CHAPTER 3:   METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methods that have been used in this study to investigate the process of disclosure among a group of black South African homosexuals.

3.1 Research design

This is a qualitative study which made use of a phenomenological approach to gather relevant data. The phenomenological approach concerns itself with understanding and interpreting the meaning that participants give to their everyday lives (De Vos, 1998). The qualitative approach focuses on qualities of human behaviour (Ferreira, Mouton, Puth, Schurink & Schurink, 1988). The aim of such method is not to generalise but to understand and interpret the meanings and intentions that underlie everyday human actions (Bailey, 1987; Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; De Vos, 1998; Ferreira et al., 1988).

Qualitative design deals with data that is primarily verbal and derives meaning from the participant's perspective and also aims to understand meaning that people attach to everyday life (Bless & Higson-Son, 1995; De Vos, 1998). The qualitative approach is appropriate for this study because the data collected and used focuses on the participants' subjective experiences on the process of disclosure and the way they interpret them. Marshall & Rossman (1995) further outline that the qualitative approach to research is uniquely suited to uncovering the unexpected and to exploring new avenues.

3.2 Sampling method

Snowballing, which is a non-probability sampling method was utilised to draw up a sample of participants who provided adequate information for the study. Snowballing sampling is a method whereby the researcher starts with one member of a group who in turn refers the researcher to another member (De Vos, 1998; McClure, 2001). Although the researcher was referred to participants, the researcher purposively selected participants who were perceived to be information rich and appropriate for

the study. The researcher tried to put together a sample of people from diverse backgrounds in order to get more varied data.

3.2.1 Population and sample

The sample was drawn from ACTIVATE, a Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender club at the University of the Witwatersrand (WITS). ACTIVATE was formed by students and staff members as an organisation against homophobia. It was launched in August 1994. The main aim of this organisation is to claim rights and equality as homosexuals and bisexuals demand no special privileges or special rights, but equality (Out on Campus, 1994). ACTIVATE accommodates and welcomes members of all racial groups. Members of ACTIVATE meet to share experiences, offer moral support, socialise and inform members about their rights. This club was chosen to draw a sample from because it is accessible and has a significant membership of black South African homosexuals.

After prospective participants were identified, the researcher approached and invited them to participate in the study. They were presented with the information sheet and were further informed about their right to refuse participation and that participation was voluntary. When they agreed to participate, they were also made aware of their right to withdraw from partaking in the interview. They were further informed that the information that they provided in the interviews would also be treated with confidentiality; they were not required to disclose their identifying details. Finally, they were presented with consent forms for their participation and for the audio tape recording that they signed to give their consent.

The sample consisted of six (6) black South African male participants between the ages of eighteen (18) and twenty-five (25) who are WITS students. All participants have disclosed their homosexual orientation, four (4) have fully disclosed and two (2) have partially disclosed. Full disclosure is a type of disclosure which involves disclosing one's sexual orientation to everyone around the person. Whereas in partial

disclosure, one only discloses to a certain group of people that one feels comfortable with.

3.3 Data collection method

Data was collected using face-to-face individual interview schedule. According to Ferreira at al. (1988), interviewing is the most important data collection instrument. The interviews were semi-structured, that is, a list of questions and issues to be discussed was prepared prior to the interview. Semi-structured interviewing gave room for probing for clarification and further discussion of important and relevant issues that arose during the interviews. Where necessary, questions were elaborated to suit a particular participant. Face-to-face interview enabled the researcher to read the non-verbal communication and reactions, which proved to be helpful in the analysis of data. The interviews were audio taped and later transcribed.

Bogdan & Taylor (1975) listed acceptance and understanding as part of the basic principles of unstructured interviewing. This proved to be a valuable aspect in rapport building between the researcher and the participants as it was evident that some of the participants seemed encouraged by the researcher's non-judgmental attitude towards them. At the same time the researcher was cautious of the emotional involvement that could " affect the validity and the reliability of the data" (Ferreira, et al., 1988: 147). Bogdan & Taylor (1975) add that it is the interviewer's responsibility to create an atmosphere in which participants will feel comfortable enough to talk freely and openly. This was achieved by allowing participants to take part in choosing an appropriate and conducive venue for the interviews.

3.4 Data analysis method

Results were analysed using the thematic content analysis method. Ezzy (2000) describes this method of data analysis as a way of analysing data by organising it into categories on the basis of themes, concepts or similar features. The procedures employed are primarily designed to reduce and categorise large quantities of data into

more meaningful units for interpretation (Singleton, 1997). The steps used in developing themes were informed by Marshall & Rossman (1989) in De Vos (1998) and included the following procedures:

Organising data:

The transcribed data was repetitively read through for the researcher to be familiar with the data.

Generating categories, themes and patterns:

This is a stage that required creative and analytical thinking. The researcher then identified the most important themes, recurring ideas, and patterns of belief, which assisted with the integration of the results. The process of category generation involved noting patterns in the research participants. As categories of meaning emerged, the researcher searched for those that were internally consistent but distinct from each other. Patterns, themes and categories were uncovered.

Testing emergent hypotheses:

When categories and patterns between them became apparent in the data, the researcher then evaluated the credibility of these developing hypotheses and testing them against the data. This involved evaluating the data for their informational adequacy, credibility, usefulness and centrality.

Searching for alternative explanations:

As the categories and patterns between them emerged in the data, the researcher engaged in challenging the patterns that seemed apparent. Alternative explanations were looked and described until the researcher reached the explanations that are most reasonable of all.

Report the results:

By reporting the results report, the researcher gives shape and interpretation and meaning to the huge amounts of raw data.

3.5 Ethical considerations

After the approached participants agreed to participate, informed consent was first sought from them. This was achieved by reading with the participants both informed consents of participation and tape-recording and asking them to sign in order to grant their consent. Participants were informed of the confidentiality clause. Confidentiality implies that the dignity of a subject should be respected. Therefore it was important that participants had no doubt that any identifying information provided would be regarded as confidential (Ferreira et al., 1988). Participants were informed that their confidential information would only be accessed by the researcher and the supervisor. They were also not required to provide any identifying details and as such, transcripts and the final report will not reflect the subject's identifying information such as their names, although certain participants were comfortable with their personal details being printed. After transcribing, the tapes were kept in a safe and confidential place, after the study has been completed and a report written, the tapes would be destroyed.