



**Navigating the complexities of gay and lesbian sexual identities among rural African University students: A narrative inquiry**

**By**

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**A dissertation submitted in full fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of  
Master of Education in Social Justice in the School of Education.**

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**January 2021**

## **DECLARATION**

This is to declare that the work is the author's original work and that all the sources have been accurately reported and acknowledged, and that this document has not in its entirety or in part, been submitted in order to obtain an academic qualification.

Nonjabulo N. Makhowane

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**Student Signature**

**Date**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- I would like to express my utmost gratitude to the Almighty, my Shepherd, for all He has done, for guiding me and giving me protection through this journey especially in the difficult times of Covid-19.
- Ngithanda futhi ukudlulisa ukubonga kakhulu kumndeni wami, (my loving parents Thandi Dorisn Makhowane and Mtu Vumani Makhowane; my sisters, Ayanda Mabizela, Nomkhuleko Nomfundo Makhowane; my brothers Sbabalwe Siwahla, Sanele Mpumelelo Makhowane, Sbhongakonke Aphelele Makhowane; and my nieces, Sandiswa Ntandokazi Makhowane; Amonge Buhlebonke Makhowane) who have always emotionally and spiritually supported and motivated me to complete this study.
- Dr Antoinette D'amant; thank you for having faith in this study and for your willingness to supervise it. It would not have been possible without you.
- Mlungisi Ntando "Cakes" Hlabisa; thank you for believing in me. There are no words to express how grateful and thankful I am for always having my back, for the sleepless nights assisting me with my work. It would not have been a success without your assistance.
- To all my research participants; I truly appreciate your valuable inputs.
- To my friends, Smiley, Bhusula, Shongani, Zodwa Snqo, Original and Nicol; whom I started this journey with, from undergrad, thank you for your contributions and criticism.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this study to my Gay and Lesbian friends, who are struggling every day to live their authentic self.

## **ABSTRACT**

The study focuses on the narratives of African gay and lesbian university students from the rural areas in relation to how they navigate their sexual identities in an effort to understand their experiences and realities of 'otherness' and oppression. The study uses a combination of two theoretical frameworks: Cass's Model of Homosexual Identity Formation (1976) and Hardiman and Jacksons' Social Identity Development Model (1997). This combination of theories offers a comprehensive and useful lens to better identify the oppressive experiences and realities of gays and lesbians. To understand human lived experiences, the study utilises a qualitative research design. The selection of participants was done through snowballing and purposive sampling to generate rich personal narratives as the elected strategy of inquiry. Through these sampling methods, five participants were found. Narratives were gathered through digital platforms, such as phone calls and WhatsApp. While research using a small sample of five participants from a one university and different rural areas cannot claim to be indicative of the realities of all South African communities, to a large extent these narratives do reflect experiences of 'otherness' and oppression common to the majority of African university gay and lesbian people. The study found that students navigate their sexual identity to suit the environment they are in. These students have expressed that their homes are hostile and not accommodative towards a gay or lesbian identity therefore they hide or mask their identity. Furthermore, it has been found that universities are allowing and welcoming towards their sexual diversity.

Isifundo sigxile ekulandiseni kwabafundi baseyunivesithi abathandana nabantu ababobulili obufanayo abavela ezindaweni zasemakhaya maqondana nokuthi baziqondisa kanjani ngobunikazi babo bezocansi kanye nokuqonda okwenzeka kubo kanye namaqiniso wokunye nokucindezelwa. Isifundo isebenzisa inhlanganisela yezinhloko ezimbili zethiyori: ICass's Model of Homosexual Identity Formation (1976); kanye noHardiman noJacksons (1997) Identity Development Model. Ukuhlanganiswa kwemibono kunikeza indlela ebanzi futhi esebenzisekayo ukukhomba kangcono okuhlangenwe nakho okucindezelayo kanye namaqiniso ezitabane nabobulili obufanayo. Ukuqonda impilo zalabantu abakhethiwe, ucwaningo lusebenzise idizayini yocwaningo esezingeni. Ukukhethwa kwabahlanganyeli kwenziwa ngohlelo lwe-Snowballing kanye nePurposive sampuli elihlose ukuqoqa ukulandisa komuntu ngempilo yakhe. Ngalezi zindlela zesampula, abahlanganyeli abahlanu batholakala. Ukwenza imininingwane, ukulandwa kwaqoqwa ngamapulatifomu edijithali, afana nezingcingo kanye ne-WhatsApp. Ngenkathi ucwaningo kusetshenziswa isampula elincane labahlanganyeli abahlanu abavela eyunivesithi eyodwa kanye nezindawo ezahlukahlukene zasemakhaya kungeke kuthiwe kukhombisa amaqiniso ayo yonke imiphakathi yaseNingizimu Afrika, lokhu kulandisa kukhombisa ngezinga elikhulu, okuhlangenwe nakho 'kokunye' nokucindezelwa okujwayele iningi labantu base-Afrika abayizitabane nabangqingili. Ucwaningo lutholile; abafundi bazulazula ngobunikazi babo bobulili ukuze bahambisane nemvelo abakuyo. Laba bafundi bazwakalise ukuthi emakhaya abo abahlali ngokukhululeka awahlali kahle umuntu wobungqingili ngakho-ke bafihla ubunikazi babo. Ngaphezu

kwalokho, kutholakele ukuthi inyuvesi ivumela futhi yamukele maqondana nokwehluka kwabo ngendlela yokuthandana nabobulili obufanayo.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

There is a dearth of literature on the narratives of gay and lesbian South African students' feelings, beliefs and attitudes on the issue of disclosure and sexual identity. Research such as that of Lim (2002) shows that individuals and groups with traditional ideologies are likely to harbour more negative attitudes towards homosexuals, rendering disclosure or 'coming out' a significant, challenging and lifelong process. There are three levels of disclosure according to Mbatha (2012): disclosing to the self (an individual's awareness and acknowledgment of their homosexual identity), disclosing to others close to the self, and disclosing to the public. According to Mbatha (2012) while disclosing to the public may bring about a sense of relief, this is often inhibited by society's negative attitudes toward homosexuality. For some people, disclosure brings about traumatic experiences while to others it can be a liberating experience that brings about positive mental health (Mbatha, 2012). My study focuses on the challenges and oppression experienced by homosexual African students who come from rural areas to study at an urban university.

Most university students are black students coming from deep rural areas (Walker and Mathebula, 2020; Mdepha and Tshiwula, 2012), where homosexuality is a taboo subject, and where homosexuals are often marginalized and silenced (Reygan and Lynette, 2014). Often in the rural areas, they may be viewed and judged as 'sick', 'inhuman', different from the dominant society, and often ridiculed by members of the dominant society (Connell, 2009, as cited in Mbatha, 2012). According to Gyamerah, Collier, Reddy, and Sanford (2019), while South Africa protects all sexual orientations in its Constitution, homosexuality is still to a large extent socioculturally contested and unaccepted. For this reason, many black homosexuals have resorted to silencing and hiding their authentic sexual identities, by pretending and colluding with and assimilating the dominant expectations of heteronormative sexual identities which exist in their communities, thereby ensuring the maintenance of the status quo (Msibi, 2018). As a result, choosing to be silent disempowers the subordinate group as it denies them a voice and a sense of authenticity (Mthembu, 2014). Disclosure has been recognised and acknowledged as a "rite of passage" and an important layer in the building blocks of students' self-construction (Mthembu, 2014). Remaining in the closet (passing as a heterosexual) causes students to live double lives and endure psychological stress (Christiansen, 2019). University is an environment in which students should feel free to disclose their sexuality to others and

subsequently, endure various positive and negative consequences. The university, specifically residential spaces, is often perceived as 'home away from home' mainly because of the perceived safety and sense of comfort they supposedly offer students (Jagessar and Msibi, 2015). In a study conducted by Msibi (2012), one respondent stated that university residence, feels like an escape place away from home and a home away from family; a place where they have the freedom to be who they authentically are. Msibi (2012) posits that it is not necessarily that the student residence space affirms their sexualities, but that it is a space where students can freely explore their same-sex interests without the restrictions imposed by parents or community. It is being away from parental and community scrutiny which affords students the freedom to be authentic about their sexual orientations. Being African (for example, Zulu and many other Nguni tribes) is associated with adherence to a strict cultural, heterosexual script (Rudwick, 2011; Chamane, 2017). Accommodation in student residence offers the possibilities to pursue individual interests, without pressure to conform to dominant heteronormative sexual identities (Msibi, 2015).

This study explores opinions, experiences, perceptions, beliefs, feelings and attitudes towards homosexuality experienced by students who are living a complex life, acting "straight" (closeted) at home and living out their gay/lesbian (out) identities on campus. By African, the researcher refers to black South Africans, regardless of their home language. The study examines factors that facilitate and inhibit disclosure of a homosexual identity within the black community. Furthermore, the challenges faced during the process of 'coming out', as well as the benefits and costs of disclosure, are explored.

## **1.2. Background to the study**

Sexuality forms part of our realities and who we are as human beings. The coming-out experiences of people who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) varies depending on the environment (Chamane 2017). Discrimination, social attitudes and taboos around homosexuality, especially in the African context, play a critical role in influencing the coming-out processes and experiences of gay African men and lesbian women (Smut, 2011). There is a great belief that homosexuality is a western perversion imposed upon and adopted by the African population (Ibrahim, 2015). Homosexuality is visible in individuals from African communities, even though it is not openly spoken about in a positive manner; resulting in homosexuals feeling the pressure to mask their sexual identity.

The process of coming-out in many African societies is often met with challenges such as discrimination, negative representation, homophobic attitudes and exclusion (Lewis, 2011; Mkasi, 2012). For example, Zulu people use terms such as “Istabane, Ugqingili, Inkonkoni” in a derogatory manner, to dehumanise an individual for their sexual preference.

Richardson and Monro (2012) state that South Africa is a pluralistic society comprising various social groups whose rights are protected by the Constitution of South Africa. This diversity does not only apply to race, culture, religion and ethnicity but also to sexuality and sexual orientation (Richardson and Monro, 2012). Hurst, Gibbon and Nurse (2016) claim that as a developing country with a high rate of illiteracy on sexuality (understanding the complexities of sexuality), the country feeds on the worldviews developed by elites on issues regarding lesbians and gays and other LGBTQI community. Moreover, Hurst *et al.*, (2016) emphasize that with the nations’ unjust history, the government is committed to redefining the country’s identity to include all previously suppressed, subordinated and marginalised members of the community and society. The goal is to find or establish communities where everyone’s sexuality is respected and tolerated (Hurst *et al.*, 2016).

Homosexuality exists in all cultures and peoples and has existed in Africa for centuries (Epprecht, 2013). The history of same sex relationships in South Africa turned a new leaf on the 10<sup>th</sup> of December 1996, when former President Nelson Mandela signed into effect South Africa’s new Constitution, making South Africa the first country in the world to include a sexual orientation clause in its Bill of Rights (Reddy, 2006). According to Mthembu (2014), gays and lesbians have historically been victims of exclusion, prejudice, discrimination, marginalisation and labelled as “other” due to the norm of heterosexuality as imposed by society. Furthermore, Mthembu (2014) claims that gays and lesbians have been subjects of rejection, victimisation and have been denied an authentic voice. Being identified as a gay and lesbian has been closely linked with a negative and inferior status in society. The right to equality has been discussed in Section 8 of the Constitution. Section 9 (1) provides the basic principles behind the right to equality by stating that everyone is equal before the law (Epprecht, 2013). The overall vision of the Constitution of South Africa is to protect every citizen from unfair treatment and any form of oppression. Section 9 of the Constitution of South Africa declares that neither the State nor any other person may discriminate unfairly against any individual or social group on the basis of any of the following forms of difference: race, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, culture or language (Epprecht, 2013).

In South Africa, as in many countries, human rights are drawn up in the Bill of Rights as part of the Constitution (Epprecht, 2013). In the United States of America, the Supreme Court legalised same sex marriages and entitled homosexuals to the same federal benefits as those enjoyed by heterosexual married couples (Hagai and Crosby, 2016). It was pointed out that the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) was unconstitutional as it highlighted marriage between a man and woman. Eskridge (2002) points out that the LGBT people had not wished for a different system to be created for them, but rather, they wanted the right to marry through the same legal procedures as heterosexual people. Through socialisation and gender construction, members of our societies have been deeply socialised to accept and expect the polarised conceptions of male and female and all the expectations that go along with this.

Within the South African context, the country has been faced with many challenges since the dawn of democracy in 1994. The greatest challenge in the post-apartheid era has been creating an atmosphere of a human rights culture in the context of substantial cultural diversity (Mubangizi, 2012). The state has laws and principles setting out legal human rights frameworks, and these are to be commended. However, these frameworks are often not translated into reality in that they are not necessarily lived and experienced on a daily basis by citizens (Universal Declaration of human rights, 2007). A human rights culture is said by Mubangizi (2012) to be a culture where human rights are respected and enjoyed, or simply a way of life guided by a human rights framework. This is made possible by acknowledging the human rights principles felt in one's mind, heart, and body translated into everyday life. Mubangizi (2012) and Epprecht (2013) share the same ideology that one form of oppression (eg. racism) is never greater than another or considered worse than other forms of oppression. Each form of oppression is as negative and insidious as all the others. Therefore, with the push for equal rights for all races in South Africa, equal rights for all forms of difference and "otherness" comprise an important part of the wider package of adopting a human rights culture (Mungizi, 2012).

The narratives of African gays and lesbians are shaped by the spaces (brought by apartheid segregation) that they inhabit in both liberating and disempowering ways. Garvey, Mobley, Summerville and Moore (2018) conducted a study to explore outness among undergraduate students who identified as queer and trans people of colour. The aim of the study was to explore outness across racial identities for Queer and Trans People of Color (QTPOC) with students using linear regression to understand the relationship between contextual influences and outness. Although freedom is said to be found in the comfort of the university as many studies

suggest, Garvey *et al.* (2018) found that black students were often invisible within the higher education context and the choice of disclosing their sexual identity led to vulnerability. Mitchell and Means as cited in Garvey *et al.*, (2018) point out that, as people seek acceptance, they are faced with numerous challenges such as battling stereotypes and potentially being ostracised due to their identities. As individuals, we hold multiple identities ranging from race, to sexuality to gender, which lead to the complexity of their lived experiences and oppressed identities. Garvey *et al.* (2018) recognise the process of outness as a personal process which is shaped by external contexts.

A study done by Rudwick (2011) reports on the reconciliation of Zuluness and gayness among members of a particular gay Zulu sub-culture in South Africa. In the article, the researcher claims that there are three main pillars upon which gay Zulu men in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) build their Zulu ethnic consciousness: firstly, the linguistic variety of *isiNgqumo*; secondly, *amadlozi* (ancestors); and lastly, and *ukuhlonipha* (to show respect). The article highlights the anti-gay sentiments shared and experienced by gay Zulu men in most parts of KZN. Rudwick (2011) cites an article in the local newspaper: *The Witness* which reports on a survey done in 2005 and which shows that 20% of gay and bisexual men and 19% of lesbian women and bisexual women are victims of rape or sexual assault whilst in school. This is not surprising as KwaZulu-Natal is deeply entrenched in strong patriarchal and heteronormative values among Zulu people. There is no doubt that homophobia still exists in this province. The underlying sentiment by Zulu people that is put forward for anti-gay orientation/gayness is that it is “against our culture” (Chamane, 2017). Rudwick (2011) points out that often people lack the understanding that for gay and lesbian people it is not a matter of choice but rather their sexual orientation is very much part of their authentic identity.

### **1.3 Aim and rationale**

I have been a student and a tutor at the university of KwaZulu-Natal Edgewood campus, Pinetown, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa for the past five years. I interact with different people on a daily basis and my very close friends consist of close to ten gays and two lesbians and three heterosexuals. The majority of my friends are not openly gay and lesbian at home but they find freedom and acceptance to live authentically in the university environment. On the 27 of December 2016, my friends, Sizwe married, Nhlaka (these are pseudonyms). Sadly Sizwe’s side of the family did not attend the wedding as they did not approve of the homosexual lifestyle. In addition, his traditional father is also a priest at a very well-known African church which preaches a staunch anti-gay message. He therefore opted not to inform anyone from his

side of the family. Another friend of mine shared with us that whenever he has to go back home for holidays, it is one of his greatest pains because he has to change the way he lives, the way he talks, walks and dresses. There are many stories that are shared by my friends and listening to their stories over the years, I have developed a growing empathy for them. My primary concern is the relationships they have with their families and their communities at large, which is largely influenced by general ignorance, discrimination and prejudice towards homosexuality.

This study is very close to my heart because my eldest cousin has been a victim of rejection and discrimination from my family. Having come from a very strong Christian background, homosexuality is seen as a taboo subject and as demonic. My cousin was prayed for and fasted for in the hope that the “demon” would leave her body. She is still forced to wear a skirt at our grandmother’s house because girls do not wear trousers as such attire is only seen as appropriate for males (Deuteronomy 22v5). At church they had arranged a man to marry my sister but she stood up for who she was and did not marry anyone. Today she is in a relationship and very happy with another woman. Despite my family’s reservations and negative comments and attitudes she is living her life her own way, authentically.

Being a social justice student and advocate, I have been observant and critical of the social injustices and oppressive way that gays and lesbians are viewed and treated in our society. I have grown to understand the intensity of discrimination, prejudice and alienation towards gays and lesbians. I strongly believe that everyone should be accepted and treated equally despite their differences and uniqueness and that being gay or lesbian does not make one less of a human being.

What this research study aims to do is to explore the narratives of the students who are gay and lesbian and considered ‘other’, closeted at home and out-closeted at university. I wanted to explore how these students navigate the complexities of their sexual identities to suit the contexts they are in. This research study explores the lived realities of students going through these experiences and is an attempt to offer a space and platform where their authentic voice can be shared and heard.

#### **1.4 Focus and purpose**

The focus of my study is on university students who specifically come from the rural areas around South Africa referred to as the Nguni group. Not much is currently known of what it takes for a black person to navigate sexual identities who do not conform to heteronormative expectations of the Nguni culture. In African communities, people do not talk openly about the issue of sexuality and homosexuality is seen as a western practice, alien to the Nguni culture (Msibi, 2011; Kuloba 2014). The study focuses on students who come from a rural background where homosexuality is seen as a taboo and a practice against tradition and culture.

The purpose of this study is to explore the narratives of lesbian and gay students from African rural backgrounds at a university, and to specifically look at how they navigate their complex sexuality/sexual identities in different contexts.

My research objectives are:

1. To investigate the experiences of gay and lesbian African university students from rural areas
2. To investigate how their experiences impact their identity formation
3. To investigate how they navigate their non-normative identities in predominantly heterosexual environments

My research questions are:

1. What are the experiences of gay and lesbian African university students from rural areas?
2. How do their experiences impact their identity formation?
3. How do they navigate their non-normative identities in predominantly heterosexual environments?

#### **1.5 Structure of dissertation**

This dissertation comprises six chapters:

Chapter 2: This chapter reviews literature that exists on gays and lesbians. The literature provided in this chapter is drawn from global and local scholars. Homosexuality and sexual identity are defined, and a critical description on issues of rurality, homophobia and perception carried by the community and family and the African cultural context is offered.

Chapter 3: This chapter presents two theories that have been conceptually adopted to guide this study. Employed in this study is Cass's (1976) Model of Homosexual Identity Formation and Social Identity Development Model presented by Hardiman and Jackson (1997),

Chapter 4: This chapter discusses the methodology used in this study, and the rationale for the choice of methods used. The study draws from the interpretive paradigm and qualitative approach which are both in alignment in understanding lived experiences from participants' own perspectives and situated knowledge (D'amant, 2010). Data generated in this study is analysed following thematic analysis which falls under the qualitative method. Purposive and snowball sampling methods are employed to get participants for this study. The chapter explains in detail the trustworthiness and validity of the research, ethical issues, and limitations of the study.

Chapter 5: The chapter responds to the three important research questions through the presentation, interpretation and analysis of the study findings.

Chapter 6: This chapter gives a summation of the findings and offers some recommendations.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Literature Review**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter offers an overview of literature linked to the topic of the experiences and realities of gays and lesbians, within the global context and within the context of South Africa. The literature indicates that many of the findings in older research (Vincent, 2003 ;Mbatha, 2012; Msibi, 2011 show similarities to the findings in more recent research (Mnyadi, 2018, 2019; Zabus, 2014). The following themes are explored in this chapter: understanding sexuality; defining rurality; families' attitudes towards homosexuality and homosexual parenting; homosexuality as an un-African ethos; navigating homosexual identities and homosexuality and campus life. This literature review is structured thematically, beginning with understanding sexuality and defining/profiling a rural context, and extending to families' attitudes towards homosexuality and homosexual parenting, and homosexuality as an un-African phenomenon. It will then explore the theme of navigating homosexual identities and homosexuality and campus life

Vincent (2003) recognises that the development of identity is strongly influenced and shaped by issues of social differences, and are particularly impacted on by practices of exclusion, prejudice, discrimination, and oppression. Gays and lesbians have not fully enjoyed equal rights and social status enjoyed by heterosexuals (Vincent, 2003). Homophobic attitudes, stigma and violence occasioned by their otherness has resulted in their ill-treatment and oppression. It is therefore, evident that gays' and lesbians' identities have been influenced by the negative and oppressive social practices that have characterised their otherness.

Large scale research projects investigating homosexual students have been conducted in South Africa (Msibi and Jagessar, 2011) and have focused on homophobia and the negative experiences of gay and lesbian students. The findings from these study (Msibi and Jagessar, 2011) reveal that, despite laws and rights which have been passed to protect the rights of homosexuals, widespread prejudice, discrimination and oppression still exists. The Constitution of South Africa, section 9(3) states "the state may not 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, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth." However, we still witness gays and lesbians being victims of prejudice and discrimination (Matabeni, 2007). This has led to a number of

university students silencing their authentic sexualities and sexual identities when they are at home in rural areas, in order to appear hetero-normative, and avoid the negativity which inevitably goes with being gay or lesbian. Studies (Msibi and Jagessar, 2011) have found that gays and lesbians could, however, be their authentic selves when in university residences as they experienced university environments to be gay and lesbian friendly.

## **2.2. What is sexuality?**

Sexuality is a complex phenomenon that is multi-layered in nature and context-specific. Researchers such as Tamele (2011) maintain the view that sexuality is seen predominantly in terms of the sex act; a perspective that fails to investigate the extraneous factors that shape and impact individuals' multifarious sexualities. Over time, sexuality has linked sex and the society, revealing a revolution in our understanding of human sexualities. From being on the periphery of historical and scientific studies, sexuality has come to be seen as important in any endeavour to understand contemporary societies. Weeks, Holland and Waites (2003) posit that for over 50 years, there has been a shift in traditional sexual knowledge which has re-shaped the ways in which sexuality is understood. Great emphasis had been placed on morality and unconscious desires and biological attributes. By simply looking at its natural component, sexuality can be understood through unconscious processes and through cultural forms. Weeks (2016) states that although sexuality was viewed as marginal to the broad domains of orthodox history, it has gradually evolved and is widely spoken about; developing into a growing respectable field of study. Investigating and researching sexuality is no longer the unusual and marginal activity it has been in the past.

## **2.3 Defining homosexuality in relation to the South African context**

According to Mnyadi (2012), homosexuality is a definite same-sex erotic preference which is usually, but not always, expressed behaviourally. Homosexuality describes sexual desire or relationships between people of the same sex. Homosexuals are therefore individuals who experience sexual desire and engage in relationships with members of the same sex. Many consider these terms to imply a sexual orientation (an unchangeable, psychosexual organisation that may be congenital and inherited) rather than a sexual preference, a term which suggests that homosexual behaviour may be a matter of choice (Fone, 2000). Homosexuals are divided by sex and by terminology into 'gay men' and 'lesbians' and are distinguished from 'bisexual', 'transgendered' and 'transsexual' persons" (Fone, 2000, 3). This research will concern itself with gay and lesbian participants - gays being understood as men who have a sexual orientation

towards other men, and lesbians as women who have a sexual orientation towards other women. Homosexuality is considered the opposite of heterosexuality which is considered normal. By normal it is meant the sexual practice of the majority of people (Kertbeny, in Fone, 2000). The terms homosexuality and heterosexuality indicate differing, opposing categories of sexuality and have “unfortunately reinforced a growing psychiatric tendency to define homosexuality as abnormal” (Fone, 2000, 4). The term “homosexual” was coined by Kertbeny, a German

The history of homosexuality in South Africa dates back to the pre-apartheid era. Gevisser, as cited by Gavisser and Carmerin (1994), notes that the presence of homosexuality was first noted in South Africa in the 1950s. Homosexuals were largely found in big cities such as Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban. Most homosexuals at that time were white, male and middle class. Urbanisation was gradually taking place during the 1920s and 1930s, and many black people moved from rural areas to urban areas to find work on the mines. Due to the long distance between their work and their homes, many black miners would stay for months and even years at the mines without visiting their wives at home. This resulted in some miners practicing homosexuality because of the lack of appealing heterosexual alternatives.

Adams, Bell and Graffin (1997) state that the number one thing that is common across cultures when a child is born is the question of whether the child is a girl or a boy. What people intend to find out is the baby’s gender, not its sexual orientation. From the knowledge of the baby’s gender, the perceptions of individuals and the community shape the life of the child. If the child fails to conform to societal expectations of being a girl or a boy/ a man or a woman (the standard genders), it will inescapably face many challenges, difficulties and hardships. With the categorisation of an individual as either male or female, there is no room for deviation from the two acceptable social groups; and any non-conformity or deviance from the norms of traditional gender roles results in heterosexism and homophobia. Those who disregard and act out of the norm of gender stereotypes are punished and bullied.

Masculinity and femininity promote male domination, and as a result, boys who show feelings towards other boys are at the risk of being labelled “moffies” or “sissies” in a derogatory manner. Girls who uphold strong feminist views or casually look boyish run the risk of being labelled lesbian. To be accepted by/in society as a man, masculinity helps determine the expected behaviour for men, how they can reproduce and emulate male characteristics in their daily lives and internalise them through the socialisation process. The greatest mistake people

make is to mistake masculinity with aggressive behaviour and with expressions of sexuality. For women, femininity helps determine expected behaviour which revolve around being soft and nurturing. Nonetheless, there is no single form of masculinity across cultures or sub-cultures.

Tadele (2010) explored the sexual lives of men who engage in sexual intercourse with other men, and the social and personal conflict which arises as they try to live up to heteronormative societal expectations and manage their different sexual desires. Furthermore, the study explored the overriding heteronormative structures and influences of men's perception and understanding of sexuality and masculinity/femininity. Gay and lesbian sexual identities have no space in most black rural areas, and with great emphasis, heteronormative male and female genders are enforced and developed.

Bailey (2016) suggests that sexual orientation carries four components of which sexual identity is part, and includes sexual behaviour, sexual attraction and physiological sexual arousal. Sexual orientation is determined early in life while sexual identity may change over time (Maynard and Snodgrass, 2015). The majority of individuals who have attended universities and colleges have noted how much they have changed during this period of their lives. That students' sense of identity is developed during their tertiary years is widely accepted, but has not received as much attention as the influence of race, ethnicity, and other social categories, or the interrelationship between and among multiple identities and development during the college years (Maynard and Snodgrass, 2015).

### **2.3.1 Homosexuality at an international spectrum**

The study done in America by Woodford, Perry Silverschanz, Eric Swank, Kristin Scherrer and Lisa Raiz (2012), have developed the idea that homophobia is closely related to conservatism in sex-role polarization. LGBT individuals experience discrimination and oppression, which can negatively affect their well-being (Harper & Schneider, 2004). While some of these discriminatory practices involve blatant hostility and violence, most emerge in subtle mistreatment and biases (Nadal, Rivera, & Corpus, 2010). This discrimination is based in heterosexism, or the presumption that only heterosexual relationships are valid and acceptable. Upholding traditional gender roles and rules is a central component of heterosexist assumptions and worldviews. In addition, heterosexism underpins both homophobia and transphobia (Woodford, *et al.*, 2012).

While acceptance has increased over the past two decades, the partisan divide on homosexuality in the U.S. is wide. More than eight-in-ten Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents (85%) say homosexuality should be accepted, but only 58% of Republicans and Republican leaders say the same.

At the same time, the U.S. still maintains one of the lowest rates of acceptance among the Western European and North and South American countries

#### **2.4. Homosexuality is un-African**

Based on the literature presented by Msibi (2011), the concepts of gay and lesbian have no meaning in Africa. Homosexuality is a concept which does not originate from Africa, but instead, originates from historical and political Western experiences. Many of our black leaders have publicly announced their dissociation with homosexuality such as the members of parliament and local leaders. The idea that homosexuality is un-African is emphasised by leaders and reinforced at different institutional levels. In 2018, Uganda's speaker of Parliament, Rebecca Kadaga, threatened to withdraw her country from gatherings should some nations insist on the inclusion of LGBT people at the 138th Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Assembly. When influential people of high regard make such statements, they influence the communities they represent who, in turn, internalise these prejudices and discrimination; resulting in them projecting them confidently in their homes. Kuloba (2014) reveals that the majority of Ugandans have negative attitudes towards homosexuality and homosexual individuals, contributing to the worldly-known statement depicted by BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) in 2011, that Uganda is the worst place to be gay and that Africa is the most homophobic continent on earth. Kadaga's stand was followed by a renewed call by members of parliament to introduce an anti-gay law based on the premise that homosexuality is un-African.

The President of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe declared that "gays are perverted and their behaviour is worse than that of pigs. They are lower than dogs and pigs, for these animals don't know homosexual behaviour" (Luirnk, 2000, p.51). Mugabe claimed that lesbianism is not part of the Zimbabwean culture. In Malawi, punishment is harsh for individuals who are found to be engaging in homosexuality. The President of Malawi presented a statement on his disapproval of homosexuality, wherein he made reference, firstly; to culture (central to the idea that homosexuality is unnatural and un-African), secondly; to religion (presenting morality as communicated through presumably Christianity), and lastly; to law (Epprecht, 2013).

These factors emphasize the disapproval of homosexuality in African culture, religion and policy; thus providing space for leaders to influence the larger population's attitudes and views towards homosexuality. Msibi (2011) says that these are not only false in their assumptions, but inherently lacking in logic. Students from the rural areas are socialised according to traditional heterosexual gendered roles (Harro, 2000) which are often based on traditional or cultured ideologies. The issue of sexuality is often not discussed because of the prevailing dominant belief that sexuality and sexual desire are linked solely to heterosexuality.

Dlamini (as cited by Mbatha, 2012) points out that homosexuality existed in traditional African communities. The traditional religion of Africa valued the spiritual power in sexuality and were not hostile towards homosexuality. Even though not much research has been done on African sexuality, homosexuality has been present in Africa, and South Africa is no exception. In some instances, homosexuality carries religious and spiritual significance, as in cases of Izinyanga, izangoma and other traditional healers. This is clearly outlined in the article by Mnyadi (2018) titled *The influence of ancestral spirits on sexual identity amongst Traditional Healers (iZangoma) in South Africa: A discourse analysis*. She shows how the spiritual being (idlozi) has an influence on one's sexual identity. A male Sangoma can be referred to as *uGogo* (grandmother) because he has been influenced/possessed by a female spirit. Similarly, a female Sangoma can be referred to as *uMkhulu* (grandfather) because she has been influenced/possessed by a male spirit. These individuals act according to the sexual identity influenced by the ancestors; that is, a homosexual identity. They behave, act and talk in a manner which is presumed to be homosexual.

Contrary to many arguments that homosexuality is un-African, some studies (Mnyadi, 2018, 2019; Zabus, 2014 Mbatha, 2012) actually claims that homosexuality began in Africa. Ilesanmi cited in Mnyadi (2019) explained this using what biologists would call 'Out of Africa Hypothesis' which follows the argument that all life actually began in Africa, which then leads to the argument that homosexuality began in Africa. The term 'homosexuality' might not have existed historically but the act and emotions were present. A similar view is shared by Zabus (2014), who claims that the African continent has been far more pro-queer than generally known. He substantiates his claim by making reference to the sacred artefacts or gods. One example is Yoruba, the god of thunder, painted on ancient African walls; who appears dressed, braided and accessorised as a woman. This serves as proof that African ancestors affiliated themselves with homosexual behaviour (Mnyadi, 2013). In the Congo, male warriors marry

young men to perform wifely duties. These examples are just some of the numerous practices and historical evidence which prove that homosexuality has been prevalent in African histories.

Much of the stigma attached to gays and lesbians in Africa has been justified by opponents on broad religious or cultural grounds, with assertions that same-sex relationships are condemned in the Bible and other religious books, or that homosexuality never occurred in pre-colonial African society. Yet the existence of homosexuality leads to confusion as to why, in the African rural areas, homosexuality is regarded as a taboo subject and a disgrace to African culture.

## **2.5. Homosexuality and rurality**

According to the Rural Health Information Hub (RHIHub) (2019), 'rural' is an inexact term that can mean different things to different people, organisations and governments. The RHIHub (2019) argues that trying to define 'rural' is problematic in a nation of diverse demographics, geography and changing economy. An early definition by the Oxford dictionary defines rural as an adjective, which means in, of, or suggesting the country; pastoral or agricultural. There is also strong linkage to the concept of a certain space. For this study, the concept of rural is aligned to the community. A rural community is a small group of people living in the same place- values that are the same-mutual friendship-people who have built together (Van der Vyver and Mathikge, 2010). However, for those concerned with rural issues, a precise definition is pivotal. Defining 'rural' is very important because there is not one definition that fits all needs for all programs or research studies. Each organisation, researcher or policy maker selects the best definition that facilitates the purpose of their program or study.

For the purpose of this study, I relate rurality or the idea of being rural to culture and tradition (norms and standards projected by society), and any area that is not classified as urban. Rural areas are subdivided into tribal areas and commercial farms. Based on the statistical records of The World Bank (2018), a rural population is defined as people living in rural areas. The rural population (% of total population) in South Africa was 34.71% as of 2016. Its highest value over the past 56 years was 53.38% in 1960, while its lowest value was 34.71% in 2016. The rural population is calculated as the difference between total population and urban population (The Word Bank, 2018).

Recent work by Kekana and Dietrich (2020) and Daniels, Struther, Maleke, Catabay, Lane, McIntyre, and Coates (2019) has highlighted the relationship between the non-heterosexual sexual identity and that of geographies. They found that gays and lesbians were found mostly in urban areas. They could be born in the rural areas but when they begin to explore their sexual

desires, they seek places which are welcoming and accepting of their sexualities. The predominantly conservative and traditional recognition of the heterosexual male and female identity as the only sexual identities accepted in rural areas, leaves little or no room for other sexual identities. The gay and lesbian sub-culture is not noticeable in the rural areas due to cultural and traditional limitations as Fisher and Anusko (2008) note, and there is the demand that each community adopt the dominant and unified way of living which will represent the community's values and norms. I want to underscore the importance of 'rural' for this study, because people travel between rural (home) and urban (often where universities are situated) refer to the rural area as *Emakhaya/EmaFarm*. The relationship between home (*Ekhaya/EmaFarm*) and people suggests that there is an emotional attachment to shared culture and norms.

## **2.6. Families' attitudes towards homosexuality**

When homosexual family members are discovered, heterosexual family members often experience a conflict. As a result, many students do not disclose their sexual orientation to their parents due to fear of rejection, fear of being thrown out of their home, fear of being forced into therapy, fear of being abused, and/or potential disappointment (Ben-Ari; Gerstel, Faraios and Herdt, as cited by Matthew and Coene, 1998). The disproportionate number of 'closeted/out-closeted homosexuals' (not revealing sexuality publicly/directly or indirectly revealing sexuality) in the black community has resulted in the notion that black communities are less tolerant towards homosexuality. While it is considered psychologically healthy for lesbians and gays to come out, disclosure (commonly known as coming-out) precipitates a very real and possibly painful family crisis. For these reasons, homosexuals often choose to mask their homosexual identity and adopt the pretence of heterosexual normality.

There is limited research speaking directly to both gay and lesbian sexual identities and the relationship they have with their parents in rural communities. Kekana and Dietrich (2020) researched the relationship between fathers (biological or social fathers) and their sons. Social fathers include extended male figures and community men who take the role of raising masculine identities in young males, taking the role of fatherhood due to biological fathers being absent or disinterested in their children's lives.

Pistella, Salvati, Ioverno, Laghi, and Baiocco, as cited by Kekana and Dietrich (2020), found that families' cultural backgrounds and parents' low level of education inhibit homosexuals from disclosing their sexual orientation to their parents. In South African communities,

heterosexual attitudes prevail and homosexuality is misunderstood as a result of the contextualised relationships between fathers and sons (Kekana and Dietrich 2020). In the rural areas, homosexuality is still a taboo subject, and there are no adult examples of gay men or lesbian women. In addition, Mthembu (2014) emphasize, disclosure is not seen as an option in the rural areas because it carries negative implications with regard to the relationships of gays and lesbians with their parents; and it could result in them being disowned and forced to leave the family home. Furthermore, disclosure of a homosexual sexual identity may result in some parents having to redefine their identity as ‘normal parents’ towards a potentially stigmatised identity of being ‘parents of the gay/lesbian child’ (Salzburg as cited by Kekana and Dietrich, 2020). Due to the stigma which results, parents often find themselves to blame, based on the view that they were not good enough examples or role-models for their children to uphold heteronormative behaviour (Kekana and Dietrich, 2020). In addition, they found that some parents had a sense of awareness that their children were homosexual because of their children showing no signs of gender-conformity when growing up.

The findings from Mbatha (2012) also reveal students’ fear of coming-out to their parents, more especially, their fathers. Students have reservations as to whether their fathers will accept their sexual orientation or not, due to ignorance and tradition. However, Mbatha (2012) also revealed that younger parents were more accepting of homosexuality. They were familiar with modern portrayals of sexual minorities or the influence of non-traditional cultural ideas; leading to greater acceptance of their same-sex attracted children. This was in contrast to older parents who held traditional ideologies of living and found it difficult to accept or tolerate ‘abnormal’ homosexual ways of living.

Boso (2015) revealed that, expressing a homosexual sexual identity or sexual orientation is what exposes gays and lesbians to public scrutiny; making them targets of prejudice and of not being welcomed in/by their communities. In the African community, there is an idiom ‘*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*’ and another famous one ‘it takes a village to raise a child’ which emphasize the idea of love and unity amongst black people and the belief that individuals do not exist alone but work hand in hand to assist one another (McAdoo, 2007). Families hold important roles in black communities. They become part of the bigger family which is the community at large (Boso, 2015)

The participants (male sex-workers) in Tadele’s research (2010) claim that living with homophobic families, friends and neighbours was the greatest challenge; and it was for that

reason that they pretended to pass as heterosexuals and hide their sexuality. The reason behind this was fear of possible suspicion of being homosexual. If there is slight suspicion from families, instead of confronting them directly, they strike up conversations about gays and lesbians to give 'corrective lessons' indirectly. In traditional homesteads, talking about issues pertaining to homosexuality with children is taboo; hence the indirect 'corrective lessons' (Tadele (2010).

To conform to heteronormativity, the lengths that gay men go to is undeniably great; with some going to the extent of fathering children and having girlfriends to deny their gay sexual identity (Tornello and Patterso, 2012). In the long run, the absence of any support or approval, their attempts to conceal their sexuality from family, friends and community; lead to taking up specific paths towards distancing and isolating themselves. They may drift away from the intolerant heteronormative environment and begin to construct a new environment in which they can live freely. They might gradually become integrated into a homosexual environment that provides them a free space to reconcile and live out their same-sex desires. This points to the idea that gays and lesbians conceal their sexual identity due to expected heteronormative standards. However, the university provides a safe environment in which they could reveal their homosexual identity without fear.

Limited research has been conducted on black homosexuals who have openly disclosed their sexual orientation to their families (Fields, Bogart, Smith, Malebranche, Ellen, and Schuster, 2015). Families are viewed as the main source of support, happiness and social well-being for homosexuals; as they are for all people. However, if someone chooses to disclose their sexuality, it brings disgrace to the family. There is a belief that homosexuality tears the family apart, mainly because homosexual behaviour limits reproduction which is valued by black communities. Because of the solid bond families have, having to be rejected by family members could be psychologically and emotionally damaging for a homosexual. In addition, they do not have anyone to turn to for support if they have been abandoned by their families of origin due to their sexual orientation. An example is Lim-Hing (1994), a self-identified Chinese lesbian, who had the courage to disclose her sexual identity to her parents, resulting in, not so much as condemnation by her family, but more of a plea to keep her sexual orientation a secret. She complied with the face of 'hetero-normality' requested by her family and kept her lesbian identity a secret, waiting until she had moved to her own place and was old enough to begin acting on her sexual desire. As time progressed, her family stopped inviting her to family

gatherings. The family's reaction towards gays and lesbian is dependent on culture, and acceptance or rejection of prejudices.

## **2.7. The role of social construction and choice in developing sexual identities**

The possibility that homosexuality is a decision brings up various issues and questions. Wilkerson (2016) notes that the popular or the biological notions of sexual orientation, as well as the academic ideal of social constructionism, adequately addresses the role that choice plays in adopting a particular sexual identity. Identity categories are social creations, resulting from social beliefs and socialisation practices, which are themselves complex (Somers and Gibson, 1993). Communities/societies define social norms and standards, which inevitably go hand in hand with discrimination for going against these definitions of 'normal'. To cure this ill practice, a call for the reconstruction of societal norms and standards to better suit multifaceted communities without discrimination and prejudice, is a necessity. Developing an identity or a part of one's identity can be suppressed by the very same society that is supposed to help build an identity. An example is that of a homosexual identity in rural areas where it is seen as taboo or an abomination.

Wilkerson (2017) opines that same-sex sexual identity is a choice and an anathema to the mainstream gay, lesbian, and bisexual community; because it opens doors for labelling homosexuality a sin that the individual is willingly choosing. Tradition depicts gay and lesbian sexual identity as a choice and a choice of sin (Francis, 2017; Mnyadi, 2018; Fokol, 2019). This idea of choice appears to oppose the experience of desire, which cannot possibly be chosen this simply. A question is raised by Wilkerson (2017) 'why would we choose something unless we already desired it?' This question challenges the issue of choice and being born this way, on the basis that no-one would choose an identity which is of a subordinate and targeted position.

Coming out (often said to be coming out of the closet, meaning directly or indirectly revealing publicly one's sexual orientation/identity) is a choice made possible by external favourable factors, such as family and societal norms and standards. These norms and standards are set by the society and practiced accordingly, and if one chooses an unnatural sexual orientation, one has to deal with the harsh consequences. Choosing to come out involves choosing to adopt a subordinate, non-normative sexual identity. Many people understand this choice as accepting one's authentic God-given sexual orientation (Wilkerson, 2012).

Despite the above mentioned, some people have professed to choosing their desire on the same spectrum of choosing as their identity. The fluidity of sexual desire often seems to demonstrate that we do have some role in choosing what we desire. In books which address issues of sexuality and sexual identity such as *Ambiguity and Sexuality: A theory of sexual identity* (Wilkerson, 2016) and *Identity development of college students: Advancing frameworks for multiple dimensions of identity* (Jones and Abes, 2013) , many questions on the idea of sexuality and sexual identity as a choice or a given lifestyle have been explored thoroughly. The main question is how can it be that some homosexuals claim to choose their desire while others are simply given? It is indeed a complex issue trying to understand how the different forms of sexuality can appear to be given, biological, constructed, chosen, felt, social, and individual. Moreover, trying to understand sexual identity and its development leads to trying to understand which existed first, sexual orientation or identity.

Previous research by Wilkerson (2012) shows that the sexual orientation of an individual has always existed, with some homosexuals claiming they have always felt a certain way, and that to be gay or lesbian was an underlying feature of their innate identity make up. However, sexual identity is a self-consciously directed development that a person develops around this orientation. When gays and lesbians report to having always had a sexual desire towards their own gender, it shows that they have always had a sexual orientation but they only had a gay and lesbian identity upon coming out; accepting their sexual orientation and living accordingly (Wilkerson, 2012). One would then ask questions as to why there are so many identities, and so many different forms of desire. Furthermore, one could question why some identities are stable (heterosexual), and why one would choose one identity over another; also why somebody might choose an oppressed, minority identity (Wilkerson, 2016).

Sexuality stabilises as individuals understand their desires through contact with others and their own culturally explicit standards. According to Wilkerson (2016), as an individual interprets experiences in light of social categories, he/she makes continual choices about the meaning and place of these experiences; and through interaction with others, develops an identity that is real, chosen and socially located.

## **2.8. Navigating and negotiating sexual identities.**

Identity, according to Erickson (1963), is the most prominent developmental task during the adolescent stage. However, the bigger task in this stage is developing the gay and lesbian identity, more so, a positive gay and lesbian identity. This is a difficult task as adolescents are

faced with the pressure to conform to heterosexual identity and homo-erotic drives (Herdt, 2018). This conflict creates identity confusion which can induce many psychological issues such as depression and denial. Gays and lesbians in the rural areas lack accessibility to identity affirming resources (Waldner and Magrader, 1999). Furthermore, Waldner and Magrader (1999) also discussed, growing up in the rural areas, there are little chances of seeing an adult gay/lesbian in the community. This results in adolescents feeling alienated and unwelcome.

Waldner and Magrader (1999) claim that gays and lesbians adopt strategies to cope with sexual identity issues which include withdrawing, identity masking and indulging in other self-destructive behaviours. This means that when students are at home, they withdraw from their families and society emotionally and physically; creating an invisible barrier to block their emotions to be invested in their well-being (Yarhouse, 2013). Furthermore, they involve themselves in drugs (chemical dependency) and suicide due to heterosexual expectations. Furthermore, they rather keep to secrecy or identity masking to avoid the attention and expectations created by families and society (Yarhouse, 2013). Identity masking leaves individuals trying to navigate their way through self-denial, rejection, love (for their parents) and the burden of guilt.

## **2.9. How do homosexuals interpret culture?**

Culture provides us with an unquestionable acceptance of sexual instinct, through the process of socialisation. Culture provides images and ideas of acceptable and appropriate behaviour, and through culture; heterosexuality becomes institutionalised and ritualised and ultimately engraved upon our minds as a dominant sexual ideology (Ngcobo, 2007). For this research, I adopt the definition of culture from the early work of Fisher and Anushko (2008), that culture denotes group ways of thinking and living based on shared knowledge, consciousness, skills, values, expressive forms, social institutions, and behaviours that allow individuals to survive in the contexts within which they live. Homosexuality is rejected by traditional dominant sexual (patriarchal) ideology that is linked to institutionalised heterosexuality. This renders homosexuality a sub-culture, and the researcher has defined sub-culture as an arm or part of the wider culture, and any group excluded from dominant culture by self-definition or ostracism. Gay/lesbian culture has historically been thought of as culture of lust, sex and immoral deeds (Waugh and Walker as cited by Ntuli, 2009).

South Africa witnessed a black lesbian couple challenging culture and the norms and the standards it set. One controversial event, posted by Tshwane LGBTQI Facebook groups shows

customary/traditional wedding pictures of a young black lesbian couple (Myer, 2000). It appeared to be a happy mood with friends and family happy for the couple. It also appears to be a customary wedding as opposed to a religious or civil one. Prior to the wedding ceremony, the *ilobola* (bridal price) negotiations and transmissions have been ironed out (Ratele, 2016). This shows that culture is evolving and is socially constructed. Gay and lesbian marriages gained momentum soon after the wedding which was covered by eNCA (2013), in which the gay couple saw this as “bridging the gap” between African culture and homosexuality. This new ‘bridging the gap’, according to Yarbrough (2019), rejects the older, dominant transcript portraying homosexuality as un-African. Contrary to the idea which states that homosexuality is un-African, The Guardian (2015) stated that “if you say being gay is not African, you don’t know your history”. This controversial headline caused many conflicts. The newspaper article put forward the statement that, “the idea that homosexuality is ‘western’ is based on another western import - Christianity. True African culture celebrates diversity and promotes acceptance” (The Guardian, 2015, p.1). The argument reveals that there is real confusion about Africa’s past, and the idea that homosexuality is not part of African culture was/is a colonial myth.

To prevent this, there is a great need to create open dialogues which will provide spaces of re-telling black history and remembering true culture; one that celebrates diversity, promotes equality and acceptance, and recognises the contribution of everyone, whatever their sexuality. However, there are communities in which the gay and lesbian sub-cultures exist in secrecy to avoid victimization, and homosexuals remain anonymous because identity is linked with community. In the article, Ratele (2016) states that gays and lesbians are part of the culture.

The strong belief that homosexuality is un-African, unnatural and a western practice brews negative attitudes towards gays and lesbians (Epprecht, 1998). This belief posits that laws and policies have come to destroy the African authentic cultures and customs. Msibi (2010) state, even though the study focuses on university life, students who are living the “double life” date back to high school. Their schooling experiences are enforced by what the community believes in. Msibi (2010) explored the experiences of homophobia among queer youth of South African township schools and marginalized students from conservative schooling contexts in KZN. He points out that verbal abuse experienced by these learners is one form of discrimination from both teachers and learners.

Even though this research is looking at the university being a comfortable environment for an individual to be out-closeted and live their true being, scholars such as Jagessar (2015) note that sometimes student residence and the university surroundings are not favourable to lesbians and gays. Evidence was drawn from the slurs splashed on walls against gays and lesbians, and the prevalence of labelling and naming of sexualities in the South African context, universities included (Msibi & Jagessar, 2013). There is also a great need to evaluate the role of language in relation to same-sex relationships, how it is treated and how it is used in the African context.

### **2.10. The use and abuse of culture to justify homophobia**

Numerous black lesbians and gays have been murdered, beaten, assaulted, detained and shunned because of homophobia, ordered by people who seek to silence same sex desire. South Africa has witnessed the murder and the rape of Zoliswa Nkonyana in 2006 and, Satome Massoa, Sizakele and Sigasa in 2007, and the rape and murder of a soccer star Eudy Simelane in 2008 (De Waal, Manion & Cameron, Msibi, Butcher as cited by Jagessar, 2015). The most recent cases are documented in a Triangle Project Human Rights Report 2013 by Lee, Lynch & Clayton (2013). These are all homophobic attacks which are driven by fear of deviation from heteronormativity and patriarchal social control. The justification for all of these murders is that homosexuality is un-African.

There is a great debate with regards to ‘Who owns the body?’ in an article written by Izugbara and Unide (2008). The argument stems from conceptualising the body and its ownership and highlights the limits and problematic nature of rights-based discourse. The body, they argue, is ‘a slate upon which the community inscribes a variety of norms, beliefs, rights and statuses’ (p.161). This means that the body is an owned property of the community and that individuals have little or no rights to express personal desires.

A recent study by Mnyadi (2019) found that homosexual individuals live in a hostile environment in which their lives are made invisible or sensationalised. Literature has found, black communities are less welcoming and accepting to gays as compared to lesbians, claims Mthembu (as cited in Mnyadi, 2019), resulting in the trend of rape culture. Raping black lesbians is not an act of secrecy, but happens openly in the eyes of the community. Li (2009) referred to the practice of ‘corrective rape’ where the rapist believes that he can ‘cure’ the lesbian if she has sex with a man. Many students coming from rural areas have come forth with stories of being raped and being beaten to change what has been noticed as a glimpse of homosexuality. Additionally, numerous reports on gay and lesbian killings and abuse through

newspaper articles as well as academic articles have been documented (Reid, 2018). Living in pretence every day in the closet, the majority of homosexual students' construct and negotiate their silenced sexualities at home. Mthembu (2014) and de Vos (2015) observe that lesbian women are not fully living their authentic imagined lives. Even with the Constitution in place, black lesbians are constantly discriminated against and abused. Attention is given to heterosexual dominance because of its mainstreamness, unconsciously rejecting the homosexual discrimination/ domestic abuse. The abuse towards gays and lesbians is not taken as seriously as that of heterosexuals. This reveals South African realities regarding sexuality issues, and the need to fight for social justice for women, and homosexuals particularly (Mthembu, as cited by Mnyadi, 2019).

### **2.11. Claiming African-ness and homosexuality**

Matolino's (2017) article titled "Being gay and African: A view from an African philosopher", challenges the notion that homosexuality is un-African. He charts a way that seeks to establish whether the gays interpretation of that reality is philosophically sound. By setting up a charitable interpretation of what opponents of same-sex relations could possibly take African reality to be, and what makes an African and how an African should behave. The central questions he poses include: "What could be the basis of objections to homosexuality?" "What values do they articulate?" The strongest reasons for objecting to homosexuality are centred around the metaphysical and epistemological foundations of African reality. The basis of such a view, which is communitarian, is that community makes and profiles an individual to be who they are (Matolino, 2017). The African culture sees individuals as thoroughly fused to the community, where there is no room to pursue individual interests or for the individual to claim whatever and whoever they want to be. Furthermore, they owe their existence to the community and they need to prove their loyalty to the community. This loyalty can be understood in terms of the individual understanding that they owe their being to the community and African culture. By so doing, their individual rights are subordinate to the duties, obligations and responsibilities they owe their community. For gays and lesbians to have a voice and make personal demands on the community about the rights owed to them, they need to perform duties and have norms and values representing the community.

The community-centred society does not make a distinction between the individual "I" and the collective "we". Society therefore, expects the individual to behave in ways that represent and promote the collective good (Matolino, 2017). The manner in which individuals carry

themselves is determined by the community, and must be in accord with the community. An individual's existence then, is not only to measure up to the standards and expectations of the society, but to actively contribute to social harmony and prosperity and the maintenance of the status quo.

Most Africans value their ancestors. The African community is not only the community of the living but also comprises the departed ancestors. In the African culture, the dead are not taken to have reached expiry through their death, but are seen to be part of everyday life (Mekoa, 2020). The living understands themselves, not only as primarily concerned with the living, but also with the dead and yet to be born (Ramose as cited by Matolino, 2017). The duties, obligations and responsibilities they owe to their community are stretched equally between the living, the dead and those yet to be born.

Matolino (2017) observes that if we look past that aspect of the gays and lesbians sexual identity and lives that demonise homosexuals, we may be able to see some important aspects related to them and their identity which we can make positive judgements about. We may be able to see other useful, productive or endearing aspects within their persons. Matolino (2017) claims that homosexuals are skilful in different ways which may contribute to the general good of the society in significant ways other than sexual reproduction. To successfully claim their African-ness, gays and lesbian participate in the livelihood of their community. Their sexual orientation does not inhibit them from being productive in other spheres of life that make African communitarian life successful.

Yarbrough (2019) examines the media coverage surrounding two "African-style" weddings of lesbian and gay couples in South Africa and uses these as a lens through which to view the evolving cultural politics of black queerness. He argues that the media representations show the growing inclusion of black LGBTQI people as a process of bridging the supposed disjuncture between homosexuality and African culture. Through the first gay wedding, the couple hoped to show that relationships like theirs already existed in African communities, and that African communities would accept them (Yarbrough, 2019). The wedding was indirectly a strategy to quash the idea that homosexuality was un-African. When interviewed by eNCA (2013) they stated that "gays have been living amongst us since time immemorial." In addition, one of the grooms said, "Even in the rural areas and also in the townships, we've always had gay people living as part of the community." But what had allowed the "un-African" script to deny the undeniable, was the secrecy surrounding same-sex relations. "We see no reason to

hide in darkness as if there is something to be ashamed about. Our marriage is largely symbolic and a sign that black gay men can commit and build family through a happy and loving marriage,” (Igual,2013). For this marriage to be recognised as tradition, certain key elements had to be marked. First, the families slaughtered a bull to introduce each new spouse to the other’s ancestors and to request that the ancestors bless the wedding. Second, the proceedings included an *umabo* exchange of gifts between the two families, which is also, very traditional (eNCA 2013). And finally and perhaps most important and triggering the media frenzy, they wore traditional regalia. Numerous things were said, both by family members and outsiders. One headline “Gay union made me feel like I belong” an open letter to the couple in *The Mercury*, the writer called it ‘a silence-breaking wedding’. This clearly shows there are a number of gay people still living in the closet, afraid of coming out.

The customary practice of *ilobola* by a lesbian couple in 2015, Vaivi Swartz and Sape Maodi, signified and portrayed something new, as bridging the historic gap between un-African homosexuality and African homophobia. Furthermore, the couple claimed, “just because we’re lesbian doesn’t mean we have to move away from those traditions. [Rather] let’s integrate our lives into the culture...Culture is not written in stone; culture is historical, and if history does not progress with the next generation, we’ll be left behind. We want to teach our kids the same things that we were taught.” (Yarbrough, 2019, p.5) By paying *lobola*, they hoped to preserve their existing claim to African traditions.

## **2.12. Homosexuality and campus life**

The term disclosure or ‘coming out of the closet’ refers to individuals having the courage and the support to decide to no longer pretend to be heterosexual, but instead to openly acknowledge that they are gay or lesbian. In contrast, being in the closet or closeted refers to the phenomenon of individuals hiding their homosexual feelings and pretending or passing as heterosexuals (Plummer, 1975). Mbatha (2013), as stated earlier, distinguishes between and among the three levels of coming out (disclosing to the self, to others close to self, and to the public). Fear, amongst other reasons influences gay and lesbian students not to disclose their sexual orientation. The study also claims that the fear stems from the socialisation and the perception held by dominant members of society. A number of people may decide not to disclose their sexual orientation as a protective measure to avoid rejection, pain and discrimination from members of the family and the community. Crucial factors that further influence disclosure include culture, religion and gender beliefs (patriarchy).

The influence of campus climate on outness (state of being out explicitly) is occasioned by the diversity of individuals found on campus and the supportive structures or organisations. Jagessar (2015) found that students find residential spaces affirming to their sexual identities, as they are spaces where they can freely explore their same-sex interests without restrictions imposed by their parents or community. The residence offers students possibilities to pursue individual interests without any pressure to conform to societal norms and expectations. One of the main reasons why homosexual students preferred being on campus was that it allowed them to create an existence out of their own identification and engagements (Jagessar, 2015).

Garvey, Mobley, Summerville and Moore (2018) conducted a study to explore outness among undergraduate students who identified as queer and trans people of colour. The aim of the study was to explore the outness across racial identities for Queer Trans People of Colour (QTPOC), and used linear regression to understand the relationship between contextual influences and outness. Although freedom is said to be found in the comfort of the university, Garvey et al. (2018) found that black students were often invisible within the higher education context and the choice of disclosing their sexual identity could lead to vulnerability. Mitchell and Means (2014), cited by Garvey et al. (2018), point out that people who seek acceptance face a number of challenges such as battling stereotypes and potentially being ostracised due to their identities. Individuals hold multiple identities ranging from race to sexuality to gender, which leads to the complexity of their lived experiences and oppressed identities. Garvey et al. (2018) have recognised the process of outness as a personal process shaped by external contexts, which sometimes lead to a negative experience.

Mavhandu-Mudzusi and Sandy (2015) report on the negative experiences of being out of the closet at the university. The focus of the study was on the stigma and discrimination experienced by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students. The findings revealed that religion induced stigma and discrimination are common at rural-based university in South Africa. Often, lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender people are given derogatory labels, including 'sinners', 'devils' and 'demon possessed' (Mavhandu-Mudzusi and Sandy, 2015). Despite the claims that the study makes, the researchers found a contradicting idea with the university space. Their findings revealed that within the university community, LGBT students are discriminated against, experiencing acts such as the denial of financial and healthcare services and threats of or actual rape (Mavhandu-Mudzusi and Sandy, 2015). A range of factors adds to this stigmatisation and associated discrimination, including religious beliefs and societal values and norms which frame people's attitudes and behaviours toward sexuality and

sexual relationships (Ngcobo cited in Mavhandu-Mudzusi and Sandy, 2015). The findings from the study revealed that, often the heterosexual counterparts come up with strategies to convert LGBT students into heterosexual, which the researchers call 'heterosexualisation'. According to the participants, these strategies were religious based and motivated, and are carried out by both student and academic staff.

Research conducted in universities in the United Kingdom (UK) explored the extent to which the universities are 'gay friendly' and the climate for LGBT students and/or staff (Ellis, 2008). The findings revealed that despite the effort through laws and policies which vouch for equality in the UK higher education, homophobia on campus is still a huge problem, and universities are not regarded as a safe space in which to be open about sexual orientation or gender identity. To safeguard the livelihood of LGBT individuals, the introduction of the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations and the revised Gender Equality Act 2006 (revised from Sex Discrimination Act, 1975), strictly requires universities in the UK to ensure that staff and students are not discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation. However, the researchers found that "while many universities have developed policies for addressing such discrimination, the implementation and enforcement of these policies is much more opaque" (Ellis, 2009, p.4). It is generally considered that for most students, university is ordinarily the first place that students are away from home for a very long time. This is what Jagerssar and Msibi (2015) mean when they speak of university residence being 'home away from home'. For LGBT students, Ellis (2009) claims that it is often the first opportunity to explore their identity without the limiting constraints of the home and secondary school; both of which in many instances, are not gay-affirmative settings in which to 'come out'. The findings uncovered that, although homophobia on campus was not a problematic phenomenon, it was still a significant one, as dangerous acts such as actual violence are uncommon, verbal provocation and anti-LGBT sentiments are prevalent. To avoid such acts, LGBT individuals collude with their own oppression by actively 'passing' as heterosexual, while the campus climate continues to feel vulnerable and marginalized (Ellis, 2009)

The university provides an environment for suppressed experiences and sexualities to be explored and developed. Students are always in a quest to find themselves fully or express hidden or suppressed identities. Susan, Jones, Elisa and Abes (2017) identify two questions that characterise college years: Who am I? What will I be? (Widick, Parker, and Knepfelkamp, cited in Susan et al, 2017). These questions serve as the foundation of the study of identity. The book: *Identity Development of College Students* (Wilkerson, 2016) focuses on the complexities

of identity development among college students. The responses to the question; who am I? varies depending on disciplinary perspectives. However, one way to understand development is by using Erickson's (1963) stages of psychosocial development which detail the identity development process. He presents eight stages, and one profound stage presented in, is the fifth stage; identity versus role confusion.

### **2.13. Conclusion**

A review of the literature indicates that gays and lesbians are discriminated against and marginalised in their rural home areas, while the university often provides a welcoming space/safe place for their homosexual identities to be expressed with more acceptance and tolerance. The review of literature highlights that homosexuals face challenges after disclosing their sexual orientation, mainly due to the myth that homosexuality is widely considered un-African.

With this historical prejudice in South Africa, more research needs to be done on the subject of African sexuality. The present study explores the narratives of students from rural areas, and specifically gain deeper how they navigate their complex sexual identities.

The following chapter presents the theoretical framework and lens which guided my investigation into the narratives of black gays and lesbian students coming from rural areas.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

This research is underpinned by the understanding of identity formation through a social justice lens, central to which is understanding the notion of ‘otherness’ (being different from the norm) and understanding the power relations which come into play when considering the notions of ‘them’ and ‘us’. It includes a medley of theories as part of my theoretical and conceptual framework, namely: Cass’s Model of Homosexual Identity Formation (1976), which offers an understanding of homosexual identity and Hardiman and Jacksons’ (1997) Social Identity Development Model. The identity theories speak to the formation and the impact of otherness, and ‘them’ and ‘us’ groups within the process of identity formation. Hardiman and Jackson (1976) expand on “otherness” and homosexuality as a form of oppression, in their model which speaks to the all-important element of power relations between different social groups. speaks to the predestined roles that we are born and socialised into as per the rules and roles that make up the status quo with regard to different identities.

There is need to integrate these two theories in order to gain a better understanding of the complexities of gay and lesbian identities. These theories build on and complement each other, as each offers an additional layer towards understanding the complex and important issues involved in gay and lesbian identity formation. Relying on a combination of these theories offers a broader and more in-depth lens through which to better understand and analyse the chosen area of research.

I include a discussion and unpacking of the three concepts: heterosexism, homophobia and heteronormativity as they are key concepts used throughout the study.

#### **3.2. Cass’ Identity Development Model (1976) - the creation of gay and lesbian identity**

Cass (1976) is of the assumption that everyone, irrespective of ones’ sexual orientation, identify themselves initially as heterosexual due to the socialisation process within culture. This carries the implied assumption that all cultures are heterosexist or homophobic. The model seeks to treat gay and lesbian people as ‘normal’ in a heterosexist society and in a climate of homophobia.

Cass (1976) believes that identity is achieved through a developmental process and the interaction of an individual and the environment. For this study, it is important to understand how environment influences African students' sexual identities. Some environments are enabling and tolerant of diverse sexual identities, making it safe to explore and come out when one feels ready to. Whereas, other environments urge one to suppress the feeling and inclination towards divergent sexualities. The use of this model in this study allows for a better understanding of how gay and lesbian African students navigate between the two environments.

The model presents six stages; identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride, and identity synthesis. In identity confusion, individuals begin to question their self-perception as heterosexual, wondering whether or not some thoughts, behaviours or feelings may be categorised as 'lesbian' or 'gay'.

In the identity comparison stage, individuals' increasing self-identification as lesbian or gay combines with a profound awareness of the negative social attitudes toward lesbians and gays to produce a sense of alienation from family, friends and society as a whole. Through the first towards the second stage, students learn that the choice of an individual's identity is shaped by pre-existing social structures, hierarchy and conditions. Identity is both individual and collective, being continually formed, created, and shaped by the discourse of individual and society or community. This study sees students comparing their livelihood and self-identification.

During identity acceptance, Cass (1976) state an individual negotiates whether the lesbian and gay identity will be a private or public identity, deciding on whether to continue the 'passing' behaviour in which they have been engaging, or to 'come out of the closet.' For this study, the African students find themselves in being in having to accept themselves even though they have to 'pass' as heterosexual in other environments to be accepted by the members of that particular community. According to Taylor-Smith (2009) in Africa, identity can also be translated as belongingness, these are ties with, or a strong sense of belonging to, the family, community, ethnic group or tribe, a clan, and a state or nation in modern sense of word. Taylor-Smith (2009) asserted that the African society is organised around the family, community, clan and tribal ties.

During identity pride, a strong sense of group identity is developed through a growing commitment to lesbian and gay issues, and previous disguise strategies are abandoned; leading

to disclosures of being gay and lesbian to heterosexual others. For this study, African students adopt a sense of pride when they are in context which enables one to fully explore and grow a strong sense of pride towards their sexual identity.

From the above, one learns that the choices an African student makes are not entirely influenced by the self but dependent to family, general community and different institutions. The general implication for this understanding on sexual identity, it would seem for an African and their sexual identity, is a complex and very nuanced one. However, Rudwick (2011) emphasised that South Africans anti-gay sentiments result from the reasoning that homosexuality is against their culture, implying that gay-ness is simply a behavioural codex which one could choose to adhere to or not. What many South Africans do not acknowledge, claimed Rudwick (2011), is that homosexuality is not a matter of choice for most black gay people, but a matter of identity.

### **3.6. Hardiman and Jacksons' (1997) Social Identity Development Model**

People are commonly defined as 'other' on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, and physical and mental ability (Prasad and Prasad, 2002). Hardiman and Jackson (1997) define oppression as power imbalances between the powerful and powerless social groups. These groups are viewed as agent/dominant and target/subordinate groups, respectively. The dominant groups often have the greatest influence in determining the structure of the society whereas the target/subordinate groups have little or no influence in society, as they are relegated to having inferior social status. In addition, Tatum (2000) is of the opinion that societal norms are set by dominant elements of identity, further verifying the co-existence of dominant as well as targeted identity elements in individuals. She adds that elements of targeted identity are highlighted while those of dominant individuals and groups go unnoticed. Harro (2000) recognises that humans are different regarding gender, ethnicity and race, sexuality and religion; and with these differences, we assume that we will treat each other with appreciation and respect. However, this is not the case due to the unequal relations of power between agent and target social groups.

According to Hardiman and Jackson (1997, p17), "oppression, is not just an ideology or a set of beliefs that assert one's group's superiority over another, nor is it random violence, harassment, or discrimination towards members of target group." They further explain, with the model of social oppression, that oppression exists when one group, consciously or sub-consciously, exploits another social group for its own benefit. Social oppression exists when there are key elements in place, such as the agent group having the power to define and name

reality and determine what is “normal”, “appropriate”, “acceptable” and “correct”. For the purposes of this research study, the dominant group comprises heteronormative individuals (men and women who consider themselves and are considered “straight” / attracted to the opposite sex) and the targeted individuals who identify as gay and lesbian. Hardiman and Jackson (1997) show how social oppression is maintained and operationalised at three levels: individual, institutional, and societal/cultural.

The individual level focuses on the individual rather than other practises, looking at the conscious or unconscious actions or attitudes of individuals in society at large, that maintain oppression. Within the individual level, individuals enforce their expectations of agent heteronormative characteristics, which reflect the status quo in the broader culture and the values of the dominant society/culture. The institutional level refers to institutions such as the family, church and learning institutions which shape our lives and are shaped by other levels. The application of institutional procedures and policies posed by individuals or groups is understood as collusion with social oppression, producing oppressive consequences. At the Societal/Cultural level, society’s cultural norms perpetuate implicit and explicit values that bind institutions and individuals. Each society has norms and values imposed by the dominant social groups, and these include the perception of homosexuality as ‘sick’ or ‘evil’ (Hardiman and Jackson, 1997).

The above theoretical framework will assist in understanding how the select group of African students navigate their complex t sexual identity, that being, if they view their sexual identity as shaped by African community, or if influenced by the climate of outness in the university.

### **3.7. Heterosexism, homophobia and heteronormativity**

Wingberg (1972) originally introduced the term ‘homophobia’ and challenged the traditional thinking of homosexuality. The term homophobia includes a fear of non-normative sexualities. It is coined by the use of the suffix phobia, suggesting that prejudice, discrimination and oppression of homosexual individuals is based primarily on fear. The definition has evolved to much more than just an irrational fear, to include reactions such as disgust, anxiety and anger, in conjunction with irrational fear (Wingberg, 1972; Hereck, 2004). Hereck (2000) argues against the term “irrational” when making reference to the fear, disgust, anxiety or anger felt by people towards homosexuality. He believes these feelings towards homosexuals are true representations of what is rational and functional for the individuals who manifest them, based on the premise that it is natural for individuals to feel disgust and anger towards anything they

fear or do not understand or relate to. Although there are a number of contemporary definitions of homophobia to date that attempt to theorise it, I highlight MacDonald's (1976, p.23) definition of homophobia as an "irrational, persistent fear or dread of homosexuals". It can be described as a fear, abhorrence and dislike of homosexuality and of those who engage in it (Yep, 2002, cited in Claire 2014). The term 'homophobia' is usually used to refer to "...individual anti-gay attitudes and behaviours, whereas heterosexism has referred to societal-level ideologies and patterns of institutionalised oppression of non-heterosexist people" (Hereck, 2000, p.19).

Heterosexism is the "belief and practice that heterosexuality is the only natural form of sexuality" (Cooper, 1994 cited in Buston and Hart, 2001). This belief can be propagated in various ways such as any invisible mention of gay and lesbian sexuality or through implicit or explicit homophobia, and can manifest as discrimination towards the targeted individuals at the individual, institutional and societal levels. Furthermore, heterosexism is understood as an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatises any non-normative form of conduct, identity, relationship, or community (Yep, 2002). The assumption carried by heterosexism is based on the idea that heterosexuality is the only correct sexual orientation that is socially acceptable. Heterosexism and homophobia work hand in hand to sustain and spread oppression and encourage, cultivate and propagate homophobia in individuals.

Heteronormativity is a system that privileges and sanctions certain individuals on the basis of presumed binaries of gender and sexuality. As a system, it characterises and enforces beliefs and practices about what is regarded or perceived as normal in everyday life (Toomey, McGuire and Russell, 2012). The queering framework allows an understanding of homosexuality by providing identities that do not fit into the strict definitions required by heteronormativity. This approach gives room for complex identities in environments that traditionally have only accepted and provided space for individuals with heteronormative identities.

Students leave home to study in the urban areas and find affirmative conditions to live freely, as the university has in place clubs and societies that include and welcome the LGBT community, and the study of sexual minorities is included in the curriculum. Implementing queering in the policy and curriculum plan requires the consideration and inclusion of individuals and their experience to make it safe for deviation from societal norms. Toomey et al. (2012) suggest that schools and universities should acknowledge the presence of gender

non-conformity and LGBTQ students, and enact and enforce policies and practices created to provide a safe space for them.

### **3.8. Conclusion**

This chapter has presented multiple theories which constitute the present study's theoretical framework in an attempt to better understand homosexual identity formation and homosexuality as a form of oppression, and the impact of differential power relations on individuals who identify as gay and lesbian. The chapter also presented and unpacked the concepts critical to this study. This theoretical framework was used to guide and provide a complex and in-depth lens to analyse the data generated.

In the next chapter, I present the methodology and methodological choices made in generating the data for this study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Research Design and Methodology

#### 4.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the research methodology which was used during the process of data generation, including deciding on the research paradigm and design of the study. It explains the sampling strategy, the data generation techniques, and an overview of how data was analysed. Due to the sensitive nature of the study, which dealt with the lived experiences of gay and lesbian students, the ethical considerations as well as issues of validity and reliability of the study are discussed. At the outset, I would have it known that, as a researcher, I wished not to do research *on* gay and lesbian students, but *with* them. This intention foregrounds my commitment to the full and authentic participation of participants and the choice of a methodology which enabled and allowed for their authentic voices and personal experiences to be highlighted.

#### 4.2. Research approach and paradigm

##### 4.2.1 *A qualitative research design*

In this research, a qualitative research approach was used, as a means to understand human lived experiences. The choice a qualitative approach as compared to a quantitative approach was based on the reason of inquiry of each. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (1994) state the difference between quantitative research and a qualitative research as the differentiation between knowledge ‘discovered’ and knowledge ‘constructed’. A qualitative research design involves understanding human experiences, whilst a quantitative research approach design aims to explain phenomena, often involving scientific methods of cause and effect. Jipson and Paley (1997) state that a qualitative research design considers how important meaning is and the importance of situations, context and detail. Selecting a qualitative research design allowed this research to present the experiences of black gays and lesbians in as authentic a manner as possible.

##### 4.2.2. *An interpretive paradigm*

An interpretive paradigm aims to understand the world as it is from the subjective experiences of individuals (Cohan and Manion, 1994). Work by Wahyhuni (2012) stresses that the interpretive paradigm, within which the study is located, should agree to subjectivity, multiplicity, changeability and social constructivism in any way that recognises the active

participation of social actors. It was deemed an appropriate paradigm for this study because of the nature of the research objectives and goals. A great deal of studies suggests that sensitive issues such as sexuality and masculinity/femininity can best be understood and engaged in within this paradigm. This is due to the nature of sexuality being multiple, fluid, socially constructed, and contextual (Connell, 2005; Ratele, 2008; Morrell, 2001).

Exploring lived experiences and realities of sexual minorities remains complex, sensitive and political. These matters continue to have a stigma attached to them as they are regarded as taboo in spite of South Africa's progressive Constitution that promotes equality and inclusion.

### **4.3. Sampling**

The study adopted non-probability sampling which means that the sample was not selected using a random sampling method. This implies that the participants were selected using clear and specific criteria, the critical factor being that the sample should be representative of the population which is the focus of the research (Bryman and Bell, 2009).

The reason for choosing this type of sampling was to select information rich participants who would best illuminate the purpose of the study (Sampling and Sample, 2009). The two types of non-probability sampling which were used to select the sample were snowball and purposive sampling. The sampling procedure is regarded as snowballing sampling when the researcher accesses information through contact information that is provided by other informants. The process involves informants referring the researcher to other informants, who are contacted by the researcher and then in turn refer the researcher to yet other informants. This process continues until the researcher is satisfied with the participant's number, hence, the snowballing effect. Concerned that I may face difficulty in getting relevant participants, given the sensitive nature of the study and their anticipated contributions, snowballing assisted in reaching five participants who volunteered and also met the criteria of who was eligible in being a participant (criteria listed below). Sample size was determined by the concept of saturation in a qualitative study, which states that, the appropriate sample size is the one that answers the questions adequately (Marshall, 1996).

Sampling and Samples (2009) define purposive sampling as a sample selected in a deliberative and non-random fashion to achieve a certain goal. Similarly, purposive sampling can be defined

as a sampling strategy guided by pre-selected criteria relevant to a particular research question. Furthermore, the sample should be a representative of the population of interest. In this research study, the purposive sample comprised gay and lesbian who were approached through the referral procedure. I was assisted by the chairperson of the LGBTI forum on campus (all UKZN campuses were contacted) to assist me by referring me to people who might be interested in becoming participants, I had communicated with them and gave them the selection criteria and presented my proposal to them so that they could have a clear understanding on who to refer me to. One I had the first two participants, they referred me to their friends and people they knew who fit the criteria and who might be interested. This continued until I ended up with five participants. Communication was made through WhatsApp with the chairperson and the participants who were interested.

#### **4.3.1 Selection criteria**

The criteria that I used to identify the participants for the snowballing and purposive sampling was as follows:

1. Participants had to be identified as being ethnically black.
2. Participants needed to identify as either gay or lesbian.
3. Participants should have been registered students at UKZN, preferably residing in or having resided in student residences on campus.
4. Participants should have been willing to participate in the study and to sign informed consent to be interviewed.
5. Participants needed to be from the rural areas.

#### **4.4. Research Instruments and Data Generation**

##### ***4.4.1 Narrative Inquiry***

Narratives carry traces of human lives that we want to understand, and have become popular in contemporary western social research. Clandinin and Connolly (2000) characterise narrative inquiry as an umbrella term that catches individual and human dimensions of experience over time, takes account of the relationship between individuals' experiences and cultural

backgrounds, and represent people's stories as narrated by them, which may very well challenge traditional and modernist views of truth, reality, knowledge and personhood. The narrative inquiry component of this research took the form of conversational interviews which were guided by a set of questions which were developed in line with the critical research questions and objectives.

In this research study, the sharing of personal stories provided subjective meanings and sense of self and identity as stories unfolded, bearing in mind as a researcher that stories are reconstructions of people's experiences, projected at a particular point in their lives for a particular purpose. The benefits of undertaking a narrative inquiry is memorable in that it produces fascinating knowledge that brings together layers of understanding about a person, their culture, and how they have navigated and sustained change.

Additionally, a narrative approach is a collaboration between researcher and participants over time, in a place and in social interaction. It also allows us a chance to understand the society, culture and place of those we live with. Moreover, the risk and the decisions we take in life shape and influence our lives, which also have an influence on our destiny and identity. For this study, my participants and I worked with each other to tell, re-live, and retell stories, journeys, experiences and testimonies in order to understand what might have influenced their sexual identity.

In choosing narrative inquiry as part of the methodology for this research, I believed that it would be beneficial for my research that the participants narrate and tell their stories and lived experiences, as events in their lives that have shaped their identities. Often as humans, we tend to recall past experiences by means of narrating and telling our stories, thus; creating an imagination in other people to live through our experiences with us while we begin to find meaning and make sense of our lives. I believe that re-examining and revisiting our experiences provides us with an opportunity to stop, pause and listen to different stories. Too often, we continue our life journeys without any pause to reflect or gain understanding of how we have come to be who we are, and the circumstances we find ourselves. This study sought to provide some insight into the experiences of my participants. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) share a similar understanding of the narrative approach. It is a naturalistic approach, which allows us to talk easily about our life stories. It is chronological and continuous as experiences grow out of other experiences (Varathiah, 2010). Furthermore, it captures personal and human dimensions.

For this study, conversational interviews were used to generate narrative data from the participants. Initially, I had hoped to have face to face conversation to listen to their narratives but due to the Covid-19 safety regulations, I had to change my initial plan. Narratives were carried out using digital platforms and telephonically. This did not change the essence or value of conversational interviews, as even the interviews conducted through digital platforms and telephonically afforded me the flexibility of allowing for unanticipated responses and issues to emerge through the use of open-ended questions to allow participants to share their narratives.

Selecting the phrasing of questions allowed me to seek and provide clarity, and facilitate the direction and the pace of the narratives. These individual conversational interviews generated the narrative data I needed. In this research study, interest was on the experiences of black gay and lesbian university students. Hence, the individual conversational interviews were a gateway to the narratives, as this type of interview permitted the participants to tell their own stories rather than answer a series of structured questions. However, this did not just take any random order, themes were formulated to construct a framework which guided the narration process while still allowing flexibility for participants to reflect freely on their personal experiences of the topic and research questions. This assisted the collection of richer, more textured data from the participants than would have been achieved through using a strictly structured scheduled interview.

Various methodological strategies have been developed in connection with research utilising narrative inquiry. For the purposes of this research, personal narratives of participants will be developed through in-depth, unstructured, interactive and conversational interviews and expended series of creative prompts under the umbrella of visual methodology

#### ***4.4.2 Process of Data collection***

Qualitative research is defined as a multi-perspective approach, wherein the researcher is able to employ a wide range of strategies of inquiry (Schurink, 1998). According to Berg (cited in Schurink, 1998) it is preferable that more than one method is used to generate data, since the different methods provide facets of the same reality, thus resulting in more valid results. It is also important to note that the qualitative research process is not a linear process and therefore, although various steps in the generation of data may be identified at the outset of any research, this may not mean that all methods are in fact, utilised; nor does this mean that one stage will follow the other sequentially (Schurink, 1998).

The process of data generation followed stages and cycles of data triggers and prompts, storytelling and reflection. Adopting the overarching paradigm of qualitative research allowed me the flexibility to allow these stages to emerge, unfold and develop in response to emerging issues as the research progressed.

What follows is a description of and rationale for the exploration and selection of methods of data generation.

#### ***4.4.3 Conversational interviews***

Lavrakas (2008) differentiates conversational interviews from other types of interviewing methods, as one which is flexible and does not follow the norms and standards of traditional interviewing. Under conversational interviewing procedures, participants are allowed to ask interviewers if they did not fully understand the question and provide unscripted feedback to clarify the gist or the meaning of the questions necessary.

The manner in which the conversational interviews took place was that I conducted one individual interview with each participant. Questions were not deliberately formulated, but instead, developed as a guide and spontaneously during the course of each conversational interview. Motivating and probing questions were necessarily unique to each individual participant.

The interviews were conducted in English, but taking into consideration that the participants came from deep rural areas and English was not their mother tongue, I chose to switch between English and isiZulu, meaning that I phrased the questions in English first then in IsiZulu for those who needed clarity. During data analysis, I transcribed and translated whatever had been said in IsiZulu. Each telephonic interview was recorded, each interview lasted for one hour 30 minute.

#### ***4.4.4 Using images and videos to generate data.***

Prior to the narration process, I had sent images and a video to the participants, and asked the participants to comment on each one after if it has evoked any thoughts they would like to share. I utilised questions such as “Please have a look at this image / watch this video clip and tell me what your thoughts and feelings are relating to this image / video”. From their responses, I then asked further probing questions emanating from their individual responses, to unpack and explore their reactions, thoughts and feelings in greater depth and detail, in order to

generate rich data. I also asked the participants to relate any personal experiences they have had to each image or video clip.

I used pictures found on social media and video clips from the well-known television series, *Generations*. In the video clip I used, two male characters Jason and Senzo unexpectedly kissed which shocked and stirred up a storm and conflict across the country when it was aired. Through these visual images and videos, I managed to trigger and evoke emotions and opinions that enhanced and added richness to the study. Glaw, Inder, Kable and Hazelton (2017) refer to this type of visual method as a Photo Elicitation, whereby the use of photographs or other visual mediums are used in an interview to generate verbal discussion and generate data.

Through the use of these prompts, multiple layers of meaning were generated as this method evoked deep emotions, memories, and thoughts. Glaw et al. (2017) further emphasise that photo elicitation interviews contribute to the trustworthiness and rigor of the findings through member checking. Bignante (2010) affirms one advantage of using visual images during interviews, which is, to promote participants' involvement in the research process, and to encourage and stimulate the collection of qualitatively different information to that obtained in conventional interviews. Story telling is culturally relevant to the Zulu culture (Broodryk, 2002; Villa-Vicencio, 1995), and knowledge of who they are as individuals set each participant up as the expert in that field. "Stories tell us who we are ... and are perhaps the most fundamental form of communicating the sense of life and thus a sense of the person who lives that life..." (Mattingly, 1991, p.37). Participants were also encouraged to communicate in Zulu if All participants' verbal reflections were recorded and transcribed. These transcriptions comprised participants' personal narratives which were analysed and interpreted they did not feel confident in their English proficiency. All participants' verbal reflections were recorded and transcribed. These transcriptions comprised participants' personal narratives which were analysed and interpreted

#### **4.5. Data analysis**

Data analysis in qualitative research is defined as the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, or data generated or data the researcher accumulated, to increase understanding of the phenomenon (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2018). Once the conversational interviews were completed and the participants' responses transcribed, the transcriptions served as the raw narrative data which then needed to be analysed. For this study,

I identified themes which emerged from the data generated, and from there on, I identified broader categories (which are umbrella themes, that a few sub-themes fell under). Using the narrative and thematic analysis method, Cresswell (2008) identifies six steps involved in analysing the data collected: (1) prepare and organise the data for analysis; (2) explore and code the data; (3) code to build description and themes; (4) represent and report qualitative findings; and (5) validate the accuracy of the findings. Dawso (2007) and Rugg and Petre (2007) refer to this type of data analysis as inductive.

#### **4.5.1. Trustworthiness**

Assuring trustworthiness of a study is a vital part of qualitative research. Long and Johnson (2000) claim that it is not possible to address the issue of validity and reliability in qualitative research in the same way as in quantitative research, as these two types of studies vary fundamentally in their nature. In qualitative research, instead of validity, the concept of trustworthiness; which includes dependability, transferability, confirmability and credibility, is used (Shenton, 2004). To gain the trust of participants, the researcher had sent informed consent forms, engage, listened and got to know the participants,

#### **4.5.2. Credibility.**

Cohen et al. (2011) advise that for ensuring the credibility of the study, the researcher must ensure that findings accurately define the phenomenon being researched. Thus, to enhance the credibility of findings in this study, I used audio tape recordings during the various interview sessions. The audio data was then transcribed and participants allowed to check the accuracy of the data, particularly verifying whether what they said corresponded or not with transcriptions to ensure the consistency of the data generated (Creswell, 2008). The interviews took place telephonically and all other communication was done through digital platforms and all recordings sent for safe keeping.

#### **4.5.3. Dependability.**

“In order to address the dependability issue more directly, the processes within the study should be reported in detail, thereby enabling a future researcher to repeat the work, if not necessarily to gain the same results” (Shenton, 2004, p 71). The researcher needs to ensure that the research study is logical, systematic and well documented in a way that a reader can comprehend. The dependability of the study was enhanced through the use of qualitative study analysis; data transcription, arrangement, where similar emerging themes were found the data was arranged

for interpretation of the findings. For this study, I selected a sufficient sample size to ensure that research questions were answered and to ensure the richness of data.

a detailed report of the research process was therefore provided to ensure dependability and readers can trace the followed research study process.

#### **4.5.4. Transferability.**

Transferability has to do with the degree to which the findings of the study can be applied to other situations. The researcher has no control over the transferability of the study, as it is the reader of the study who decides (Stringer, 2004). To ensure transferability in this study, I provided a thorough and detailed description of the research context and findings so that whoever wishes to transfer the results of this study to a different context or similar setting can be responsible for measuring the sensibility of the transfer. I have also outlined the characteristics of the geographical area where my study took place in order to ensure that the same study can be done in another place utilising the same data collection method. This presented me with rich data that could be then analysed thematically.

#### **4.5.5. Confirmability.**

Confirmability means that the data constitutes the knowledge that the participants communicated and the understanding of that data was not fabricated by the researcher, Polit and Beck (2012). I ensured that data was accurate by reflecting authentic responses from participants. As a heterosexual, I needed to, by all means, distance my prejudices and biases from this research study, so that it does not affect the data in any way. The researcher must try to be reflexive in order to ensure that their preconceptions do not have an emotional impact on the study or affect the views and perceptions of the participants (Thomas & Magilvy, 2014).

### **4.6. Ethical considerations**

#### ***4.6.1. informed consent***

Ethical clearance was applied for the study through the University of KwaZulu-Natal ethics in research process. On receipt of the ethical clearance certificate, I had to make clear that participation was voluntary and that participants were free to withdraw at any time if they wanted to. Informed consent forms were sent to each participant. They sent back the signed forms electronically if they could or printed and scanned the signed forms. As this study used a snowballing method, I explained to each participant the process of the study, the purpose of my research and how I planned to generate data. I gave each participant a chance to ask

questions about the research study and their involvement. The form included my supervisors' contact details in case they had any further concerns about the study.

#### ***4.6.2. Autonomy***

Autonomy and respect for the dignity of persons led me to the protection of the identity of participants and maintaining confidentiality (Pollock, 2012). I was able to achieve this successfully by giving each participant a pseudonym (from colours of the LBGT flag) so that their personal identities could not be known or deduced.

LGBT colour and what they represent:

Purple: Spirit (Male)

Yellow: Sunlight (Male)

Pink: Sexuality (Male)

Green: Nature (Female)

Orange: Healing (Female)

#### ***4.6.3. Justice***

As a researcher, the principle of justice requires that I treat participants with equity and equality throughout the process of the study (Vanclay, Baines and Taylor, 2013). This was achieved through fair selection of research participants and true representation of the participants' narratives. This was ensured by selecting participants who met the criteria. As a researcher, I was required to provide care and support for participants who could become distressed and harmed by the study (Pallock, 2012). Hence, participants were given information about trauma counselling in case they felt they needed to talk to someone about sensitive issues and emotions that the interviews might stir up.

#### ***4.6.4 Dissemination of research***

The result of the research study was made available to all participants before publication of data.

### **4.7. Conclusion**

In this chapter, the research design and methods used in the study were presented. The discussion included a description of the qualitative and interpretive research design, the snowballing and purposive sampling technique and procedure, conversational interviews as a

tool for generating narratives, narrative and thematic data analysis, and consideration of the strategies I employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the research, and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 provides a presentation and discussion of the results of the study.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Presentation and discussion of findings**

#### **5.1. Introduction**

The analysis of data responds to the three research questions:

- What are the experiences of gay and lesbian African university students from rural areas?
- How do their experiences impact their identity formation?
- How do they navigate their non-normative identities in predominantly heterosexual environments?

This chapter was divided thematically, with each theme responding to each of the three research questions. The themes are as follows:

- Theme 1: experiences of gays and lesbian's African university students from rural areas
- Theme 2: impact of experiences on sexual identity formation
- Theme 3: navigating the non-normative identities in predominantly heterosexual environments.

The analysis is done thematically with each theme having sub-themes. Each sub-theme includes verbatim excerpts of each participant's narrative.

Taking into consideration that all participants were bilingual, where isiZulu and Isingqumo (homosexual Zulu slang language) expressions were used, English translation is provided as stated in Chapter 4.

As referred to in Chapter 3 on Research Methodology under ethical consideration, pseudonyms (colours of the LGBT flag) are used to represent participants' voices so that confidentiality is maintained.

## **5.2. Theme 1: experiences of gay and lesbian African university students from rural areas**

### **5.2.1. Growing up in a rural setting**

For this study, participants had to meet the criteria set, one being that they came from and grew up in rural traditional areas.

*I grew up in eMsinga, Sweetwater and in Tamboville. I learnt a lot of stuff. I grew up with my cousins. We use to play together and herd the cattle - **Pink***

*I was raised by my grandparents (grandpa and step grandma). I grew up in eMondlo section C as the only child raised by the above mentioned. The area is a semi-rural*

*area surrounded by township sections. I moved to live with my mother in 2008 in Nqutu, a rural area -an isolated settlement where the areas are named izigodi (sections) and have izinduna namakhosi (Chiefs). This is where my life took a turn – Purple*

*I grew up with my father and he had 3 wives... that was stressful on its own. My father was very strict. All we did was to go to church (a very well-known African church). I grew up in eMpendle mostly. I would visit my cousins in Durban during school holidays - Yellow*

*There are so many things that I understood back then and made peace with them at a very young age. I grew up with my mother's sides of the family, very strict so I was well mannered girl- Orange*

*I grew up moving between Swaziland and KwaMhlaba'yalingana, the most traditional places you could find yourself living in. My mother passed on and left me with my cousins and my one brother. I grew up being taught how a girl should behave and the expectations they have from me. I was part of the reed dance but I was never happy in Swaziland, even to date.... the king has expressed, in the past, his disapproval of homosexuality claiming it is against culture and religion.... I met my father when I was 17. He stayed in the deep rural of the Eastern Cape, a place called Tsolo, he is Zulu but spoke isXhosa because he worked and stayed there for a long time. I always liked it when I visited. It was not the best but it was bearable compared to Swaziland. I fell pregnant in that same year – Green*

It was very important to gather where participants grew up and how they were raised. The participants grew up in rural settings with their grandparents, parents and extended family members, adopting the culture, customs, beliefs, value, performance and behaviour expectations of that particular area/community. In their experiences, the black community prioritised gender, respect, culture, the value of gendered roles, moral ethical behaviour, the value of discipline, obedience and respect. Harro (2000) sees individuals as part of a community by adopting and maintaining a status quo. They are socialised to maintain balance, this is also seen as earlier work by Hardiman and Jackson (1997). They were able to relate to others like cousins as Pink says *he used to play with his cousins and herd cattle*. What struck me was the emphasis on the role he had at home, which is what Harro (2000) says when he claims that target groups always tend to show or project their inferiority whereas members of

the agent group do not necessarily have to state their position. Furthermore, target groups such as gays and lesbian tend to want to perform gendered roles so that they hide their homosexual identity.

Orange said, *there are so many things that I understood back then and made peace with them at a very young age*. Through social interaction and being observant of what and how things should be (Cass, 1976), participants came to terms with a lot of things, one being the disapproval of homosexuality. Living in the rural areas with grandparents who held strong traditional values and cultural norms, affected their way of thinking and behaviour, which had implications for the way they developed their own personal perspectives on sexuality. Cass's (1976) identity confusion stage makes it clear that individuals s It is evident that issues against homosexuality were not a South African issue only, as Green experienced issues of homophobia in Swaziland, shared by the King and her immediate family members. Tatum (2000) is of the opinion that societal norms are set by dominant elements of identity. Thus maintaining a heteronormative environment (Toomey, McGuire and Russell, 2012).

### ***5.2.2. Feeling different and exploring their sexuality in the rural areas***

All five participants made it clear that they had experienced and explored their differences (sexuality) compared to their peers at a very young age and kept them secret from their families. They had the following to share:

*Growing up I've always known that I am different even though I did not know how to categorise myself, or who I am but I knew I was different. I thought I was the only one like that. I remember when I was very young trying to tell my aunt about it. She quickly shut me up and said that type of behaviour was not allowed, and boys do not act that way, it's not acceptable and that is not how a guy should feel. In that time, I decided in experiencing, trying to find what type of a person I am, for myself. From there on I decided not to tell anyone else and I kept it to myself. I decided to join social media. I joined this social network group called 2go and there was a social group for gays. Because all the time people used to call me "istabane" or "Gay" and I did not understand so that is when I started to see a larger group of gay people - **Pink***

*I had a crush on Njabulo in first grade. Then in grade 6 I assume it began to be stronger with the adolescent stage kicking in. I began to feel different, I had a crush on my grade 5 class teacher in such a way that I never wanted to go through a school day without talking and seeing him (giggles). Surprisingly, my friend and I used to kiss, like the real*

*French kiss, when we were playing uMas'gcozi (housie-housie). I remember this one time another friend of mine came home for a sleepover. I wanted him and I to sleep together and we actually tried to have sex. I think I was 10 doing grade 6 if I'm not mistaken. Unfortunately, the sex didn't happen(giggles). In high school at Siphosini in Nqutu, I had a crush on Lungani which lasted a long time and on my English teacher. I never dated throughout my high school years but I had crushes here and there. I only started dating in grade 12 - **Purple***

*I can't pin point really the actual time I knew I was lesbian because I never acted on it when I was young because growing up in Swaziland it was not allowed. I knew that from the early age. But I knew I was different. I didn't like any boys from my area. I kept to myself. I was always inquisitive though. When I went to Eastern cape and changed schools, I was friends with two girls who I later found out they were lesbians. I questioned them about being lesbians and what they felt - that is when I saw I resonated well with what they were telling me. But I did not date any girl because I was scared. I ended up dating a guy and fell pregnant. My life was a mess, but after giving birth and being forced into early marriage, I broke up with the baby daddy - **Green***

*I didn't understand what being gay actually meant but I knew that I was attracted to boys which happen to be the same gender as mine. There were boys at school whom I felt like we had a connection but in a romantic way, only that I didn't understand how that was happening because all my peers were attracted to the opposite gender of theirs. My first real encounter of falling in love with another boy happened when I was around 8 years old. I know that's such a very young age, right? (giggles) This boy had everything that I found interesting in a guy so we became very close to each other and we actually treated each other like romantic partners. He would call me his girlfriend and I would call him my boyfriend. We did all of this privately. But whenever we were around people he would say he hate gays. However, saying I'm gay would be mislabelling myself. I'm starting to see that I am transgender and would love to undergo all the necessary surgeries for that transitioning - **Orange***

*I realised I was gay when I was in grade 7. My friend who were in the same school and shared the same desk with asked me during sport day, the period before sports began. She sat next to me she requested that "when we got out can you not leave me behind I have a problem with my tracksuit zip". During that conversation I felt some changed*

*in my body, some sexual arousal and I started to notice how beautiful she is. So I told my friend (female) about this experience, she said to me, "How come because you know this person and you have been friends with for such a long time". She kissed me once I was done with the zip. I was "shook" and started to ask what is she doing and how did she know I liked girls. I guess that how I realised I was gay - Yellow*

From these narrative excerpts, all of my participants clearly stated that they had always felt different and began exploring their sexualities at a very early stage, even before puberty. This refutes with the view held by most heterosexuals, especially those who are sexuality ignorant, that every boy likes a girl, and there is no way that a boy likes another boy. Even during the childhood game 'housie-housie' (*umasgcozi*), boys would be paired with girls, and not the other way around. Cass (1976) believes that identity is achieved through a developmental process and the interaction of an individual and the environment. The participants in this case, showed that even in those instances, they would find spaces to play together, whether both boys or girls. This brings another dynamic to the understanding of sexuality and the contentious issue of when one chooses one's sexuality. One of Cass's (1976) stages; identity confusion which one questions their self-perception and their emotions. Knowing from an early age that they were attracted to the same sex, brings into question the objectivity of the viewpoint that homosexuality is a choice. Perhaps in an endeavour to maintain heterosexuality as mainstream and marginalise and demonise other forms of sexuality, such a belief is useful, as it hinges on the belief that if individuals choose homosexuality, they can just as well choose heterosexuality. It is clear from the findings that the participants did not consciously choose to be homosexual, but reported that homosexuality was a natural inclination from an early age.

From the conversations with the participants, it is apparent that the reality was not that their community and parents were *not* aware of homosexuality, as children were beaten up and sent away to different locations when there was suspicion of traits of homosexuality. Pink recalled the time when he questioned his sexuality and searched for answers from his aunt. He says, he felt alone and began to question his sexuality by seeking clarity from older people in his family without clear knowledge that these questions and behaviour was not allowed. Tatum (2000) asserts that the concept of identity is complex and multidimensional. To have a clear understanding of this, Tatum (2000) poses the age-old question, "Who Am I?" the answer to which relies to a large extent, on the external factors of other people's perceptions of who one is.

These conversations were done privately and in secret, as discussions about a person's sexuality are deemed taboo in the black communities. This correlates with Matabeni's (2007, p.102) assertion that South Africa remains "highly homophobic, patriarchal and heterosexist" despite recent calls for progressive change as well as marked shifts in policy. It is for this reason people are not always mindful of other different sexual orientations and sexual identities. Traditional societies do not openly discuss sexuality, and so, from the initial realisation of their homosexual identities, participants reported feeling the need to hide any signs of their deviant sexual attractions and identities. The main justification for hiding their homosexuality was based on African ideologies. Through the conversations with participants, it was apparent that non-acceptance and intolerance of gays and lesbians was based predominantly on traditional cultural and traditional arguments and beliefs about gender and heterosexual gender roles.

Because of heteronormativity and existing homophobia, participants such as Green, ended up suppressing their same-sex interests and feelings. Despite Green being aware of her homosexuality, she engaged in heterosexual relationships which resulted in her falling pregnant and almost getting married at a young age. This raises a lot of questions about homosexuality as given or a choice that the individual makes. That is, if homosexuality is learnt behaviour or a choice, why would people choose something that is against their family, beliefs and open themselves to possible judgement or possible ostracism? With most traditional black families, there is a strong tie with ancestors, who are believed to provide guidance, and God as the maker and creator of life on Earth. With that in mind, why do homosexuals feel different from what is presumed the norm?

### **5.3. Theme 2: Impact of experiences on identity formation**

#### ***5.3.1. Catching up with the heterosexual social demands, the realities of gay and lesbian sexual identities.***

*People have often judged me without knowing me personally. I was told I had gay-ish traits from a very young age and I was made fun of and judged to the point that I tried by all means to act tough and be a man. Even today, I try hard to fight off this feeling that I have, this feeling towards other guys... - Pink*

*I really struggle when I have to wake up every day, looking at the mirror and seeing that I am not who I am. Life was really difficult growing up. Namanje futhi (even now) I remember this one time when my grandmother(uKhulu) almost caught me trying on*

*my cousin's dresses. It is still difficult but not as it was, because I spend most of my time at res than at home - Purple*

*I have also grown up to think being gay is a sin, and I have seen how gay people are treated in my community and even the reaction my family has towards gays and lesbians. I have always known that I am gay but I can't act fully gay when I am home. But whenever I get a chance like how I do when I'm at school I am free to be me - Orange*

*I don't even speak about anything that has to do with homosexuality. I resented the feeling of being lesbian for many years till the point I got pregnant and almost marrying a man I did not love at a young age of 17- Green*

*I am trapped in the wrong body really. You can even tell from the way I dress on campus. People don't believe me when I tell them I am actually a girl. But when I am home I change like drastically. I stage this other side of me that my peers do not know about- Yellow*

Mohr and Fassinger (2013) state that sexual identity is the realisation of one's sexual orientation and imparting this realisation into one's self-identity. Like any other aspect of identity development, the development of a sexual identity occurs within the social context which an individual is embedded in and interacts with. Hardiman and Jackson (1997) Societal/Cultural level state that norms and values are imposed by dominant social groups, which include the perception that homosexuality is sick/evil. The identities of these homosexuals were influenced and impacted on by social norms and standards from the time they were born. They felt confused and questioned their sense of being and belonging while having the constant need to be part of the wider society and to fit it. From these extracts, it is clear that inner conflict arose. This conflict came when they questioned themselves about their identity. This is evident in the claim above, that when the gays and lesbians act or try to be more 'masculine' or 'feminine' (as per heterosexual norms), and they look in the mirror, they realise they do not recognise themselves fully because they are wearing a mask of pretence. Identity acceptance becomes impossible in such instance as one battles between the two environments (Cass, 1976). This is brought about through the disjuncture between their authentic sexual tendencies and the norms and standards imposed by the society and family.

They internalise these feelings and conflicts and this impacted the way they viewed themselves and the way people from their families viewed and received them, as compared to the people

at university. Tatum (2000) poses a question, as to who communicates the concept of identity and how one views it as compared to the society. These experiences impacted on the way their identity was formed and developed. The extract from Purple proves that there is always conflict with, and confusion about, the realities he is living in, and he sees this whenever he looks in the mirror and he does not recognise himself. The participants in this study claimed that the experiences they had with regards to living in different environments caused inner conflict about their identity. It is clear that participants navigated their sexual identities between university and home, as they found themselves having to survive the complexities of their lives by coming up with strategies to accommodate different expectations of their gender and sexual behaviour in the different parts of their lives.

### ***5.3.2. Understanding sexual identity in relation to culture***

The invisibility of gay and lesbian relationships helps to normalise heterosexuality, fuel homophobia, and support heterosexism as the status quo. Pink, had the following to say:

*Azikho izitabane ezindala eseke ngazbona 'live' except for oSomizi kanje (I have ever come across an old gay man in my life expect for the famous one such as Somizi)- Pink*

Responses such as these reveal there is a struggle of finding and having a gay role model in their communities. The emphasis on the word 'azikho' reveals that participants had been searching for social groups to identify with and seek acceptance and belonging. It is apparent that a type of group identification amongst homosexuals is desired. However, it is achieved through negative characteristics which appear to be along the lines of rejection. Students search for identity in and out of their communities but due to the stigma associated with homosexuality The need for positive affirmation of their non-normative identities is often not readily forthcoming. When considering visibility and challenging homophobia, programmes designed for and by the LGBTQI like Pride and Femme (programs with educate and raise awareness about issues faces by homosexuals), for the purpose of celebrating their sexuality and educating the wider community, are important. These programs show that LGBT expressionism is gaining momentum in the urban area, whereas in rural areas, it remains a taboo topic as culture recognises only mainstream sexuality. It is for this reason that Green felt the pressure to have a child and consequently almost got married.

*I had my child at 17 and my family forced me into early marriage but I had to reject...after a huge debate at home as to why I rejected, I had to lie and say I was not ready and pretended that he had abused me – Green*

The participant experienced a tremendous feeling of being a burden to their parents simply by having a child. For that reason, the parents' pursuit for their children to get married and this is based also on the assumption that participants are heterosexual. This confuses children in their quest for a fitting or suitable sexual identity in traditional communities. In addition, it poses a great threat to the sexual identity and psychological well-being of gay men. Through respect and fear of being disowned by their parents, homosexual children often live a heterosexual life to meet the normative gender and sexual expectations of their parents.

The argument against gays and lesbians amongst traditional societies is based on traditional beliefs which are mostly centered around ancestors. However, Purple revealed an insightful view on ancestry and rural traditional communities by noting that that black communities are welcoming to Izangoma (traditional healers) who are gay because there is a belief that they are possessed by spirits.

*In my area, in as much you would not see gays or lesbians in the streets, but you would find izangoma(traditional healers) ezi-Gay but they are not treated badly and no one questions them and their sexuality. However, parents would take you to the Sangoma so you can be cured of homosexuality. Sometimes they also take you to church thinking prayer would magically heal you - Purple*

The very same community which is intolerant towards gays and lesbians recognize and respect gay traditional healers (a man who has been possessed by a female ancestor or a woman who has been possessed by a male ancestor) because they possess ancestral healing powers which cannot be denied as it will bring bad luck to the family. Communities are understanding and accepting towards things and people who will afford them the healing they want due to desperation. The strong belief and respect towards ancestors and traditional healing suppresses all hatred and any form of negativity towards gays and lesbians. From the above narrative, it is clear that traditional healers and churches believe that homosexuality can be cured. This reflects the idea that the rural traditional societies hold that homosexuality is unnatural unless you have been chosen by the ancestors.

## 5.4. Theme 3: navigating non-normative identities in predominantly heterosexual environments

### 5.4.1 Enabling and inhibiting environments

Participants expressed similar feelings when asked about their university versus home experiences. They preferred an enabling environment and suggested that the university was such an environment as they experienced it to be safe and healthy for the expression of their authentic sexual identities. To allow homosexuals to be who they are, and be free from fear of being judged, discriminated against, excluded and living a staged life; the university facilitates and accommodates non-normative groups of sexualities. Even though participants had not yet disclosed their sexuality to their respective families, they witnessed how their family members reacted and expressed hateful remarks towards gays and lesbians on the television and social media. Moreover, some participants shared that the continuous discrimination and negative attitudes by their communities and churches towards gays and lesbians made their home environment dangerous and unsafe to come out. The participants recalled how (even during lockdown) they had to change how they presented themselves when they were at home. Purple highlighted the issue of gendered role expectations and the need to maintain masculinity in the following narrative excerpt:

*I worry less about how others look at me and what they say when I am on campus. I think this because students are. To be honest, It is like I have split lives, one to suit every environment. When I'm home, I become very conscious of how I talk, walk and dress up. I literally have two pants from the many that I own, which I am comfortable to wear at home without feeling like I look gay. I must ensure that no one can see that I might be playing for the same team. I must fulfil male duties even those that I'm uncomfortable with. I must ensure that I'm grounded to the "possibly" straight man they assume me to be. It is the hardest time of my life.... lockdown is a nightmare - Purple*

The participant compared his experiences of being home in the rural area and being at the student residence on campus and being allowed and affirmed in his sexuality. By aligning themselves with hetero-normative labels of being male or female, all the participants were able to conform to already existing expectations of what it means to be a man/woman within a Nguni hetero-normative context. Who then places these expectations, and what is the criteria of being man and woman in black societies? For Green, who does not cross dress, she did not face any

issues when she was home, but she could not discuss anything about her sexuality because it was a taboo subject.

*If I was coming from a rich family, they would disown me but because we are poor and they sometimes depend on the allowance I get from NFSAS, that could be my only way of staying at home - **Green***

Poverty plays a huge factor in African families, even though the participant is dependent on their funding allowance to assist them and in unfortunate situation as that of participant Green, she shares her funding monthly allowance with her family. One should be aware of the amount (R1700) students receive which is meant to last a month and cater to the students' needs. Because of poverty Green sees a gap to use the fact that she is contributing financially in her family therefore they would be lenient if she wishes to come out. Not working and lack of education seemed to play a factor in homophobia as shared by Green. I questioned why she did not take charge of her current situation and disclose her sexuality. Her response revolved around emphasising the issue of respect for her indigenous culture and her family. The narrative paints a bleak picture of the pervasiveness of heteronormativity in the rural indigenous cultures. It is evident that participants strongly aligned with their home cultures and the foundations of respect, which are a big part of all Nguni culture. Participants were therefore, prepared to compromise their happiness and authenticity to avoid the scrutiny and non-acceptance of their family and home culture. Kekana and Dietrich (2020), found that families' cultural backgrounds and parents' low level of education.

The participants' narratives expressed living a double life as a means of surviving. In terms of their sexual identity, they tended to change everything about their appearance, from the way they dressed, talked and presented themselves when they were at home. Orange emphasised this by saying:

*I've got two prominent behaviours. There is one for res and one that I have for home. I feel much safer with people who actually don't know me than being with my own family and community. My feminine side appears mostly at school - head wrapping, make up and wearing some of my friends' clothes especially when there are events hosted by the SRC, or organised in res my favourite has to be the one by the LGBTQI Forum but at home it's a different story. I'm much more scared of neighbours and community than of my family - **Orange***

Most of my participants shared that whenever they were at home, they behaved in a conservative and anti-homosexual manner, changing their behaviour to suit their parents' and community expectations, similar to what Waldner and Magrader (1999) revealed that individuals adopt strategies to channel through the cultural norms, he claims identity masking. Whereas, being, on campus, where there are events which enables everyone to be free give them a chance to be whoever they want. Pink revealed that he changes his behaviour because his parents were not familiar with, and are against homosexuality. This resulted in the shift in mentality that involved him seeing his home as *someone else's house*. This is because he was not comfortable with living his true self. Furthermore, he revealed that at residence and on campus, his behaviour changed drastically, as illustrated by the following excerpt:

*My whole behaviour changes because I am with people I am comfortable with and living a similar lifestyle - Pink*

This was similar to what Yellow also shared. His narrative showed how many factors played a role in shaping his environment. One such factor was institutions such as churches, which had a large influence on the way participants portrayed themselves in the eyes of their parents.

*Going back home for holidays and even now during lockdown is fun at first because I get to see everyone after a long time, but it is also daunting because it's like I'm having to act out a different me at home. I can say I'm faking or living a double life; only with my sexuality side. I am a butch lesbian. If you have seen one before you would know how we typically look - our fashion sense and our vibe generally. At campus, everything is cool - I'm relaxed in my jeans and all. But at home, aibo (exclaiming) ngiyintombi mina, pants at home for girls are not allowed. Even the Bible says so. So I wear skirts and dresses only. I am not even allowed to wear anything revealing - Yellow*

Francis, (2017); Mnyadi, (2018) and Fokol, (2019) state that tradition and religion does not allow individuals to explore other sexual interest such as gay and lesbian sexual desires. Yellow speaks of having a double life, it goes to reveal the psychological pressure and strain it takes when the student is at home. A home is a space one should be able to be free and find comfort at, however, for Yellow home is where he needs to act out a fake life and live a double life. It is for this reason Msibi and Jagessar (2015) findings reveal that students finds university residences to be home away from home, for both reasons of firstly being physical away from home and secondly the sense of relief and security they enjoy at university space.

A dissimilar experience was shared by Green, who did not experience a lot of issues because she did not have to keep up with any heterosexual social demands, as she did not have much to change about her appearance. For her, it was only a matter of not being open about her sexuality, which she kept to herself. From these extracts above, it shows that individuals' experiences are dependent on the environment they live in, whether or not it is accepting or affirming of non-normative sexual identities

The need to pursue a heterosexual identity, as it is the only accepted sexual identity results in gays and lesbians suppressing their authentic self. This is due to the social conditioning for all to embrace a heterosexual identity. Furthermore, it has an immediate impact on the formation of a stable visible gay or lesbian sexual identity in a normative environment such as the university. One may wonder and question how people hailing from similar intolerant environment studying at the same permissive environments. How is it then that they experience universities as safe, welcoming and perceived as *home away from home* spaces? Could it be of other contributing factors or they perceive the university differently. Furthermore, it is a result clubs, societies and academic modules which are available to university students, which educate and challenge the traditional, normative narrative that they have learnt and internalised.

When I was planning for this study (early 2019), corona virus had not been an issue of concern in South Africa as it was in other countries such as China and Korea. However, this changed when there was the first case, and many safety precautions had to be taken (as from March 2020). Thereafter, the country was under lockdown from 26<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 for 21 days, which ended up being extended, with different levels attached to the lockdown, as the infection rate of the virus heightened or as it was easing off slightly. It was then fitting to ask participants how they were surviving and experiencing being at home for such a long period of time without having had the chance to mentally prepare for it. From the repeated use of the words *pretend, hide and difficult*, it is apparent that participants were facing a difficult time adjusting to the 'new normal'. Having to spend more days at home, facing possible rejection, pretence and not fitting in, forced participants to try to keep their sexual identities secret. Below are extracts from our conversations:

*At first, I thought 21 days was nothing. I can suck it up till we are safe to return to res, but it has been nothing but the worse for me. Even now doing this interview, I am doing it in secret. I feel like I am suffocating as each day passes and I am in this house and*

*this rural area. Worse of all, I don't have any friends around. I am always locked up in the house. I am living a fake life and pretending - Pink*

*Lockdown has put a lot of things into perspective. I have been thinking and questioning my sexual identity. It is then I get to affirm that I am indeed gay but I can't act gay. I really don't know why I am not an essential student (giggles). I could be at res living my best life right now. Corona has not just been a virus, but it has been a thief robbing me of my life. I have to hide my identity, put on this straight face and identity. My only escape is through my phone and social media - **Green***

*Ngibhekene nengwadla oe (I am facing a huge problem). Having to juggle online learning, which is a pandemic on its own (giggle), but also I have to face my family worse because I went to visit my grandparents' home so it like double stress. Waking up every day to fulfil my duties as a man or the boy child who is visiting would act - every day I need to do the yard and sometimes, ngiyalusa (herd) which is the biggest part of my rural life, and I hate it. So, I would say that Corona and lockdown has affected me negatively. It's like I'm not in my normal, I'm boxed and living a half-life - **Orange***

*It has really been a difficult time for me. I have thought of coming out to them because I can sense that they have noticed some things - the way I walk, dress and sometimes speak gives it away but I try by all means to hide it from my family. I really hope this will pass soon. I know I will not be in school forever, but once I graduate and get a job, I will make sure I live far away from home so that they will not have to see me every day, because it will bring them pain. But I will visit - **Purple***

Lockdown was emotionally draining for the participants as they had to adjust to their own experiences of what is being called the “new norm”. Lockdown was imposed on participants without giving them any time or chance of emotional preparation for their mental stability and sexuality. Participants did not anticipate having to be home for such a long time. It was clear that they only thought it would be 21 days which is equivalent to the amount of time they usually spend at home during university holidays. Green personified the corona virus as a *thief* robbing her of her life. Clearly, she perceived that being lesbian was not simply a part of her identity, but that it constituted much more than that. She saw it as her life, she felt whole when she was living freely and openly as a lesbian at university. For Purple, however, he had thoughts of coming out, because he was finding it too stressful to keep up the façade of being straight.

This lockdown situation had made him consider his future plans and how he would navigate his sexual identity in the future. But central to this consideration remained his concern for his family's reputation, highlighting that participants were more than likely to still put up a show in line with the expectations of normativity ahead of their authentic selves, for the sake of their family and community.

Through our conversations on comparing being at university and at home, participants revealed that they were members of the LGBT forum and Chasu Peer educators, where they had found and created bonds with people of similar sexual traits and interests, where they felt safe to be their authentic selves.

#### **5.4.2 Plans to come out**

The conversation about coming out was a difficult one and was clearly undertaken with a heavy heart on the part of participants. The understanding and the expected experience of coming out differed from one individual to another due to various choices and reasons such as specific and unique backgrounds, self-choice and environmental circumstances. During the interviews and the discussion of when and how they anticipated coming out, Pink and Orange shared a similar response that they would do it when they were independent, working and having a place of their own. Purple and Green revealed that they would not disclose by simply admitting to being gay or lesbian, but they planned to bring their sexual partners and introduce them to the family, however, not anytime soon. The participants were clear that their identity had strong ties to their tradition statement such as *ngiyindoda yomZulu* (I am a Zulu man) and *njenge ntombazane* (as a girl) tying in with the expectation to live according to cultural norms associated with traditional normative gendered roles imposed by their indigenous culture.

Green and Pink had had thoughts of coming out during lockdown because they felt suffocated by being isolated by their families. The noted the pressure they were experiencing with regard to online university work that made them consider wanting to ease the stress by coming out. However, their fear of homelessness, betrayal and rejection was a huge deterrent to them actually following through on coming out.

*I'm just tired of having to put on a show every day. I have no one to visit. I don't have any friends around. The only thing I get to express myself in is my cellphone, but even on my cellphone. I need to be careful where I leave it because there are pictures and conversations that could put my life in danger. So, I plan on coming out when I'm working and have a place of my own - Pink*

*Because I have been home for a very long time, sometimes I try to gather the strength to come out but everyday table conversation with my family makes me regret even thinking about it. I would lose what is important to me but I would gain my freedom. Worse, I could be homeless. My family is very family orientated. My grandmother got married at the age of 16, my mother at the age of 18 before she could finish her matric and she had her first child later that year. Because this is a norm in my family and community, it has been done for many generations, it is therefore, seen fit that I should be thinking about settling down with a husband and having children. When I chose to go further with my studies so I could take my family from poverty, it was never really supported by everyone but my mother gave me the support I needed, but making sure that I need to get educated and find a good husband. Little does she know I'm looking for a good wife (giggles). For me to actually be free from all of this pressure and expectation, I need to have money so that I can be able to provide for my family. The moment I get a job, I will tell them because I would have a place of my own, my money basically. I'll be selfish at the same time I'll be free and happy - **Orange***

*I would never come out before I could be financial independent. If I did it now, they would beat me up till I become straight for them. But I have plans of coming out by bringing my partner home to introduce him - **Purple***

From the above narrative excerpts, there were varying feelings towards the possibilities of coming out, but all of them planned on coming out at some stage regardless of the risk of being beaten, rendered homeless and being rejected by their families. Students face resentment towards being at home for a longer period, particularly Pink, Orange and Purple stresses on employment. Orange insist on securing a stable future to be independent so that when she comes out to his family he will have place of his own however he will not turn his back on the family as he is aware of the financial inconsistency the family is facing. The underlying matter is the large extent that these homosexuals have become prisoners in their own homes, with little or no sense of belonging.

Furthermore, the participants felt that culture/tradition and religion should accept the diverse or non-normative sexualities through unlearning old traditions and accepting that culture and traditions change with time. D'Augelli (1997) contends that once homosexuals disclose their sexuality status they are often rejected because of their difference; they are excluded from many activities taking, place in their own communities; discriminated against, prejudiced, victimized,

harassed and often find themselves being the targets of violence. Shared by Purple “*they would beat me up till I become straight for them*” reveals how they have internalized being targets of violent and oppression.

In addition to this, keeping on the point of context being non-conducive to a homosexuals’ comfortable existence, and our living in South Africa. Orange highlights the importance of educating people about gay identity. He had the following to say:

*I feel that we need to educate our parents about homosexuality and speak openly about it without shame or fear. When the episode of Generations that you sent was aired on tv, my family had a lot to comment on, none of which were positive and I could see the hatred and disgust on their face. Even though the flash backs of this day are not clearly but My father’s comment was very loud and clear, he said lezinja zidinga ukushawa, he then spat on the floor. I was very young at the time but ngafunga that I will never tell my family about my sexuality- Orange*

The extract above demonstrate that the right of gays and lesbians are not supported within the community, a fact which this participant is aware of, but nevertheless makes explicit t the desire to see this change. Educating and raising an awareness towards sexuality and different forms of expressing it, the origins and living with children who is part of the LGBT community is crucial. This will facilitate the coming out process being less daunting. From the images and videos shared with the participants from local soap opera, the participants commented that it brought about exposure, and negative reactions which influenced their choice of non-disclosure. It must be noted that Epprecht (2004) proffers that most traditional societies in Africa believe that homosexuality pollutes their countries and misfortunes such as droughts, hunger and disease are often blamed on homosexuality. This has subsequently contributed to situations where individual gays and lesbians have been subjected to extensive violence. Being treated in this manner in one’s own community, and indeed in one's own home, would naturally result in one experiencing feelings of displacement

The choice to come out is overridden by fear of displacement and loosing family because they needed to fulfill duties, and they were forced to live hidden/double lives in the name of protecting the family name, reputation and cultural beliefs. Negotiating and navigating sexuality is not only complicated but requires individuals’ autonomy over their lives. The importance of protecting culture and family over individual lived experiences were the main reasons why participants experienced dissonance and unease about their authentic non-

normative sexual identities from the time they were growing up to date (including lockdown). The findings of Butler, Alpanan, Strumpher and Astbury (2003) which studied the coming out narratives of 18 gay and lesbian South African youth reveal that the context in which homosexual youth find themselves is often one which makes the experience a difficult one.

#### ***5.4.3 Cultural beliefs of non-normative sexualities***

Participants felt culture/tradition (including religion) played an important role in their lives, directly and/or indirectly. All of the participants revealed that they belonged to the African tradition/culture, three being Zulu and one a combination of Zulu and Swati. Culture placed emphasis on kindness, love and respect; and also put great emphasis on cultural norms and expectations of society. Consistent with literature, most participants agreed that the African culture was least accepting of homosexuality. Green expressed being happy living her sexual identity in secret and away from public scrutiny at home. Like all of the participants, she felt she did not need to negotiate her identities with tradition, church or family. They felt they could be there without being overt about their identities. Old people, like the grandparents most participants grew up with, used old theories and beliefs to oppress and discriminate against homosexuality as part of promoting heteronormativity.

These interpretations contributed to a justification of discrimination and violence against anyone who related to LGBTI identities. Homophobic attitudes such as the corrective rape of lesbians were seen as a way of reinforcing heteronormativity. Zulu culture played an important role, not only in giving them a sense of identity and pride, but also in fostering their well-being and courage in respect of their sexuality journeys and in general life. It revealed the complex realities of the participants, as the very tradition and culture which they belonged to and felt a part of, had been used to deny their personal rights related to sexual diversity and enforce the silence around alternative experiences of gender and sexuality.

Like most Nguni cultures, the Zulu culture as shared by most participants is experienced as the most rigid and inflexible and least accepting of gays and lesbians. Group identification and social identity development for gays and lesbians are synonymous with negative characteristics and inferior social status. Orange expressed:

*We Oe (slang for friend/acquaintance) at home ubaba (dad) holds strong cultural values you would swear wayephila noShaka (he lived during the ancient times of the King Shaka Zulu). He makes me slaughter the cow and initiate the conversations with*

*the ancestors because that is the job of the eldest son, Ngaze ngalithwala idombolo jehova!! (this is too much my God) - Orange*

One participant had a similar experience when I sent the wedding clips of Somizi and Mohale (famous gay couple) traditional wedding, and asked how they felt about this and how their families' would/they respond (ed) or react (ed) to this wedding. Green said:

*Hehehe (giggle for a few seconds) that would have never happened in my area, a total abomination and disgrace to the Swati and Zulu culture. For me personally, I would love to see or even have a traditional wedding but I know my family very well, they would not fall for it. Even raising the idea of having a lesbian wedding, worse a traditional one for that matter. Ubani ozolobola, inyongo izothelwa bani (who will pay lobola and who would perform the traditional duties prior to the actual wedding). I could tell from their negative reaction from watching that wedding that they found it to be disturbing and somehow entertaining because it on t.v, my sister said basibukisa amanyala (they making watch nonsense) – Green*

In the African culture such as the Zulu culture, marriage is prioritised and it is seen as the union between a man and a woman, despite the definition of marriage given by the Civil Union Act of 2006, which includes two people of the same sex. Even though same sex marriage is recognised legally, traditionally it is still a taboo subject in most African communities. However, the first gay Zulu wedding of Thoba Sithole and Tshepo Modisane provided us with the first image of the possibilities of reconciling cultural beliefs and homosexual identities (refer to Chapter two for the full review of the wedding).

Some people like Pink, felt that their identity was strongly aligned with their traditional background. Ancestors provided them with protection and identity.

*I am gay but I am also a man, a Zulu man, so culture is part of my identity. I was introduced to my ancestors ngenzelwa imbeleko (introduction to the ancestors) I cannot turn a blind eye to it. Amadlozi azongifulathela (they will turn their back on me). When I go back to school ubaba ushisa impepho acele kubantu abadala ukuth bangivikele (when I leave home for school, my father burns the incense for the ancestors to guide and protect me) – Pink*

A dissimilar view was shared by Purple on the issue of culture and tradition and how she navigated her sexuality.

*I really do not care about tradition, I just respect my grandparent and my family and follow the rules as I got. I would never want to make them a laughing stock of my community – Purple*

Orange was the only participant who did not acknowledge with culture having any impact on his identity, but recognised that he his family was strongly aligned to culture and tradition. He therefore, respected the rules set by his grandparent which were based/founded upon culture and tradition.

*Yes, it is un-African because according to traditions or culture which are set for us, especially when it comes to marriage, we are not recognised by our ancestors. Homosexuality is not recognised. We fail to bear children. However, we amend new breeds of African marriages for example, I as a versatile bottom when I get married I will pay lobola. This practice is old but it is part of my culture but we need to explain that we can't birth children and there is no woman we both males. Now that un-African, that is when we get brutal slurs. Secondly, the issue of whose surname will one use, and our marriages are not recognised by African tradition as the law - **Orange***

*In my Swati culture, it is a disgrace and taboo for two women to marry each other. It is believed that a woman cannot be the head of the family, who will protect and provide for the family. There is no regard for women in the Swati and Xhosa tradition, ikhaya lihloiswa ngenxa yendoda,. That is why I almost got married at such a young age - **Green***

From the above narrative excerpts, it was apparent that patriarchy played a huge role in maintaining cultural beliefs, heterosexism and homosexuality; and participants were already thinking about alternatives of incorporating culture into their non-heteronormative identity. Furthermore, they felt that they needed to educate the older generation about the dynamics of homosexual relations. Green touched on an important issue of respect when she stated that a household cannot be respected in the community if there was no male figure. Participants have resulted in adopting a heterosexual persona/identity in environments which not accepting and allowing for the exploration of sexual desires

## **5.5.Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to present the findings from the narratives in relation to the research objectives. In doing so, a detailed description of how participants navigated their gay

and lesbian sexuality between university and their homes in the rural area was presented. What was evident was that, in line with the literature, many participants had to juggle their sexuality between these two environments because homosexuality was not welcomed in the rural area. Participants expressed that they lived their sexual identities in secrecy when they went home but when they were at the university, they were free to express themselves fully and authentically. These key findings are analysed in the following chapter.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **6.1. Introduction**

The concluding chapter provides a brief summary of the study and looks back at the objectives of the study in order to evaluate if they have been met. It is of importance for this chapter to remind the reader of what the title and objectives of the study were and thereafter, the findings. The title of this research study is: Navigating the complexities of gay and lesbian sexual identities among rural African university students: A narrative inquiry. The study was guided by the following objectives: to investigate the experiences of gay and lesbian African university students from the rural areas; to investigate how these experiences impact on the formation of their identity; and to investigate how they navigate the complexities of these identities.

The first objective focuses on gathering information that relates to participants' backgrounds and their lived experiences in their different living spaces. The second objective aimed at finding how their experiences shaped, impacted and influenced their sexual identity formation. Lastly, the third objective aimed to find out how they navigated their non-normative identities in environments that are intolerant towards homosexuality. This study revealed information on possible disclosure, popularly referred to as coming out. This was seen from the responses that participants shared on their anticipations, time frames and plans.

The themes that emerged from these narratives confirmed much of the literature that problematises the relationship between sexuality, society and lived experiences. From the conversational interviews, it was clear that tradition promoted and maintained normative behaviour and culture, with no room for deviation. Inherent to each narrative, was the sense that the participants were involved in the normality that is set out with no option of deviation on their part. It is for this reason that participants found the university institution accommodative and accepting of the LGBTQI community.

This study discusses complexities around the navigation of sexual identities of gays and lesbians in contexts/environments that are not accommodating or accepting of their authentic sexual identities. Chapter six discusses us with the findings based on the narratives shared by the participants in this research endeavour.

## **6.2. Theme 1: experiences of gay and lesbian African university students from the rural areas.**

The narrative analysis approach used in this study showed that what was common to all participants' experiences is the effects and results of the socialisation process. According to Harro (2000), socialisation begins from the time one is born. This idea was emphasised when the participants revealed having grown up in significantly rural environments, with grandparents, parents and other extended family members, and had been taught how to be and who to become as members of a larger society. They were taught roles and socialised into gendered roles from an early age. To maintain the status quo, Harro (2000) observes that individuals are socialised by powerful agents in the communities to conform to the roles, attitudes and behaviours which are aligned with community expectations. Kekana and Dietrich (2020) and Daniels, Struther, Maleke, Catabay, Lane, McIntyre and Coates (2019) emphasise the relationship of geographies and sexual identities, as they find that individuals' homosexual identities tend to be more prominent in urban areas. The families in the participants' stories were not presented as people who were open to change or to accepting any other sexualities apart from heterosexuality. Instead, they appeared to perpetuate the victimisation of homosexuals which is fuelled by ongoing prejudices such as the general attitude that tends to be complacent with the ill-treatment of homosexuals, merely because of their sexual orientation. This observation is in line with Ben-Ari, Gerstel, Faraios and Herdt, as cited by Matthew and Coene (1998), who postulate that when homosexual family members are discovered, they experience rejection, discrimination and are disowned by family members.

The way participants were socialised impacted and continued to impact the way they behaved and projected their sexuality. This study shows that most of the parents and community members did not respond in a positive, inclusive manner towards homosexuality. The participants had subconsciously internalised this behaviour of non-acceptance of homosexuality. Most importantly, the participants have been brought up to be active members in their community, by simply fitting into the already existing societal profile and expectations. Kekana and Dietrich (2020) found that families' cultural backgrounds and parents' low level of education inhibit homosexuals from disclosing their sexual orientations to their parents. This concurs with Tatum's (2000) theory on identity, which contributed to the theoretical work of this study. Tatum (2000) argues that there are factors which contribute to one's identity, and the societal mirror in which we shape our image in.

This study found being gay or lesbian as just one part of their identity, but was the one which most people found disturbing. Tatum (2000) posits that identity is complex and multidimensional. Apart from being gay or lesbian, these participants were black and already open to prejudice. Secondly, some were women, and in African countries, women are given an inferior social position which makes them vulnerable to oppression. The experiences of gay participants showed that, from a young age, they had been told to behave in a masculine manner and project their manhood through doing things like outdoor home chores and fulfilling the expectations of being a man.

Under this theme what was prevalent was the issue of exploring confusion and realisation of difference in identity. The participants challenged the norms of how to be normal or conformity to heteronormative behaviour, acceptable and appropriate for the family and community. At an early age, the participants began to question their feelings. In doing that, they had to stretch out beyond learned norms to find out what it is that they were feeling, whether or not it was acceptable, and whether members in their age group were going through a similar stage. Renold (2005) reports that people call for the need to reinstate the innocence of all children because, knowing your sexuality as a child is seen as a sign of sexually abused children. Furthermore, there is a belief that children should not be aware or know anything about sexuality. Participants were dependent on their peers and social media for exploring non-normative sexual identities and behaviours but kept this a secret because they were already aware of the reaction they would receive if it was known by their family or the community at large. This brought about the subconscious identification of 'other' through the mental process of evaluating themselves in relation to their community. What was evident was the lack of role models in the rural areas for the participants to identify with. What was principal was the ideology of respect, respect for their culture and family, and the brutality that comes with having what is believed to be a deviant westernised identity. The participants witnessed disgust shown by family towards gays and lesbians on television

One would expect participants to face the same problems as those they experience in the rural areas they move to university. However, participants shared that they had to observe and associate themselves with people who share the same values as them. Jagerssar and Msibi (2015) observed university residences to be homes away from home, and this is what was shared by the participants - that they felt safe with people who were not their families. This was because there are fewer societal expectations and pressures, due to the majority of students being on their own self-discovery journeys. In the university, there was little exposure to

prejudice as students had been taught about diversity (even though some are reluctant). In the university also, there were people and organisations such as Chasu, the LGBTQI Forum, and the Student Representative Council who protected the rights of every student. The university was open, accepting and inclusive (documented on the student code of conduct) of everyone regardless of their sexual identity. Participants reported being more expressive of their sexuality when they were a university - the lesbian participants played soccer and lived with their girlfriends, and the gay participants cross dressed most of the time and were openly in touch with their feminine side.

### **6.3. Theme 2: Impact of experiences on identity formation**

Participants positioned their childhood and cultural experiences as being valid reasons for identity formation and the conflict that comes with it.

These experiences included the games they played when they were growing up, their friends both from their homes and university, the television programmes they watched, clubs and societies they were part of, the roles given to them at home and at university, and their life goals. Some of the experiences highlighted by the participants were significant events which happened in their childhood whilst exploring they were exploring their sexual identities. In addition, they were influenced by the values and attitudes of that community or institution. It was found that the university environment was affirming and welcoming to diverse and multiple sexualities with no or little judgement and prejudice, whereas the traditional rural communities the participants came from were not welcoming and, to some extent, homosexuality was not spoken about because it was seen as condoning it

What participants revealed was that, universities had programmes planned out by the SRC and Department of student residence, club and societies, and modules which educated every student coming from the urban and rural areas. These programmes (Chasu and the LGBTQI Forum) and relevant social justice modules allowed everyone to feel free. Student residences had support systems to enable the emotional and psychological well-being of all. If one felt that they were not comfortable in a particular residence, they were able to move to any other residence of their choice and be with people who understood them.

In addition, the participants had grown to understand, through socialisation, that they were African, and therefore, should uphold the values and morals of being an African man or woman. Participants understood the expectations they had to fulfil in the community and in the family. They had seen the ill-treatment people received if they were suspected of being homosexual

and so, hiding their authentic sexual identities gave them an opportunity to be accepted as valuable members of their family and community.

#### **6.4. Theme 3: Navigating non-normative identities in predominantly heteronormative environments**

The narratives of participants revealed how they navigated their sexual identities in predominantly heterosexual environments. To navigate their sexuality, gays and lesbians came up with different strategies to balance out their lives in heteronormative environments. These strategies included:

- **Withdrawing:** This means that when participants were at home, they withdraw from their families and community emotionally and physically, creating an invisible barrier to block their emotions as a strategy towards maintaining their wellbeing.
- **Secrecy:** The participants kept one part of their identity a secret, which they did by not communicating issues relating to sexual relationships in an effort to avoid the attention and expectations created by families and society. There are many reasons why people keep secrets. In this study, participants hid their identity to protect themselves from public scrutiny and social consequences. There are many benefits of keeping a sexual identity a secret and living a double life; such as avoiding disapproval, not being banished from their community, and not being disowned by their family. Prior research has shown that secrecy is associated with various negative outcomes such as emotional distress and dissatisfaction with relationships with friends, family and community members. Studies by Chaudoir and Quinn (2010) reveal an understanding of how living in secrecy affects individuals' psychological well-being and health, where individuals concealed stigmatised identities such as sexual orientation. Sexual identity and sexual orientation are the most common secrets individuals keep, despite the theories of sexual development placing disclosure of this secret as a vital and necessary first step toward healthy sexual development.
- **Self-destructive behaviours:** The most extreme length participants went to in an effort to cope with societal pressure to conform to heteronormative identities, was to involve themselves in drug taking (which could easily lead to chemical dependency) and attempting suicide.

- Pretence and identity masking: All participants revealed pretence and identity masking as one of the best strategies they used to navigate their complex sexual identities. This strategy is one which was most emotionally draining for participants, because they had to decide and prepare themselves psychologically and physically. From the moment they entered the gate at home, they were no longer the person they are when they were at university, but a person who represents societal images and expectations of the community they come from. With this, comes the burden of having to change or switch from looking and sounding gay or lesbian. Participants' narratives suggest that gays use a lot of gestures, hand movements as well as exaggerated expressions, which are said to be gay or lesbian codes. This is similar to what was observed by Ntuli (2009) while looking at the gay sub-culture and their lifestyle as perceived by the general society. This study found that when participants went home, they changed the way they dressed, walked, talked, the pitch of their tone, and their likes and dislikes in an attempt to align with the community's norms, standards and expectations. Identity masking leaves individuals trying to navigate their way through self-denial, rejection, love and the burden of guilt.

This study shows that identity can take various forms depending on the context and the environment in which they find themselves. This means that identity and gender should not be seen as fixed attributes in a person, but rather, as Butler (1990) suggests, gender should be perceived as a fluid variable which shifts and changes. Similarly, the participants navigated their identity in different settings as part of fitting in and calculating the risk of negative reception if they lived their gay or lesbian identities openly. The environment and situation either allows or forbids non-normative identities. This study revealed that it was difficult for most communities and families to accept gays and lesbians; making the coming out process a difficult one to even contemplate.

All participants revealed being aware of their sexual differences as compared to their peers at a very young age although they only started living their gay or lesbian life later away from home. Participants' narratives highlighted that they planned on coming out, however, not under their parents' guardianship. They choose to rather deny their true/authentic life as a gay or lesbian, which resonates with what Mbatha (2012) points out, that fear is the cause of non-disclosure and culture. As participants deny their true identity, they try to function as heterosexual, consequently conforming to accepted norms and behaviours in the community. By choosing to deny and pretend to be someone other than their true identity, they inevitably open themselves

to internal struggles. The participants anticipated the process of coming out to be a challenging and difficult one hence, they wished to do it when they were financially independent and not staying at home. On the one hand, this process could be beneficial because it would put an end to the draining lies and pretence the participants were living under; but on the other hand, it could brew a negative response from parents. In referring to the negative responses or attitudes by parents and the community towards gays and lesbians, the participants expressed significant resilience in affirming their own positionality and identity. Hence, the strong statement “I was born gay or lesbian.”

### **6.5 Effect of lockdown**

The ongoing pandemic has had a significant impact on the LGBTQI community. The stretched-out effects of lockdown are having a big impact on all people, especially those who were already experiencing deep systemic inequality. Lesbians and gays faced a myriad of challenges during lockdown due to COVID-19, namely: not having social outlets, support systems for mental health issues and stress, and being subject to a high risk of domestic violence. This study found that, on an average and normal year, students spent most of their time at university compared to being at home, especially living in student accommodation or private accommodation. The participants usually went home as infrequently as possible, normally visiting their rural homes during university holidays which were normally 2 or 3 months. However, in 2020, they were forced to be at home during lockdown (quarantine) for more than five months, having to live with parents who disagreed with the existence of homosexuals. As a result, participants had thoughts of coming out but the fear of homelessness influenced their choice not to come out whilst in self-isolation with their families. Therefore, the participants were vulnerable to depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, loneliness, isolation and other mental health issues due to the suppression of their authentic feelings and the identity crisis they found themselves in. Privacy was also seen to be one issue that participants struggled with, as in a rural family home, the concept of privacy hardly existed. It was difficult for participants to find moments of privacy and ability to live out their own identity because there were house chores to be done and university work to do. Participants reported feeling robbed of their authentic lives and identities.

### **6.6. Recommendations**

In the light of the discussion, the following points are suggested as recommendations:

Firstly, there is need for educational programmes on homosexuality which would specifically target the rural areas. These programmes should involve and be headed by dominant members of the community such as the Chiefs, Izinduna and both dominant men and women (dominant in the essence that they are nurturers and pass on indigenous knowledge during the early stages of socialisation) of the community. Educating these dominant community members would have greater influence and impact on the community because it would disrupt, challenge and change the existing negative attitudes towards the LGBTQI community. These programmes should include education about human rights, the history of African sexualities and homophobia. This could be done by elders in the community who hold indigenous knowledge about the past to share, without omitting information about the existence of homosexuality in Africa. They should share information with others because people see it as something new and a western imposition to go against African tradition, beliefs and values. This would educate and normalise different kinds of sexualities.

Secondly, gays and lesbians should be given a safe platform to encourage other members of the LGBT to express their fears and experiences of harsh treatment, and to communicate their same sex relations without fear. These platforms should be done in public spaces where community members are invited to watch, listen and be given an opportunity to ask questions for clarity. These dialogues will hopefully serve to decrease the abuse that is targeted towards gays and lesbians because people would be educated and encouraged to be more welcoming and tolerant towards gays and lesbians. Such dialogues could also create awareness that nothing can change homosexuality into heterosexuality.

Thirdly, it is evident that homosexuality does exist in rural or traditional societies because the participants were from the rural areas and they identified as either gay or lesbian, despite them not disclosing their sexuality to their family or members of the community. Education on sexuality and different types of sexualities in churches, initiation schools and lower institutions such as primary schools is needed and should be implemented and adopted by the policies which guide these institutions.

For future research I recommend that:

- researchers investigate the psychological well-being of gay and lesbian students who live a double life.
- researchers investigate the attitudes of parents who are against gays and lesbians when they have children who are either gay or lesbian.

## 6.7. Limitations experienced in this study and of the study itself

- One of the major obstacles faced in this research was the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown which resulted in changing the process of generating data, from face-to-face interviews to conducting telephonic interviews. Despite my attempts to keep the process of data generation as effective as possible, telephonic interviews may have made it difficult to get the full stories and meanings of participants, because of the quality of the audio from participants, background noise and other disturbances. I did however, made every effort to be clear in my prompt questions and to ask participants to seek clarity when needed, to minimise the possible negative effects of not meeting participants on a face-to-face basis. Furthermore, I did experience some difficulty scheduling telephonic conversations because participants were always busy with their schoolwork and household chores. I eventually found the time for these telephone conversations, but this challenge had a ripple-effect on the next steps in the process of this research journey, delaying my initial dates for generating the data, analysis and writing up the dissertation.
- The findings cannot be generalised to all LGBTQI members. Due to the small sample size, it would be unrealistic to expect findings to apply to *all* gay and lesbian individuals across the globe. Despite not being able to describe global populations nor make universal theoretical claims, the findings could very well be applied to most black gay and lesbian South Africans, as indigenous beliefs tend to be similar within all black South African ethnic and cultural groups.
- The findings may not be transferred across different contexts such as urban areas or townships as issues regarding LGBTQI are seen and handled differently in these different spaces.

The findings are however, relevant to anyone from the same situation and background as my participants. These findings provide an opportunity for the voices of the gay and lesbian participants to be heard, and hopefully provide an opportunity to educate and increase awareness, acceptance and tolerance of their differences and “otherness”. Furthermore, the narratives of these participants highlight the complexities of sexual identities of students coming from rural areas, and hopefully serve to pave a way forward in challenging the existing stereotypes towards gays and lesbians in the rural areas.

## **6.8 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the results of the study were discussed in relation to the literature and theories and literature previously presented. Some of the findings were supported by existing research while other findings were relatively novel, thus contributing to the body of work around gay and lesbian identity formation. This chapter has suggested recommendations on how to make rural communities aware of the various sexualities and also made recommendations for future studies. It presented the limitations that were faced during this study and the limitations of the study in general.

I undertook this study with the aim to gain more insight into the lived experiences of gays and lesbians and gauge the impact that their everyday experiences have on their identities. Through conducting this research, I came to a much deeper understanding of the complexities of how my participants navigated their gay and lesbian identities in heteronormative environments. I had never quite understood the misery my gay and lesbian university student friends experienced at the prospect of going home to the rural areas and communities, but since undertaking this study, I have a much clearer understanding of the challenges they face. I have developed much more empathy for such students, who have to navigate between their authentic homosexual attractions and identities and the unyielding prejudice, discrimination and oppression of heteronormative environments. It is my sincere hope that the dissemination of these findings will go some way towards building awareness in communities about the negative and cruel effects of discrimination and ‘othering’, and sowing seeds of compassion, understanding, acceptance and inclusion.

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## Appendix A: Informed consent

### **INFORMED CONSENT LETTERS TO PARTICIPANTS**

Private Bag X 03  
1 Marianhill Road  
Ukzn Edgewood Campus  
Beechwood Res. Room 26  
26 October 2019

Dear Participant

#### **INFORMED CONSENT LETTER**

My name is *Nonjabulo N. Makhowane*. I am currently pursuing my Master's degree at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood Campus, of South Africa. I am interested in exploring the experiences of gay and lesbian students who come the rural areas where homosexuality is a taboo. The rural context is characterized by wide factors and challenges, hence students in this context are not exposed to modern way of living whilst in the rural area, however, coming to pursue a qualification in the urban area, students are exposed and are free to act how they desire. Therefore, the title of my study is: *Navigating the complexities of gay and lesbian sexual identity among rural African university students: a narrate inquiry*.

As a researcher, I will like to use this letter to request you to be part of my planned study as a participant so that I can engage you in an in-depth discussion as to the experiences that you faced as either gay/lesbian at the university. I will like to further assure you that your participation in the study will be guided by the following:

- Your confidentiality is guaranteed as your inputs will not be attributed to you in person, but reported only as a population member opinion.
- The interview session would be done twice and each may last for about 1 hour but may be split depending on your preference.
- Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research only.
- Data will be stored in secure storage and destroyed after 5 years.

- You have a choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research if you deem it necessary. You will not be penalised for taking such an action.
- The research aims at understanding the experiences or narratives as a gay or lesbian student coming from the rural area where homosexuality is a taboo.
- Your involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved.
- If you are willing to be interviewed, please indicate (by ticking as applicable) whether you are willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

	willing	Not willing
Audio equipment		

Should you require further information about the study, you can reach me on the following contacts:

Email: [214553533@stu.ukzn.ac.za](mailto:214553533@stu.ukzn.ac.za)

██████████

My supervisor is Dr A. D'mant. She is located at the School of Education, Edgewood campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Dr A. D'amant can be contacted on either ██████████ ██████████. Should you decide to contact her via email, she can be reached at; [damant@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:damant@ukzn.ac.za).

The following contacts can also be used to reach the Research office of the University of KwaZulu-Natal for further information about the study:

HSSREC Research Office,

Tel: 031 260 4557 E-mail: [Hssrec@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:Hssrec@ukzn.ac.za)

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

Nonjabulo N. Makhowane

**DECLARATION BY PARTICIPANTS**

I..... (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participate in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I deem it necessary and agree the interview session be recorded:

	willing	Not willing
Audio equipment		

**SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT**

**DATE**

.....

.....

**Thank you so much for your contribution to this research project**

## Appendix B- Gate Keepers letter



13 January 2020

Ms Nonjabulo Makhowane (SN 214553533)  
School of Education  
College of Humanities  
Edgewood Campus  
UKZN  
Email: [214553533@stu.ukzn.ac.za](mailto:214553533@stu.ukzn.ac.za)

Dear Ms Makhowane

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) towards your postgraduate studies, provided Ethical clearance has been obtained. We note the title of your research project is:

"Navigating the complexities of gay and lesbian sexual identities among rural African university students: a narrative inquiry."

It is noted that you will be constituting your sample by conducting interviews and/or focus group discussions with students on the Edgewood campus.

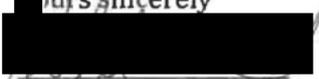
Please ensure that the following appears on your notice/questionnaire: •

Ethical clearance number;

- Research title and details of the research, the researcher and the supervisor;
- Consent form is attached to the notice/questionnaire and to be signed by user before he/she fills in questionnaire; • gatekeepers approval by the Registrar.

You are not authorized to contact staff and students using 'Microsoft Outlook' address book. Identity numbers and email addresses of individuals are not a matter of public record and are protected according to Section 14 of the South African Constitution, as well as the Protection of Public Information Act. For the release of such information over to yourself for research purposes, the University of KwaZulu-Natal will need express consent from the relevant data subjects. Data collected must be treated with due confidentiality and anonymity.

Yours sincerely

  
**DR KE CLELAND** KE CLELAND  
REGISTRAR (ACTING)

---

**Office of the Registrar**

Postal Address: Private Bag Durban, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 8005/2206 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 7824/2204 Email: [registrar@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:registrar@ukzn.ac.za)

Website: [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)

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## Appendix C- Interview schedule

1. Please tell me a little about yourself
2. Take me back a little to your childhood (who you grew up with, the environment you grew up in, and any significant childhood experiences)
3. I believe you are gay/lesbian. Take us back to how you first realised that you were attracted to the same sex

What are some of the challenges you face being a gay/lesbian that you come from the rural area?

4. Please tell me about your experience when you are at home and on campus, would you say the experience is the same or different? If Yes, please elaborate.

Coming out and homophobia

1. What do you understand about being out/closeted?
2. What do you understand by “homophobic”?
3. If you could change anything physical about yourself, what would that be?
4. When did you first feel attracted to someone of the same sex? (age/place/event)
5. When did you realise gay/lesbian/homosexual?

The emotion that accompanied this feeling ? (if several, rank them in order of your experience)

6. Are you “out” as a gay/lesbian person?
  - (a) To self Y/N
  - (b) To siblings Y/N
  - (c) To friends Y/N
  - (d) To parents Y/N
  - (e) General public Y/N
7. What do you think your family’s reaction will be to you disclosing your sexual preference to them?
  - (a) What do you stand to lose?

- (b) What do you stand to gain, by disclosing your sexual preference to your family?
8. Do you plan to disclose your sexual preference to your parents?
9. What do you anticipate their reactions to your disclosure would be?
10. What, do you think, will be their greatest concern/objection to your sexual preference?

#### Social influences

11. To what clubs/movements/ societies do you belong? And how do they help you
12. What was the most inspirational line (advice, quote) you've heard (regarding your life) that moved you forward in terms of your lifestyle/sexual preference?
13. Does religion/culture play an important role in your life?

How?

If it does not, why not?

14. How does your tradition view homosexuality?
15. Which tradition do you perceive as being most accepting of homosexuality?
16. Which culture do you perceive as being least accepting of homosexuality?
17. I understand that, when you go home for vac you have to act a certain way (straight), how differently would you behave to how you behave on campus?

#### Reflecting on being gay/lesbian

18. Differently from what you usually do on campus/ how you would behave and conduct yourself on campus?
19. How have these perceptions influenced your life?
20. Does being gay/lesbian allow you to perceive the world differently than if you were heterosexual?
21. Tell me more about your experience of being out closeted as a black man/female at the university. What makes it easy for you

How do these experience shape the way you look at yourself?

22. How has your sexual identity impacted on the way you view yourself
23. Other comments?

I will use questions to further probe issues and points that I will like to follow up on from something the participants might have said but not elaborated on. Rich data will come from me being flexible and asking further probing questions to get more understanding of the participant's narrative experiences.



Dr Jabulani Sibanda  
Senior Lecturer: English Education  
School of Education  
Tel: (053) 491-0142  
Email: [Jabulani.Sibanda@spu.ac.za](mailto:Jabulani.Sibanda@spu.ac.za)  
Alternate e-mail: [jabusbd@gmail.com](mailto:jabusbd@gmail.com)  
Website: [www.spu.ac.za](http://www.spu.ac.za)

Date: 21.01.2021

## RE: CERTIFICATE OF LANGUAGE EDITING

To whom it may concern

I hereby confirm that I have proof read and edited the following DISSERTATION using Windows 'Tracking' System to reflect my comments and suggested corrections for the author(s) to action:

**Navigating the complexities of gay and lesbian sexual identities among rural African University**

**students: A narrative inquiry.**

### Reference

- Author(s): Nonjabulo Nonkuleko Makhowane
- Affiliation: University of Kwazulu-Natal

Although the greatest care was taken in the editing of this document, the final responsibility for the product rests with the author(s).

Sincerely

[Redacted Signature]

21. 01.2021

SIGNATURE

This certificate confirms the language editing I have done in my personal capacity and not on behalf of SPU

### Turn-it in report

Navigating the complexities of gay and lesbian sexual identities among rural African University students: A narrative inquiry

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researchspace.ukzn.ac.za

Internet Source

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3

Putuke Kekana, Janan Dietrich. "“I don't need to come out; I'm quite obvious”": a qualitative exploration of the relationship between young black gay men and their heterosexual fathers in South Africa", *Journal of Family Studies*, 2017

Publication

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## Ethical clearance



08 July 2020

Miss Nonjabulo Nonkuleko Makhowane (214553533)  
School of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Dear Miss Makhowane,

**Protocol reference number :** HSSREC/00001355/2020

**Project title:** Navigating the complexities of gays and lesbian sexual identities among African university students: A narrative inquiry

**Degree :** Masters

### Approval Notification – Full Committee Reviewed Protocol

With regards to your response received on 06 July 2020 to our letter of 09 June 2020 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) 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.**

**This approval is valid until 09 July 2021.**

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

**All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.**

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/ms

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
UKZN Research Ethics Office Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building  
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000  
Tel: +27 31 260 8350 / 4557 / 3587  
Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics/>

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