and structure, involving how the individual exists, navigates and responds to the structure they are in is useful. Agency-structure refers to “how human beings both create social life [agency] at the same time as they are influenced and shaped by existing social arrangements [structure]” (Leydar, 2006, p. 05). Seyer (1992) has highlighted the tendency to overlook the agent and to only focus on the structure, resulting in a “dehumanizing social sciences” (p. 97) where the agent’s actions are shaped by the structure (Dowding, 2008). McRobbie (2009) further adds that agency is a result of the frame from which it is enacted, shaped by culture, politics, society and institutional culture. In a heteropatriarchal normative context, people are compelled to become and continue to subscribe to heteronormativity. Midglek (2016) notes that young people are caught up in dominant normative notions of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. This limits the multiplicity of identities and their expressions. The dominant normative notions of sexual orientation and gender (compulsory heterosexuality) are enforced because they are acknowledged and continuously reinforced in the school culture, school curriculum, school policy, space configuration and teacher pedagogy. This makes

heterosexuality not just normal but natural (Migdlek, 2016). However, because it is not part of the school culture, policy, curriculum or teacher pedagogy, queerness tends to trouble this notion of heterosexuality as normative and natural. Queer African youth, therefore, in showing up at township schools, having self-acceptance and not yielding to compulsory heterosexuality trouble the heteronormative school culture. To illustrate, on one hand, in his study, Francis (2017b) found that queer youth who were visible in their schools experienced intense heterosexist violence, including being “always bullied... even hurt... threatened to be stabbed... threatened to be raped... the teasing and mocking the way he talks and walks” (p. 63). On the other hand, while this clearly shows queerphobic violence, it also points to the troubled and fragile heteronormative school culture. In this study, in one of the cellphlms produced by the participants, similar queerphobic violence is experienced, where a queer learner is beaten up by male learners for being with his boyfriend in the school toilets. This echoes what Jones et al. (2016) found in their study, where transgender and gender diverse youth defied social gender norms, including who one is intimate with in schools.

From a queer theory perspective, queer “is the identity that [queer]phobia is most fearful of, one that flaunts itself unashamedly” (Carlson, 2009, p. 94). The findings from this study suggest that the heteronormative school culture is informed by a fear of queer identities. In its attempt to make the school culture heteronormative, queerphobic violence seeks to subordinate queerness as it challenges the ‘purity’ and ‘naturalness’ of heterosexuality.

#### *6.4.3 Intervening to change the schooling experiences of queer youth*

The last research question in this study was: *What changes do queer African youth want to see in their township school?* To address the question, I conducted open-ended individual interviews with each participant. I used the participants’ visual products as prompts in the interviews to understand their perspectives on what needed to be changed for them to feel safe

and accepted in their schooling context. The chapter also draws on data from group discussions of these visual products. From the findings, the participants identified four changes: 1) Kumelebazi ukuthi nathi singabantu; 2) Changes in school-based policy, teacher education and curriculum; 3) Separate schools for queer learners; and 4) The support of parents.

#### *6.4.3.1 Kumelebazi ukuthi nathi singabantu*

Available literature on teachers and school managers, charged with upholding and protecting human rights of all learners in schools, shows that they are continuously silent about queerphobic violence, further violate, and victimise queer youth in South African schools (Bhana, 2014a; Mostert et al., 2015; Ngidi et al., 2021), thereby dehumanising them. Participants in this study noted how they were made to feel excluded from the school and were left with no sense of belonging. Bhana's (2014a) study for example, reports on how, according to the participants, school managers did not see queer youth in South African schools as human beings, with some stating that, "I do not believe that people of the same sex be involved in sexual intercourse," and that, "I totally disagree with homosexuality. This is going to teach our kids something which is strange to us... I totally disagree" (Bhana, 2014a, p. 72). These comments from school managers underscore the lack of acceptance of the humanity of queer people and queer learners in particular.

It is these kinds of experiences that led participants in this study, in identifying what needed to change to ensure the freedom of queer learners in township schools, to point to their need to be acknowledged and recognised as human beings. In their words, *Kumelebazi ukuthi nathi singabantu* (*They must know that we are human beings*). For them, recognising their humanity/personhood was at the centre of social change. As the literature suggests, being queer has historically meant being a "lesser version of a heterosexual... [to be] a 'queer' was something that you did not want to be... and if it was impossible to change, then certainly be

silent and celibate” (Hall, 1993, pp. 13-14). While there has been a “shift from noun to verb, from identity to practice, from modality of being to modality of doing” (Talburt, 2000, p. 02), scholars like Talburt (2000) suggest that the shifts are not “linear nor complete but contextual and practical” (p. 02). Therefore, in this dissertation, I use ‘queer’ as a noun, the subject, the agent, thereby moving the agent away from understandings that place queerness as ‘lesser versions of heterosexuality,’ so that the existence and actions are not seen as illegitimate and as requiring punishment for their transgressions. Recognising that they are placed within a subordinated position, lesser than their heterosexual peers, the participants in this study demand that they not be expected to assimilate into heterosexuality, but for their humanity to be acknowledged.

#### *6.4.3.2 Changes in school-based policy, teacher education and curriculum,*

Available literature concerning educational policy relating to queer youth shows that there is a disconnect between the South African Constitution and school policy as developed and upheld by school managers and teachers (Butler et al., 2003). For example, Bhana (2014a) found that school managers not only perpetrated queerphobic violence, but used religion, culture and race to impinge on queer rights. In higher education, teacher education lecturers have been hesitant to teach queer content to pre-service teachers (Nzimande, 2015). Furthermore, the LO policy, meant to address the teaching of sexuality education, continues to exclude queer identities and experiences, only mentioning lesbian and gay identities (Francis, 2017b; Potgieter & Reygan, 2012). In this study, through their visual products, the participants showed how teachers in their township schools were ill-equipped to acknowledge queer youth and address queerphobic violence in their classrooms and the schools. Furthermore, they were critical about the silence of school policy and its exclusion of queer youth experiences, particularly of queerphobic violence.

Thus, the participants in this study also identified changes in school policy, teacher education and curriculum as key to facilitating their safety and nurturing social change. Borrowing from Dilley (1999, p. 458), the study reported in this dissertation examined the “lives and experiences of those considered non-heterosexual,” queer African youth in township secondary schools. Therefore, taking queer theory out of the academy and not solely focusing on adult queer persons, but on educational contexts and queer youth lives as this study has done, enables “[queer] youth to move beyond minoritizing discourses which currently frame schooling” (Quinlivan & Town, 1999, p. 243). Queer theory has enabled me to go beyond experiences of violence, and to venture into what makes or limits the agency of queer learners in heteropatriarchal schooling contexts.

#### *6.4.3.3 Separate schools for queer learners*

Informed by the literature, this dissertation has argued that the educational system is configured around and has institutionalised heterosexuality (Ingrey, 2018). In the schooling context, dominant groups, including heterosexual teachers and learners, “act to create and support a social hierarchy that privileges mainstream identities,” particularly heteropatriarchal normative identities (Meyer, 2012, p. 09). In this context, non-normative identities are regarded as a threat, dangerous and are continuously seen as a disease that will infect the ‘naturalness’ and ‘purity’ of heterosexuality (Butler, 1990). South African scholars have identified schools as constructing and supportive of heteronormative identities (Butler et al., 2003; Bhana, 2014a; Francis, 2017b; Msibi, 2012; Ngidi et al., 2021), where “homophobic victimisation is an endemic part of the South African landscape” (Nel & Judge, 2008, p. 19). As such, schools are largely heterosexists (Francis, 2017a), and are epicentres of compulsory heterosexuality. A survey by OUT LGBT Well-being (2016) provides overwhelming results of the negative experiences of queer people in general society and in schools in particular. Queer people in the

study experienced a wide range of queerphobic violence, including verbal and physical assault, threats of physical violence, objects being thrown at them, their property or possessions being damaged or destroyed, sexual abuse and rape in schools. The idea of separate schooling, of a school for queer youth, is a response to these and similar experiences in their township schools and communities. In this study, this queerphobic context and the resultant lack of access to quality learning, the participants argued that having a separate schooling system for queer youth would address their safety in schools. My participants' call for their own school falls within the first approach of Kumashiro's (2000) approaches of how to address anti-oppressive education, *Education About for the Other*. Kumashiro (2000, p. 26) writes that Education for the Other "focuses on improving the experiences of students who are Othered, or in some way oppressed, in and by mainstream society." In this way, queer African youth saw having their own school as means to improve their education experience. In this approach schools are conceptualised as "spaces where the Other is treated in harmful ways. Sometimes the harm results from actions by peers or even teachers and staff" or "looking at assumptions about and expectations for the Other—especially those held by educators—that influence how the Other is treated" (Kumashiro, 2000, pp. 26-27). In wanting their own school, participants hoped that, amongst other things, the school would not have "harmful spaces... [but would have] helpful spaces for all students, especially for those students who are targeted by the forms of oppression [they were experiencing in their schools]" (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 28).

However, as Kumashiro (2000) points out, having a queer-only school is not a viable solution to addressing the oppressive school system on queer youth. This is because the focus cannot be on the Other. In a context where queer identities "are fluid, contested, and constantly shifting" (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 30), providing a queer-only school "implies that the Other is the problem; it implies that, without the Other, schools would not be oppressive places" (Kumashiro, 2000,

p. 29). It would mean essentialising and fixing identities.

In a post-1994 South Africa, the possibility of creating another separate public schooling system is unconstitutional, as the country moved from separate development to championing inclusivity, diversity and equality. Butler et al. (2003, p. 6) write that there is commitment in the new “democratic South Africa, celebrating diversity and breaking from the shackles of prejudice, discrimination, and intolerance” where queerphobia is unconstitutional. Therefore, having a queer only school, would further entrench the apartheid era notion of separate development, and discourage inclusivity and diversity.

#### *6.4.3.4 The support of parents*

The findings in this study indicate that the participants saw the support of parents as key to addressing queerphobic violence and ensuring their safety in schools. With the support of parents, and by implication, other adults in their lives, the participants believed they would be able to respond to and resist the queerphobic violence that has become endemic in their schools and communities (Human Rights Watch, 2011; Mkhize et al., 2010), where even families are implicated (Kowen & Davis, 2006; Maotoana et al., 2019). In this context, heteronormativity (Kitzinger, 2005), in which heterosexuality is enforced in all aspects of life, from work to play, pleasure and education (Krigen, 2012) prevails. According to the participants in this study, to address (resist) the systematic and institutionalisation of heterosexuality, which governs all, queer and non-queer (Seidman, 2005), would require the involvement and support of parents and other adults. However, they also acknowledged that in such a context, where heterosexuality is normalised, getting support from parents can be risky, because it means ‘coming out.’ Available literature on ‘coming out’ in a heteronormative context has shown that it has not worked for all queer persons. In a study by Butler et al. (2003) that examined the coming out stories of gay and lesbian youth, the findings suggest that lesbian and gay youth



experienced “discrimination, isolation, and non-tolerance within their high school contexts” (p. 3). It is for this reason that some of the participants in Mayeza’s (2021) study felt that “coming out is not mandatory, but rather it is a choice that each individual makes. The choice of whether or not to come out depends on how one perceives how one’s parents would react” (p. 298).

Some of the participants in this study were ‘out’ to their parents and others, while visible, and were not out. Reasons for the latter included parents not wanting to talk about their child’s queerness, thereby curbing the child’s ability or willingness to communicate some of the experiences of violence at school (see Bhana, 2013). Others shared how critical it was to have a parent(s) know that they were queer. This enabled the parents to provide support when their children reported experiences of queerphobic violence. Bringing parents into the schooling lives of queer African youth is key to the dismantling of dominant discourse, which makes queer African youth being at odds with their parents, the only narrative available.

### **6.5 Personal-Professional Reflection on the Study**

In Chapter One I discussed my experiences as a queer learner in township schools. For me, the study was both a political and personal project. For example, during my time as a learner in township schools, there was no space inside the school where I felt free and safe as a queer learner. My schooling experiences ranged from harassment, verbal and physical abuse, and sexual violence, to being made invisible. In Chapter Two, the literature I reviewed pointed to the continuing neglect, marginalisation, exclusion and violence experienced by queer youth in schools and communities. This violence has ranged from name-calling, sexual and physical assault and even murder, as reports of murdered and raped queer bodies are posted on social media almost weekly, with little to no intervention from law enforcement agencies. In some of these violent incidents, it has taken social activism from queer people for law and enforcement agencies to begin to attend to the crimes committed against queer persons. This indicates that

there is a serious need to understand and attend to the schooling experiences of queer youth in South Africa, particularly in township schools plagued by GBV and queerphobic violence.

Informed by this understanding, in this study, I wanted to work with queer youth in township schools to understand their experiences and to learn from them what they would like to see change in their setting. The study has made it clear that very little has changed in township schools since I was a learner myself and that queer learners continue to experience marginalisation and violence, with negative consequences for their educational and health outcomes. Thus, completing this study and understanding the daily struggles that queer African youth continue to face in township schools, with little to no support from teachers, peers and parents, has left me angry. I am angry that nothing seems to have changed since I was a learner, and that queer youth continue to be treated like non-humans in schools.

Despite the continuing queerphobic violence in schools and my anger at the lack of change for queer learners, I am also hopeful. My hope is based on the agency the participants in this study have shown me. First, in spite of the marginalisation and violence they face on a daily basis and in every space in the school, queer youth remain agentic and are experts in their own lives and contexts, able to understand and begin to address the issues facing them in and around schools and communities. Second, while queerphobic violence exists in every aspect of school life and the school continues to exhibit a heteronormative culture, queer African learners have been able to create or find belonging, friendships and love. Third, the findings from this study suggest that to address queerphobic violence in township schools will require community participation, in which all stakeholders (queer learners, peers, teachers, and community members) to work together to identify and implement strategies for social change. Finally, using creative methods to co-construct knowledge with marginalised participants such as queer

learners as this study has done is not only vital in understanding their schooling lives, but is key to developing or identifying strategies for change. In this study, using PVM proved invaluable in engaging the participating queer learners and in co-constructing knowledge about the violence they experience and possible strategies for change.

## **6.6 Implications**

It is not enough to want to understand the queerphobic violence that occurs in schools, and the various forms it takes. As researchers and teachers, we cannot continue to ignore this group. Our efforts should be aimed at initiating social change in schools and communities. In this regard, the findings generated in response to the research question addressed in the study have some implications for educational policy, schools and communities. The implications point to the interventions needed to address the safety of queer learners in these schools and communities.

### *6.6.1 Implications for Policy*

In relation to policy implications, this study found that school policy tends to exclude queer youth experience and very little to no attention is paid to the experiences of queer youth in school policies. In particular, the participants in this study were critical of the school code of conduct, asserting that it was not inclusive and did not include queer learners as part of the school. While the South African Constitution affords rights to all and protects queer people, including queer youth, this has not translated into social protection in schools and communities (Bhana 2016; Brown, 2016; Francis 2017; Msibi, 2012). According to the participants, the school code of conduct does not reflect the principles of equality as enshrined in the Constitution. To address this, the school's code of conduct needs to be changed to include the needs of this group. Without this change in policy, and therefore, official recognition of these needs as legitimate, queerphobic violence cannot be effectively addressed.

### *6.6.2 Implications for School Practice*

The findings from this study suggest that due to the lack of adequate intervention addressing violence based on difference and queerphobic violence in particular, it is not only LO teachers who require re-education and continuous training on gender and sexual diversity. Rather, while the call has mostly emphasised the training of LO teachers, the experiences of some of the participants in this study suggest that all teachers need to be trained as sexuality and gender diversity educators. This is because queerphobic violence and heterosexism has no timetable and does not wait for the LO teacher to be class in order for it to reveal its ugly head. Therefore, teacher training and education institutions need to train all teachers on how to recognise, understand and address such violence within the schooling context. Further, members of the School Governing Body, and school security personnel also need to be equipped with skills and the values of ‘inclusivity.’ As the participants in this study suggested, schools themselves, in collaboration with NGOs can offer this training. However, such initiatives should not go without anti-oppressive and anti-domination initiatives. This is to ensure that schools become safe spaces for *all* learners, regardless of their sexual orientation, where queerphobic violence is eradicated and quality learning for all is the focus.

### *6.6.3 Implications for Community Action*

This study further found that queerphobic violence is not only isolated in schools, but also exists in communities. The experiences reported by the participants in this study point to the need to work with communities to address queerphobic violence in and around schools. This is informed by the understanding that communities play a key role in ensuring that violence generally, and queerphobic violence in particular, is not part of the schooling experience. The experiences of queer African youth in and around schools point to much-needed societal change in communities. Therefore, a multi-sectoral approach, involving schools, communities,

government and civil society is needed if a comprehensive agenda for eradicating heterosexism, gender inequality, GBV in general and queerphobic violence in particular, is to be developed and implemented.

#### *6.6.4 Implications for Future Research*

This dissertation focused on the schooling experiences of queer African youth in township settings. While the study has contributed to the emerging literature on the experiences of queer learners in schools, more research that works *with* queer African youth in exploring their lived experiences in and outside of schools, is needed. This study is amongst a few that place queer African youth at the centre of research. With more research of this nature and in other contexts, there might be a better understanding of and addressing the challenges that queer African youth experience within the township schooling context. In placing the queer black experience at the centre of research, future studies might consider what such experiences might look like and be addressed in diverse contexts, including rural settings. Furthermore, such research may look at how queer African youth relate to their communities and families. This could contribute to assisting communities, families and policy makers to better understand queer African youth experiences and address queerphobic violence in schools and communities. Importantly, such research would need to centre not just on queer African youth voices, but must also investigate appropriate strategies for tackling queerphobic violence at systemic, institutional and community levels. This would require intergenerational (involving children, youth, and adults), and multi-sectoral partnerships involving schools, faith organisations, government, NGOs and others in communities. It is only when stakeholders work collaboratively to tackle this societal issue (queerphobic violence) that its occurrence in schools, including those located in township settings, might be curtailed.

## 6.7 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of queer African learners in township schools, and to work with them to identify potential strategies for social change. The main research question in the study was: *How do queer African youth experience, respond to and resist negative experiences in township secondary schools?* findings are reported in the previous chapter. In sum, the findings suggest that, first, schools remain patriarchal and heterosexist, and that in these contexts, GBV, including queerphobic violence remains rife. Such violence can be physical, emotional, verbal and sexual, and might be overt or subtle in nature. For queer learners, their sexuality is constantly policed and censored for subverting heterosexuality and the heteronormative school culture, and violence is used to punish them. Second, the findings suggest that in the heterosexist school contexts, queer youth have learned to navigate the spaces and negotiate the relationships they have in and around schools. Their agency includes avoiding spaces (such as toilets) where they are often attacked, or deliberately going where they know they would be attacked to challenge and subvert the norms scripted for them in these spaces. They also learn to create relationships of love, friendships and belonging with peers. Third, the findings suggest that experiences of queerphobic violence stem from dehumanising queer youth and not recognising them as human beings, the first thing they want to change in their schooling environment. The participants recommended engaging NGOs to conduct workshops for teachers to educate and train them on queer issues. Other things identified as needing change included school policies, better preparation of their teachers for handling queer issues, including in the curriculum or in dealing with the violence queer learners experience from peers and other teachers, and increasing the involvement of parents in interventions.

The study makes some, albeit modest, contributions to scholarship. First, it makes a methodological contribution. For example, using PVM in this study helped to ensure that the research process encouraged the participation of queer learners, a group that is often silenced and ignored due to their age and marginalised because of the sexual orientation. PVM also contributed to ensuring the *agency* of the participants, *collaboration* amongst participants and the *co-constructedness* of the knowledge we generated. Working with queer African youth in this participatory and creative way pointed to the need to continue such work but also to include interventions, led by queer youth, aimed at addressing queerphobic violence. Finally, PVM enabled me to work with queer youth, to place them and their voices at the centre of research that conceptualised them as agents, and to identify strategies for addressing the violence that prevents them from benefitting from quality learning in schools.

The study also contributes to the emerging research on the experiences of queer learners in schools. From the findings we learn that, for example, while the schooling experiences of queer learners are often marred by violence, there are sometimes moments, in the eye of such a storm, where belonging, love and friendships can be found or developed. This requires developing or drawing on the agency of this group, a premise on which the study was conceptualised. Understanding queer learners as not only victims, but as also agentic and able to understand their own lives and what needs to change to ensure their safety, this dissertation concludes, will go a long way towards developing interventions that work. Such interventions must contribute to queer African youth possibly living beyond the age of 23, the age at which one of them, Lindokuhle Cele (23), a queer, black upcoming musician was brutally murdered. During the course of the study reported in this dissertation, on 5 February 2020, Lindokuhle Cele was killed in the township of uMlazi. Lindo, as he was popularly known, is said to have been stabbed to death by a 20-year old man because of his sexual orientation (SABC News, 10

February 2020). I, therefore, cannot afford to do research for the sake of understanding the experiences of queer youth in schools or communities while their bodies continue to litter the streets of the townships they call home. Rather, I offer this dissertation and its implications for future work and programming in schools and communities as a modest contribution and an entry point into more work that seeks to centre the voices of this marginalised group. My hope is that such work will not only seek to understand their marginalisation and the violence they endure, but will also contribute to identifying and/or developing strategies for social change.



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## Appendix A: Release Form for Participant Cellphilms



### RELEASE FORM

**Funder:** DST/NRF South African Research Chair (SARChI): Gender and Childhood Sexuality

**Communication Institution:** University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN)

**Researcher:** Nkonzo Mkhize

Please indicate how you would like to share your cellphilms by **ticking** the boxes:

- 1) My cellphilms can be archived in the *restricted section* of Nkonzo Mkhize's Archive at UKZN where only Nkonzo Mkhize and Prof Relebohile Moletsane will have access through a password.

☐ YES☐ NO

- 2) My cellphilms can be viewed at public at exhibitions.

☐ YES☐ NO

- 3) I would not like to share my cellphilms with anyone.

YES

NO

---

Name of participant

---

Signature

---

Date

Contact Information

Nkonzo Mkhize

University of KwaZulu Natal

213503541@stu.ukzn.ac.za



## Appendix B: Letter to School Principal



Dear Principal

Re: Request for Gate keeper's letter: Support for Masters Research Study

I am writing to request from you a letter of acknowledgement and support (i.e. a gate keeper's letter) to attach to my application for ethical clearance from the Human and Social Science Research Ethics Committee for my study which focuses on how black, teenaged, queer learners construct and negotiate their agency in relation to teachers and other learners in township schools. Such a letter would confirm that, the school is aware of my study, that some of the learners in the school are partaking in the study, that the school is aware that the Durban Lesbian and Gay Community Centre has agreed to part of the project and it is willing and able to assist me with identifying teachers with whom I might work to identify and recruit queer learners in grades eight to 11 in the school, and provide referral services to study participants who may require them.

My study, supervised by Professor Relebohile Moletsane ([Moletsaner@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:Moletsaner@ukzn.ac.za)).

Once recruited, and provided that consent and assent is obtained from all participants, I will work with participants using various arts-based methods, including drawing and short films to

explore how they construct and negotiate their agency in and around the school. The study will take place after school hours.

Every effort will be made to ensure participants' anonymity and confidentiality. For example, neither the participants nor the schools they attend will be named in the dissertation or any publications that arise therefrom. As part of the consent and assent process, it will be stressed that participants are free to withdraw from the project at any time during and after the data collection, without any consequences.

Finally, participants will be informed during the consent and assent processes that should they disclose abuse of any kind (including neglect) or any information which indicates that their safety and/or well-being or that of other learners is at risk, I will refer them to psycho-social and legal support.

Thank you once again for your support.

Sincerely,

Researcher

Nkonzo Mkhize



Email: Emkhize91@gmail.com

.....

Permission to conduct the study

Declaration

I \_\_\_\_\_ (full name of the Principal) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of this research project and I grant permission to the learners to participate in the research project and grant permission that the school be a research site.

I understand that both the learners and the school is at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time.

.....

SINGITURE OF THE PRINCIPAL

.....

DATE

STAMP

## Appendix C: Learner Assent Form



### Assent Form to Learners

This is a formal invitation to you to participate in the research project titled: **Queer African youth: Existing, resisting and responding to queerphobic violence in township secondary schools**. My supervisor is Professor Relebohile Moletsane.

I would like to ask for permission to undertake a study in your school. The study will focus on male learners from grade 8 to 11. The study aims to explore their schooling experiences in how male learner who are queer and those who are perceived to be queer construct and negotiate their agency in relation to teachers and other learners. How these learners ‘speak against’ or counteract discrimination in their schooling experience and how these learners negotiate constructions of masculinities in their school.

The participants will create drawings, make videos with other learners, which will also involve semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions around what they have made. The names of the all the learners and that of the school will be anonymized in all of the publications that will come out from this study. The names of the learners and that of the school not be in any of the publications. The learners are free to withdraw from the project at any point during and after the data collection, without any consequences.



The study will aim to ensure that every precaution is taken to maintain the confidentiality of all the participants, but there are limits to confidentiality. All of the participants will be informed that should there be a disclosure(s) which indicate that their well-being or of other learners' is being compromised or at risk, the researcher will seek their consent in addressing the matter.

A letter has been written to your parents/guardians to ask for their permission for you to participate in the study. Kindly take this letter and discuss your participation with them as well, and if they give their permission, fill the form below and return to me.

Sincerely,

Supervisor

Prof. Relebohile Moletsane

Tel: (031) 260 3023

Email: [Moletsaner@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:Moletsaner@ukzn.ac.za)

Researcher

Nkonzo Mkhize



Email: [Emkhize91@gmail.com](mailto:Emkhize91@gmail.com)

.....

Declaration

I \_\_\_\_\_ hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

Additional consent, where applicable

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview	YES/NO
---------------------------	--------

focus group discussion	YES /NO
------------------------	---------

Creating drawings	YES/NO
-------------------	--------

Making videos	YES/NO
---------------	--------

.....

SINGITURE OF THE PARTICIPANT

.....

DATE

## Appendix D: Parent/Guardian Consent Form



This is a formal invitation to ask you for your permission for your child to in the research project titled: **Queer African youth: Existing, resisting and responding to queerphobic violence in township secondary schools**. My supervisor is Professor Relebohile Moletsane.

I would like to ask for permission to undertake the study with the learner. The study will focus on learners from grade 8 to 11. The study aims to explore their schooling experiences in how learner who are queer and those who are perceived to be queer construct and negotiate their agency in relation to teachers and other learners. How these learners ‘speak against’ or counteract discrimination in their schooling experience and how these learners negotiate constructions of masculinities and femininities in their school.

The participants will create drawings, make videos with other learners, which will also involve semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions around what they have made. The names of the all the learners and that of the school will be anonymized in all of the publications that will come out from this study. The names of the learners and that of the school will not be in any of the publications. The learners are free to withdraw from the project at any point during and after the data generation, without any consequences.

The study will aim to ensure that every precaution is taken to maintain the confidentiality of all the participants, but there are limits to confidentiality. All of the participants will be

informed that should there be a disclosure(s) which indicate that their well-being or of other learners' is being compromised or at risk, the researcher will seek their consent in addressing the matter.

Sincerely,

Project Leader

Prof. Relebohile Moletsane

Tel: (031) 260 3023

Email: [Moletsaner@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:Moletsaner@ukzn.ac.za)

Researcher

Nkonzo Mkhize



Email: [Emkhize91@gmail.com](mailto:Emkhize91@gmail.com)

.....

Declaration

I \_\_\_\_\_ (Full name of the parent/guardian) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to the child participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw my child from the project at any time, should I so desire.

Additional consent, where applicable

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview	YES/NO
focus group discussion	YES /NO
Creating drawings	YES/NO
Making videos	YES/NO

.....

SINGITURE OF THE PARENT

.....

DATE

## Appendix E: NGO and Gate Keepers Letter



10 September 2018

42 Mckenzie Rd

Windermere

Durban

4001

Dear Ms Mkhize

Re: Permission to conduct a research study

I am writing to request permission for a gate keeper's letter in order to apply for ethical clearance for my research study with the Ethics Committee of University of KwaZulu-Natal.

My Masters topic/working title: **Queer African youth: Existing, resisting and responding to queerphobic violence in township secondary schools.**

My supervisor is Prof Relebohile Moletsane from the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

I would like to ask for assistance with identifying teachers who are supporting queer learners in township schools. I also request that the Center assist in supporting the participants should they require psychosocial support by referring them to the center. My study will focus on queer learners from grades 8 to 11. The study aims to explore their schooling experiences in how learners who are queer construct and negotiate their agency in relation to teachers and other learners. How these learners 'speak against' or counteract discrimination in their schooling experience and how these learners negotiate constructions of masculinities in their school.

The participants will create drawings, make videos, which will also involve semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions around what they have made. The names of all the learners and that of the schools will be anonymized in all of the publications that will come out from this study. The learners are free to withdraw from the project at any point during and after the data collection, without any consequences.

The study will aim to ensure that every precaution is taken to maintain the confidentiality of all the participants, but there are limits to confidentiality. All of the participants will be informed that should there be a disclosure(s) which indicate that their well-being or of other learners' is being compromised or at risk, the researcher will seek their consent in addressing the matter.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Supervisor

Prof. Relebohile Moletsane

Tel: (031) 260 3023

Email: [Moletsaner@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:Moletsaner@ukzn.ac.za)

Researcher

Nkonzo Mkhize



Email: [Emkhize91@gmail.com](mailto:Emkhize91@gmail.com)

.....

Permission to conduct the study

Declaration

I \_\_\_\_\_ (full name of the  
Director) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of this  
research project and I grant permission to the learners to participate in the research project.

I understand that both the learners and the center is at liberty to withdraw from the project at  
any time.

.....

SINGITURE OF THE DIRECTOR

STAMP

.....

DATE



## Appendix F: Ethics Approval Letter



**UNIVERSITY OF  
KWAZULU-NATAL**  
**INYUVESI  
YAKWAZULU-NATALI**

16 January 2019

Mr Nkonzo Emmanuel Mkhize (213503541)  
School of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Dear Mr Mkhize,

Protocol reference number: HSS/1027/018M (Linked to HSS/0852/014CA)  
Project title: Black, teenage, male and Queer: Investigating how do black, teenage, male, queer learners construct and negotiate their agency in relation to teachers and other learners in township schools

**Approval Notification – Expedited Application**

In response to your application received on 31 July 2018, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. **PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully



.....  
**Dr Rosemary Sibanda (Chair)**

/ms

Cc Supervisor: Professor Deevia Bhana and Dr Shaaista Moosa  
cc Academic Leader Research: Dr SB Khoza  
cc School Administrator: Ms Sheryl Jeenarain

---

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
Dr Rosemary Sibanda (Chair)  
Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building  
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000  
Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3587/6350/4557 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 4809 Email: [sibanda@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:sibanda@ukzn.ac.za) / [snymam@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:snymam@ukzn.ac.za) / [mphurcel@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mphurcel@ukzn.ac.za)  
Website: [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)



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Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

## Appendix G: Turnitin Similarity Report

# Masters thesis

*by* Nkonzo Mkhize

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Submission date: 10-Feb-2022 03:28PM (UTC+0200)

Submission ID: 1759241789

File name: Turnitin\_Nkonzo\_Mkhize.docx (8.62M)

Word count: 49458

Character count: 269977

## Masters thesis

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SIMILARITY INDEX

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