

https://dspace.org/

Living in and out the closet: an exploration of lesbian identity in the workplace

Destanovic, Justine

2016

http://hdl.handle.net/10539/21955

Destanovic, Justine (2016) Living in and out the closet: an exploration of lesbian identity in the workplace, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, <http://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/handle/10539/21955>

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

Living in and out the closet: An exploration of lesbian identity in the workplace

Justine Destanovic

Student number: **461659**

MA Clinical Psychology

28/04/2016

Abstract

In 1996 South Africa was the first country in the world to protect sexual minorities from discrimination in its Constitution. The benefits of a liberal constitution cannot go unacknowledged, however, negotiating lesbian identity within the work context is still a challenge due to the pervasive stigma attached to homosexuality, as well as the remnants of South Africa's stormy, oppressive political history. Lesbian woman in South Africa grow up in a society which remains predominantly patriarchal and conservatively religious and where the heterosexual assumption, the idea that one is 'straight' unless otherwise stated, is continually confirmed and perpetuated in a variety of contexts, including the occupational environment.

It is within this setting that lesbian women woman must attempt to negotiate and continually, in varying degrees, and not always by choice, take part in the coming out process in different social spaces. In interviews with seven self-identified lesbian women, the dynamic process of coming out within the occupational environment, was explored in relation to and within relevant cultural, historical, familial and social contexts. All participants had disclosed their sexual identity within the work place, in varying degrees. Key aims of the research were exploring the negotiation of lesbian identity in various occupational contexts as well as identifying strategies used to negotiate the work environment and lesbian identity

Keywords: lesbian, lesbian identity, identity, workplace, South African workplace, homosexuality, heteronormativity

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Darko Destanovic for his unwavering support and belief in me, without which, I would not have found the courage to embark on this journey. We may no longer be a part of each other's lives but the love we shared will always be part of me.

Thank you to Scott van Rooijen, Cassandra Govender, Kristine York, and Jackie Briscoe for being such an amazing support system during a very difficult and trying two years. I am so grateful to have you all in my life. Words cannot express the depth of my gratitude and love.

Dr Peace Kiguwa, my supervisor, thank you for your support, patience, and guidance.

Finally, to the seven strong and lovely women who took part in this research and allowed me a glimpse into their lives, thank you.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction 1
1.1 Research aims 2
1.2 Research rationale 2
Chapter 2: Literature Review 4
2.1 Introduction 4
2.2 Essentialist constructs of identity 5
2.3 Social constructionist constructs of identity 7
2.4 Relational narrative theoretical approaches to identity 9
2.5 Language, performativity and sexual identity 10
2.6 Lesbian identity, the coming out process, and identity negotiation 14
2.6.1 The six stages of homosexual identity development 16
2.6.2 Critique of the stage model of homosexual identity development 21
2.7 Institutional contexts of heteronormativity 24
2.7.1 Introduction 24
2.7.2 A brief history of sexuality in South Africa 25
2.7.3 Homosexuality is “unAfrican” 28
2.7.4 Religious institutions and homosexuality 29
2.7.5 The South African education system and homosexuality 31
2.8 The coming out process and the work environment 32
Chapter 3: Methodology 35
3.1 Research Design 35
3.2 Sampling 40
3.3 Participants 40
3.4 Method of data collection 41
3.5 Data analysis 41
3.6 Ethics 45
Chapter 4: Discussion 47
4.1 Introduction 47
4.2 Themes 49
a. The heterosexual assumption 49
b. Language and the coming out narrative 53

c. Coming out in the South African context 57
d. Being out at work is nice, but not necessarily important 66
e. Discrimination has become closeted 69
f. Being considerate of heteronormative sensibilities 73
g. Discrimination is a fickle beast 78
h. Gender and sexuality 81
4.3 Conclusion 86
Chapter 5: Conclusion 88
5.1 Limitations 93
5.2 Recommendations 94
Reference List 95
Appendix A: Participant information sheet 100
Appendix B: Consent form (Interview) 102
Appendix C: Consent form (Audio recording) 103
Appendix D: Interview Schedule 104

Chapter 1: Introduction

Daily interactions take place in various contexts such as work, family, and social environments. In each sphere, identities are negotiated and who an individual may be in one arena is not necessarily true for others, particularly regarding sexual identity (Valentine, 1992). A person's sexual identity is not neutral nor truly a private part of the self, but is understood, created, and negotiated through various interactions which take place within a heterosexual context (Valentine, 1992). Individuals grow up in societies, including South Africa, in which heterosexuality is positioned as the default sexual orientation: The heterosexual assumption, the idea that a person is straight unless otherwise communicated, is continually confirmed and perpetuated in a variety of contexts such as work or social environments (Ponse, 1976).

It is within these settings that a woman may discover that she differs from the heterosexual norm and must attempt to negotiate and continually, in varying degrees, and not always by choice, take part in the coming out process. It follows that homosexual identity formation is not a unidirectional, predictable process but one that includes multiple identities which are negotiated according to an understanding and location of self within various settings (Rust, 1993; Somers, 1994; Valentine, 1992). This exploratory process of identity negotiation takes place in various contexts which either prohibit or permit and encourage the development of sexual identity (Smuts, 2011).

Legally, according to Section 9 of the Constitution, lesbians in South Africa should be able to express their sexual identities in public, and in theory, should be protected from discrimination and persecution (Potgieter, 2008). However social norms often dictate otherwise which results in the need to negotiate lesbian identity accordingly (Smuts, 2011). Simply, an individual may feel comfortable expressing her lesbian identity at home but may fear social rejection and discrimination within her work environment. Furthermore, the effect of power

relations on identity, the idea that one may feel free to express sexual identity in a particular environment but not in others, also becomes evident. Lesbians may fear being stigmatized because of their sexual orientation and the negative social consequences which may follow (Smuts, 2011). Hence, the assertion that it is not possible to consider the construction of identity without taking into consideration the impact of social contexts (Smuts, 2011).

Therefore, identity negotiation is an important part of the development and construction of lesbian identity. This process involves not only understanding and defining the self within predominantly heterosexual environments, but choosing which environments to identify as lesbian and which to remain under the guise of the heterosexual assumption (Ponse, 1976).

1.2 Research Aims

- To explore the negotiation of lesbian identity in relation to occupational contexts
- Identify strategies used to negotiate occupational contexts and lesbian identity

1.3 Research Rationale

In South Africa, research regarding the negotiation of lesbian identity in relation to various contexts, specifically the work environment is limited. Literature tends to focus on white, gay males and when lesbians are the focus, the study is often aimed at understanding the similarities and/or differences between lesbians of different races and cultures (Potgieter, 2003). In this study, my aim was to explore how lesbian identity is understood, negotiated, and constructed within the occupational context. Although the South African constitution prohibits discrimination within the workplace, in Smuts (2011) study, “Coming out as a lesbian in

Johannesburg, South Africa: Considering intersecting identities and social spaces", she states that the majority of her participants "consciously decided to hide their lesbian identities at work, for fear of being stigmatized" (p. 31). Polders, Nel, Kruger &Wells (2008) also acknowledge that despite a liberal constitution, gay men and women are still faced with discrimination evident in various sectors of South African society such as the media, education, religion, and health care. Thus a secondary aim of this research was to investigate the practical 'on the ground' influence of the South African constitution; what it means for the participants in terms of power differentials and perceived safety.

Violence and corrective rape are very real threats to lesbians living in South Africa and thus the negotiation of various contexts may have a range of consequences (Kwesi & Webster, 1997). Lesbian and heterosexual women do not necessarily seek help from the same resources as a lesbian may risk further stigmatization and discrimination (Kwesi & Webster, 1997). My hope was that this study, would add to existing literature so that a better understanding of what it means to be a lesbian living in the South Africa could be established which in turn, may aid in the development of supportive environments, as opposed to support structures which perpetuate stigma and discrimination within the work context (Kwesi & Webster, 1997).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Identity has traditionally been constructed as the natural and inevitable result of fixed, unified characteristics which are intrinsic, and often positioned as undeniable, because they are based upon specific genetic blueprints (Shefer, 2004; Wall, 2005). Essentialism perpetuates such thinking and subsequently reduces categories of identity such as gender and sexuality, to enduring and natural inherent qualities which are predictable and inescapable (Kiguwa, 2004). On the other hand, social constructionism argues that identity is not pre-given and supports the idea that identity is "shifting, multiple, fluid, contextual and partly irrational", while relational narrative theory asserts that the individual understands the self, and their place in the social world, through narrative (Shefer, 2004, p. 199; Sommers, 1994).

In this chapter these various schools of thought are explained and critiqued, followed by a discussion regarding the relationship between language and sexual identity. The coming out process is then touched on, including a description and critique of Cass's development model of homosexual identity. In order to gain a better understanding of the negotiation of lesbian identity in relation to various contexts in South Africa, a brief history of sexuality in the South African context is discussed as well as the various institutional contexts which influence the construction of lesbian identity in the work environment.

2.2 Essentialist constructs of identity

Essentialism is based on the idea that human beings and things in the world have an innate essence (DeLamater & Hyde, 1998). This idea can be traced back to the writings of Plato in which he speaks of 'forms' which refer to a "finite number of fixed and unchanging forms"

which the natural world merely reflects (DeLamater & Hyde, 1998). For example, one recognises an apple based on its essence not on its appearance. An apple can take on varying appearances yet will always be identified as an apple. Thus the underlying reality of an object does not vary even if its exterior changes. The objects and categories within which we categorize them in are therefore understood as innate, fixed entities (DeLamater & Hyde, 1998). There are three inherent assumptions underlying the essentialist school of thought; first, a belief in the existence of an inherent essence. Second, due to the existence of an underlying form, differences between objects and/or categories are inevitable which leads to the third characteristic, that these differences are fixed and unchanging (DeLamater & Hyde, 1998). The idea of an underlying essence is supported by human's seemingly instinctive tendency to make sense of the world through forming and defining particular categories based on the idea of essential defining properties. This type of essentialism is referred to as psychological essentialism.

Psychological essentialism can be detected from early childhood and aids in organizing and making sense of the world (Prentice & Miller, 2007). It is a mode of category representation, specifically applied to humans, which is based on the idea that each category has an underlying reality. For example, when an individual speaks of the category 'male' there are particular intrinsic characteristics which are inferred to which makes a man a man. These may differ according to a person's understanding of the category male such as genetic, hormonal, or cultural factors (or all three) but the existence of an essence of 'man' is what gives the classification particular characteristics. Prentice & Miller (2007) state that a category is "discrete, with sharp boundaries; it is natural and has always existed in more or less its present form; membership in the category is involuntary and immutable; and many of the category's observable features reflect the workings of the essence" (p. 202). These categories are not necessarily based on an objective reality but reflect perceptions and modes of thinking

of particular temporal, social, and cultural contexts (Prentice & Miller, 2007; Rust, 1993). Thus categories are not all perceived as equal and it follows, according to essentialist thinking, that not all people are in fact equal.

Gender and sexuality are two categories which are positioned as fixed and innate within the essentialist paradigm. Traditionally, gender has been positioned as a category of natural kind, the unavoidable consequence of undeniable difference(s) between men and women, whether these variances be biological, hormonal, cultural and so on (Shefer, 2004). Numerous scientific discourses perpetuate these essentialist ideas including the discipline of psychology. A pivotal theme regarding the psychological conceptualization of gender is the notion of a unitary sexual character (Shefer, 2004). The idea is based upon the assumption that masculinity and femininity exist as a collection of traits, roles, abilities, and temperaments which are then positioned as the natural and inevitable result of a person's biological sex, as are the gender categories which are said to be based on these intrinsic qualities (Shefer, 2004). Consequently, individuals who differ from these established norms are positioned as abnormal and unnatural.

The notion of a binary classification system based on the male and female categories facilitates the reproduction and perpetuation of a naturalized and therefore 'normal' sexuality, heterosexuality. The heterosexual's gender is reaffirmed by the person's sexuality which in turn gives rise to the idea of a unified sexual identity (Butler, 1990). Should this unified and coherent gendered self not exist, the individual is faced with an identity which differs from the heterosexual norm (Butler, 1990). Subsequently, individuals who fall outside the heterosexual category are positioned as deviant and 'unnatural', yet are simultaneously produced and reproduced by the binary categorical system (Butler, 1990).

Binarisms can only exist when the one term takes its value in relation to the devaluation of the other (Shefer, 2004). Subsequently, one category will inevitably be assumed superior

and positioned as 'normal' and 'natural', in relation to the inferior, 'abnormal', and marginalized 'other'. In this way essentialism seeps into society, cementing, and perpetuating binary divisions which aid in the construction of a sexual and gender hierarchy which favours heterosexual ways of being over others (Elia, 2007). The heterosexual binary classification system is no exception as it reproduces and maintains numerous inequalities such as heterosexism, sexism, and homophobia.

Last, while essentialism may aid in making sense of the world, the social consequences of this type of thinking are concerning: If identity is understood as stable, fixed, and innate than it follows that specific physical and social modes of classification such as gender, class, and race are constructed accordingly (Kiguwa, 2004). In other words, should these categories be understood as involuntary, predetermined, and unequal than so are the inequalities which result from essentialist thinking. Essentialism therefore hinders significant social change as oppressive social relations are constructed as the natural consequence of intrinsic characteristics (Kiguwa, 2004).

2.3 Social Constructionist constructs of identity

"Social constructionism views discourse about the world not as a reflection or map of the world but as an artefact of communal interchange" (Gergen, 1985, p. 266). The social constructionist paradigm does not ascribe to the essentialist notion of intrinsic and fixed essences or the idea of a universal truth (Kiguwa, 2004). Rather, this school of thought supports the assertion that truth is socially constructed and subsequently arbitrary. The social constructionist challenges the idea that conventional knowledge is based upon "objective, unbiased observations of the world" (Burr, 2003, p. 3). The process of induction, of observation and hypothesis testing, cannot be freed from temporal, linguistic, and perceptual constraints

(Gergen, 1985). Hence the assertion that our knowledge of the world and ourselves is essentially constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed through ideological discourse (Kiguwa, 2004).

Social constructionism reasons that categories which are used to make sense of the self and the world around us, are culturally and historically specific (Burr, 2003). Not only is knowledge historically and culturally bound but it is constructed and perpetuated through social processes: By daily interactions that take place during the course of everyday life. In this manner, particular methods of knowing become embedded within our understanding of the world and it is through daily interactions that 'shared versions of knowledge are constructed" (Burr, 2003, p. 4). Thus what is regarded as accepted and conventional truth today may change with time and might vary cross-culturally, as knowledge is the result of social interaction as opposed to the product of empiricism (Burr, 2003; Gergen, 1985). Subsequently, social constructionism argues that multiple versions of reality exist and each of these various understandings evoke particular kinds of interaction and being in the world (Burr, 2003).

Each construction of the world accepts specific types of human action whilst simultaneously rejecting others. It follows, that "our constructions of the world are therefore bound up with power relations because they have implications for what it is permissible for different people to do, and for how they may treat others" (Burr, 2003, p. 5). This critical stance towards 'essential truths' includes the natural categories which are used to categorize individuals (Burr, 2003). The social constructionist approach critically examines the ways in which gender, sexuality, and desire are socially and historically fashioned and argues that the notion of an innate essence is false, thus freeing individuals from the limitations of predetermined roles of gender, class, or race (Kiguwa, 2004; Shefer, 2004). However, critics of social constructionism argue that the approach in fact robs the individual of personal agency,

accusing the paradigm of determinism. Macro social constructionism argues for the 'death of the subject' meaning that the individual is essentially the result of social, temporal, linguistic, and historical context and as a consequence has no control over the construction of the self and "no capacity to bring about change" (Burr, 2003, p. 23). Simply, individual identity is determined and constrained by the version of reality in which a person lives.

2.4 Relational narrative theoretical approaches to identity

Relational narrative theory brings together the ideas of narrativity and relationality in order to understand the notion of identity. Somers (1994) argues that individuals understand the self, and their place in the social world, through narrative. Narrative has traditionally been limited or viewed as a representational form of lived experience, a particular account imposed upon a series of events. However, in this sense there is a move towards ontological narrative as opposed to representational narrative (Somers, 1994). An individual's lived experience may be a specific version of events but the person constructs multiple and dynamic identities according to where, and how, they place themselves within the narrative that is their life. People are directed, and gain understanding of their reality, by their stories which not only guide the modes of action which are chosen over others, but ultimately aid in making sense of their experiences by 'fitting' in these happenings within available cultural, social, and public narratives (Somers, 1994). Hence the assertion that narrative is an "ontological condition of social life" (Somers, 1994, p. 614).

Social identity is created through "narratives and narrativity" and so an individual comes to be who they are "by being located or locating ourselves (usually unconsciously) in social narratives rarely of our own making (Somers, 1994, p. 606). In this way, the short comings of both essentialism and social constructionism are addressed. First, identity is viewed

as a process as opposed to a predetermined classification. A number of feminist theories in their attempt to address the inequalities created and perpetuated by traditional fixed categories such as race, gender, and sexuality have unfortunately fallen into the trap of simply producing new categories of identity, thus creating new forms of the binary classification system (Shefer, 2004; Somers, 1994). This idea is illustrated by the use of blanket statements such as "all women are more relational than men" which assumes that the lived experience of all women and men are the same and moreover, still accepts the idea of fixed gender categories (Somers, 1994, p. 611).

Relational narrative avoids these essentialist pitfalls by acknowledging the temporal, spatial, and relational qualities of identity (Somers, 1994). Second, relational narrative theory recognizes the inescapable influence of context while simultaneously allowing for identity negotiations as opposed to an identity determined only by circumstances. As Somers (1994) explains, relational narrative "provides an opportunity to infuse the study of identity formation with a relational and historical approach that avoids categorical rigidities by emphasizing the embeddedness of identity in overlapping networks of relations that shift over time and space" (p. 607).

2.5 Language, performativity, and sexual identity

There is an overarching assumption that heterosexuality is the default 'normal' sexuality and so heteronormativity, "the myriad ways in which heterosexuality is produced as a natural, unproblematic, taken-for-granted phenomenon", results in the privileging of heterosexuality over other sexual orientations (Kitzinger, 2005, p. 478). Individuals develop in contexts in which there is a social pressure to fulfill and conform to heterosexual roles as heteronormativity creates automatic assumptions that heterosexuality is the norm while other

sexual orientations are not. Thus individuals inevitably ascribe to the heterosexual assumption and make sense of themselves and the world around them through a heteronormative lens (Habarth, 2008). Consequently, the acceptance of heterosexuality as normal means that many individuals unconsciously foreclose on their sexual identity by accepting the heterosexual label as their own (Eliason, 1995).

The realization and negation of a difference in sexuality is in part, a result of the binary categories constructed by essentialism, which emphasize and perpetuate the idea of the 'straight way' as the natural and thus preferred way of being. Gender and sexuality form part of the basis of this notion of identity and fall within predetermined categories which are understood as 'normal' hence the acceptance and perpetuation of the heterosexual assumption. It is expected that a female will be feminine and the feminine will then be attracted, whether sexually, emotionally, and/or physically to the masculine, which is an inherent characteristic of the male other. Furthermore, while the existence of various sexual orientations is unquestionable, the marketing and reproduction of heterosexuality as the favoured and normal mode of being sexually is prevalent throughout society (Elia, 2003).

The use of language across multiple social domains to construct a preferred sexual orientation plays out in various institutional contexts (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004; Habarth, 2008). The media, as well as a number of various institutions particularly politics, law, education, medicine, and organized religion, have a long history of perpetuating binary thinking regarding what constitutes as acceptable and normal sexual relations (Elia, 2003). Bucholtz & Hall (2004) emphasize the numerous ways in which language constructs sexuality and how this plays out in the linguistic construction of romance, romanticism, and eroticism. If one thinks of various children's fairy tales, parables, stories and films, heterosexuality is the manner in which familial structures and intimate relationships are depicted and understood.

Consequently, the rigidity of sexual categories often results in people struggling to find the words to communicate their personal experience of their sexuality. This is particularly relevant when an individual's sexuality falls outside socially prescribed parameters. One of the difficulties of deviating from the accepted norm within heteronormative society, is growing up in a society in which queer individuals find themselves unable to find the words to express their experience of difference. Better & Simula (2015) speak of the limitations of binary language with which individual's attempt to describe their lived experiences. They argue that language and culture often lack the vocabulary to fully describe the range of sexual orientations that individuals identify with.

Thus, the manner in which gender and sexual orientation are positioned within language assumes that sexual orientation is based on the gender of the desired other. In this way, various other spectrums of sexual attraction are omitted from the understanding of sexual orientation such as race or various fetishisms, which often trump gender regarding sexual attraction (Better & Simula, 2015). While the critical examination of the basis of sexual orientation falls outside the scope of this research, it does highlight the degree in which essentialist understandings of sexuality are accepted as fact, hence the unconscious adoption of binary assumptions which individuals utilise in an attempt to make sense of themselves and the world around them. This is particularly difficult when a person finds that their identity, or aspects of the self, deviates from the accepted norms within heteronormative society.

Furthermore, Butler (1990) argues that the use of language facilitates the notion that gender and sexuality not only form part of how a person identifies with the self, but enables the belief that an individual *is* their gender and sexuality. She states that the objectification of sex is made possible through a "performative twist of language" which creates the illusion that an individual can '*be*' a sex or gender (Butler, 1990, p. 25). In this way, Butler (1990) argues

that language supports, defines, and perpetuates binary categories: To 'be' a woman or to 'be' a man, assumes a distinction from the opposite sex, and so we experience our gender to the extent that we are not the other (Butler, 1990).

Butler (1990) further elaborates, explaining that gender is performatively produced by regulatory practices: To be a gender is not to be in the sense of 'I am' but in the sense of 'I do' (Butler, 1990). In other words, an individual performs the expressions of a given gender coherently, and in doing so becomes the gendered self, "…gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance of a natural sort of being" (Butler, 1990, p. 45). It follows, that the heterosexual matrix gains power and status through the repetition of dictated acts.

Butler (1990) illustrates the performative nature of gender by critically examining the construction of homosexual identities. The existence of heterosexual norms within homosexual contexts, specifically the development of gendered identities such as 'butch' and 'femme', cannot simply be explained as perpetuations and duplications of heterosexual identities within the homosexual context (Butler, 1990). The duplication of heterosexual constructs within alternative sexual paradigms may in fact be the unavoidable location of the "denaturalization and mobilization of gender categories" (Butler, 1990, p. 42). Gay is not a mere replica of the 'straight original' but is simply just a 'copy of a copy' (Butler, 1990). The imitation of the heterosexual original illustrates the categories purely constructed existence, and reveals it to be nothing but the imitation of the perception of a discourse of natural sex.

2.6 Lesbian identity, the coming out process, and identity negotiation

The heteronormative ideal, which is perpetuated by various organizations within society such as law, education, politics, and organized religion, results in the construction and maintenance of a social order of sexual relationships, one which positions heterosexuality as the most natural, and by extension, the most culturally acceptable sexual orientation (Elia, 2003). Therefore, individuals are raised to assume heterosexual identities and so when they discover that there is a discrepancy between their assumed sexual identity and their psychosexual experience, the process of coming out may ensue (Rust, 1993). It follows, that in order to understand the construction and development of lesbian identity, it is important to understand the coming out process and the impact it has on homosexual identity.

Coming out has traditionally been viewed as a "process of discovery in which the individual sheds a false heterosexual identity and comes to correctly identify and label her own true essence, which is homosexual" (Rust, 1993, p. 53). This definition of coming out assumes that there is a starting and end point in homosexual identity development: For an individual to achieve a fully integrated identity, one must progress through each stage of development (Cox & Gallois, 1996). Development of homosexual identity begins when the individual identifies homoerotic feelings and behaviours and ends when the individual accepts their homosexual identity as part of the self as opposed to their identity being based solely on their sexual orientation (Cass, 1979; Cox & Gallois, 1996; Rust, 1993). Cass's development model of homosexual identity follows this basic blue print but is also based largely on the interpersonal congruency perspective.

Cass (1979) identified six stages of homosexual identity formation namely: Identity confusion, Identity comparison, Identity tolerance, Identity acceptance, Identity pride, and Identity synthesis. She describes the process of homosexual identity formation as "the process

by which a person comes first to consider and later acquire the identity of homosexual as a relevant aspect of self" (Cass, 1979, p. 219). Cass (1979) argues that the underlying process of identity development is motivated by the desire for congruency between the individual's view of their personal characteristics, their perception of their actions based on their understanding of the latter, as well as their perception of how other's view their characteristics and behaviours. Should incongruency exist between these various spheres of self-concept, the individual may attempt to solve these feelings of ambivalence in three ways: A person may attempt to change their perception of self, or they might try and adjust the manner in which they understand their behaviour and/or how the individual believes they are perceived by others (Cass, 1979). Therefore, the individual is positioned as an active participant in the developmental process which is understood as a linear yet interactive process, taking into account environmental influences, as well as the interplay between the external and internal (Cox & Gallois, 1996).

One of the important distinctions that Cass (1979) notes in her understanding of homosexual identity is the idea that the individual has a public (social) and private (private) identity regarding their sexual orientation. Therefore, one can be 'out' privately but choose to 'pass' as heterosexual in social situations. However, one only achieves a holistic identity when one can marry and accept their private and public persona. When an individual experiences inconsistency between these two aspects of the self, they move from one stage of development to another in an attempt to find a balance between the manner in which the individual understands their sexual orientation and how they believe it is perceived in the external world (Cass, 1979; Cox & Gallois, 1996).

It is important to note that before the individual assigns personal meaning to their homosexuality they would have first been socialized within a heteronormative environment and thus perceive themselves as heterosexual and 'normal' while homosexuality as out of the

ordinary (Cass, 1979; Rust, 1993). Additionally, Cass (1979) argues that, more often than not, homosexuality is stigmatized in western society and thus assigned very little positive value.

Gender role socialization, as well as temporal factors, play an important role in this process. These external factors influence the manner in which the individual assigns meaning to their homosexual thoughts, feelings, and behaviours as well as their willingness to accept this part of their identity, both internally and within their external environment (Cass, 1979). It follows that the individual may not pass through all six levels of homosexual identity development. Subsequently, identity foreclosure may occur before the person acquires a fully integrated identity which Cass (1979) argues is only possible if one passes 'successfully' through the six stages.

2.6.1 The six stages of homosexual identity development

Stage 1: Identity confusion

The individual becomes aware that the label 'homosexuality' is personally meaningful in the sense that they understand that their behaviour may be described as 'homosexual behaviour'. This awareness reaches a point where it can no longer be ignored and marks the beginning of the homosexual identity development process (Cass, 1979). Subsequently, one may experience feelings of incongruency between their perception of self and the manner in which they believe they are perceived by others. Feelings of personal alienation and isolation are common during this stage and are coped with in various ways. One may try to cope with these feelings by positively identifying with homosexual feelings and behaviours and by exploring this aspect of their identity. Conversely, others may negatively identify with their homosexuality and will then attempt to inhibit perceived homosexual behaviour (Cass, 1979).

Furthermore, an individual may try to restrict and/or deny that any information regarding homosexuality has any personal relevance. Lastly, should the individual deny their homosexuality but be unable to restore their heterosexual identity, self-hating, the development of a negative self-concept, and/or attempts to completely separate homosexual behaviour from the self may ensue (Cass, 1979).

Identity foreclosure occurs in this stage when the individual completely rejects their homosexual identity by denying past homosexual behaviour, adopting an asexual identity, or unequivocally adopting a heterosexual identity (Cass, 1979). This stage is generally experienced alone as the individual is still unsure of how to make sense of their homosexuality and may not feel comfortable sharing their internal confusion with others.

Stage 2: Identity comparison

A tentative commitment to their homosexual identity followed by the beginnings of a process of exploration regarding what it means to be homosexual including, possible social isolation and rejection, are characteristic of the identity comparison stage (Cass, 1979). Moreover, the individual may begin to explore alternative guidelines regarding expectations for behaviour and ideals as heterosexual ideals may no longer feel applicable.

Reference groups, such as religious and cultural groups, also play an important role at this stage and can either increase or decrease feelings of social isolation. To try and counter feelings of isolation, passing strategies may be used such as avoiding situations perceived as threatening, limiting self-disclosure, adopting and cultivating a heterosexual identity and/or attempting to distance the self from homosexual behaviour (Cass, 1979). The individual may also accept their homosexuality but not approve of this identity and might try to neutralise their ambivalence by adopting the label ‘bisexual’ or describing their homosexuality as ‘a phase’. Alternatively, one might utilize the “personal innocence strategy”. This strategy is often used

by people who view homosexuality in a negative light: The individual accepts their homosexuality but does not accept personal accountability for their sexual orientation (Cass, 1979). Statements such as "I was born this way" are common when this strategy is used. This coping mechanism may aid in increasing personal acceptance of one's homosexuality but feelings of isolation and alienation could increase (Cass, 1979).

The third approach which is often used during this stage is the acceptance of one's homosexuality but due to strong feelings of alienation, coupled with a negative perception of one's homosexual behaviour, the individual does not act on these feelings. Cass (1979) argues that this often occurs when the individual anticipates a strong negative reaction from family and friends. The individual might try and change homosexual thoughts and behaviour by seeking professional help, attempting to completely inhibit their homosexuality, and/or adopting an asexual role. Alternatively, the individual may try to change their external environment by changing reference groups or even moving to another city/town. Finally, should the individual perceive both their internal and external worlds negatively, they may completely devalue their homosexuality by rejecting the self. These increased feelings of self-hatred could result in suicide (Cass, 1979).

Stage 3: Identity tolerance

In this stage the individual has started to negotiate their new identity within a predominantly heterosexual environment and has begun to accept that they are 'probably gay' (Cass, 1979). The need to decrease feelings of isolation which accompany this process motivate the individual to seek out other homosexuals, as well as homosexual subculture such as gay nightclubs. Subsequently, feelings of alienation decrease as one accepts, and is accepted, within homosexual society. However, the individual must now recognize and admit that they differ from the heterosexual norm. It is important to note that the emotional quality of this contact is

important and the effects of both positive and negative experiences are of equal value. Should the individual identify both internally and externally with their homosexuality, commitment to their homosexual identity increases (Cass, 1979).

Alternatively, if the external and/or internal homosexual identity is experienced negatively, the result may be the devaluing of gay subculture. An individual who experiences both internal and external aspects of their homosexual identity negatively, might struggle with feelings of self-hatred. In order to cope with these emotions, the person in question may use one of two strategies: Limiting contact with other homosexuals or alternatively inhibiting all homosexual behaviour. If the individual opts for the former, acceptance of their homosexuality is more likely. On the other hand, when the second strategy is adopted, one's homosexual identity is essentially rejected and Cass (1979) argues that this leads to identity foreclosure.

Stage 4: Identity acceptance

This stage of identity development is characterized by continued and frequent contact with other gay individuals thus normalizing homosexuality as an identity and as a way of life. The individual no longer simply tolerates their sexuality but has learnt to accept this part of themselves and questions such as "Who am I?" and "Where do I belong" have been answered (Cass, 1979). However, feelings of uncertainty and social alienation are common as the individual attempts to locate themselves within both heterosexual and homosexual spaces. A number of disclosure strategies, either full, non, or partial disclosure, may be adopted in an attempt to manage this ambiguity (Cass, 1979). Alternatively, gay individuals might simply choose to limit contact with heterosexuals.

Stage 5: Identity pride

This stage of identity development is characterized by the discrepancy experienced between the acceptance of one's homosexuality and the rejection of this aspect of self by the majority of heterosexual society (Cass, 1979). Consequently, in order to cope with the feelings that arise as a result, an individual may positively identify with gay culture (gay pride) whilst simultaneously devaluing heterosexuality: 'gay is good' while heterosexual values are devalued or rejected entirely. In this way incongruency is reduced but only to a certain extent as the individual must still operate within the confines of the heteronormative framework (Cass, 1979). This reality may increase feelings of frustration, alienation, and anger. Again, disclosure strategies may be utilized. Conversely, the individual might choose not to disclose but will not actively attempt to conceal their homosexuality either.

Stage 6: Identity synthesis

Identity synthesis is the last stage of homosexual identity development and is reached when the individual realizes that the 'us vs them' split is unrealistic, thus becoming more accepting of the heterosexual other (Cass, 1979). This in turn leads to greater feelings of congruency between one's private and public identity. Additionally, one realizes and accepts that their homosexuality is only an aspect of their identity: The individual is able to see that their homosexuality is only a part of the self as opposed to the self in its entirety.

2.6.2 Critique of the stage model of homosexual identity development

Although Cass (1979) does acknowledge that her model of development should be understood as a broad outline of the development of homosexual identity, the model has been critiqued due to its linear and simplistic nature (Cox & Gallois, 1996; Rust, 1993). Rust (1993) argues that linearity implies a goal orientated, predicable, and unidirectional process of acquiring homosexual identity, where steps forward are equated with development and maturity, while reverting to earlier stages suggests immaturity and regression (Cox & Gallois, 1996). Thus beginning stages are positioned as necessary but 'less than' later stages of development. It follows that bisexuality is then understood simply as a stage beyond the shedding of a heterosexual identity but prior to the adoption of a homosexual identity, as opposed to a legitimate sexual orientation (Rust, 1993).

Furthermore, the development model perpetuates the notion that should one's homosexuality remain the central focus of their identity, and should an individual continue to perceive heterosexuality in a less positive light than homosexuality, they are understood as 'less developed' than their homosexual counterparts who have fully integrated and accepted their position within heteronormative society (Cox & Gallois, 1996). This assumption does not take into account the inherent power dynamics which exist between groups within the sexual hierarchy, and the subsequent political implications of adopting a 'minority' label within a predominantly heterosexual society (Cox & Gallois, 1996). In this way homosexuals are denied the opportunity to identify as an oppressed group as the 'mentally healthy gay individual' is one who has successfully integrated into the heteronormative framework.

Additionally, the development model positions the acquisition of homosexual identity as the simple replacement of one sexual category over another. This simplistic and essentialist understanding of sexual identity development perpetuates binary categories and does not take

into the account the broad spectrum of sexual experiences (Cox & Gallois, 1996; Rust, 1993). Dichotomous thinking regarding sexual orientation often results in a person deciding between the label 'heterosexual' or 'homosexual'. Consequently, an individual may select a label which does not realistically reflect their sexual preferences. Rust (1993) argues that this need to 'choose' a label highlights the impact of social constructs on self-identity.

Similarly, Rust (1993) also points out that the development model assumes that sexual behaviour, thoughts, feelings and sexual identity are synonymous with one's sexual essence. In reality, individuals often engage in a spectrum of sexual behaviour and the decision to identify with a particular label may be influenced by a multitude of factors. A woman may engage in heterosexual and bisexual activities but still identify as specifically lesbian rather than bisexual. This decision may be motivated by political or temporal influences such as language, as labels take on specific meanings within various cultural, socio-political, and historical contexts (Rust, 1993). Moreover, an individual's identity in one sphere may not be the same in another, particularly regarding sexual identity (Valentine, 1992).

Subsequently, the coming out process includes multiple identities which are negotiated according to an understanding and location of self within various settings (Somers, 1994; Valentine, 1992). Homosexual identity formation is not a systematic predictable process but a "product of an ongoing process of dynamic social interaction" (Rust, 1993, p. 55). The process of constructing and negotiating lesbian identity involves "an identity transformation process whereby a homosexual individual explores his/her sexuality in a predominantly heterosexual environment" (Smuts, 2011, p.24). The formation and exploration of identity takes place in various contexts which either permit and encourage the development of sexual identity or prohibit it (Smuts, 2011). Thus sexual identity is understood as a dynamic process as opposed to the end goal of identity development.

However, although identity formation is understood as a dynamic process, realistically, an individual may not always have the opportunity to be an active participant in their identity development because of various environmental constraints. Smuts (2011) argues that one cannot separate identity development from the various spaces within which an individual locates themselves. Consequently, the individual may maintain different identities in response to various contexts based on their evaluation of these spaces. Factors which may influence the assessment of how one chooses to place themselves within an environment includes personal experiences of stigmatization and the fear of reliving such experiences (Smuts, 2011). Thus an individual may negotiate their sexual identity in response to be perceived and/or anticipated discrimination.

Additionally, one's sexual identity, as well as the meaning ascribed to this identity, may change at any point in an individual's life cycle. In this way, sexual identity is understood as socially constructed and so cannot be equated with the idea of an innate sexual essence (Rust, 1993). Rust (1993) emphasises the importance of keeping in mind that individuals do not experience their identities as socially constructed nor do they understand their sexual orientations as "variable descriptions of their sexual location" (p. 70). Rather, an individual experiences their sexuality as stable and inherent, retrospectively locating change within their personal narratives (Rust, 1993). Thus, one may describe the development of their sexual identity as a goal orientated journey, the goal being the acquisition of a homosexual identity preceded by a personal journey of discovery, which is informed and understood through the individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. The majority of people live in societies in which essentialism tends to be the most popular school of thought and/or manner in which people understand the world and others, and so it follows that an understanding of self would be constructed within this paradigm (Rust, 1993).

Lastly, although a number of the development models of homosexual identity, including the Cass's six stage development model, do acknowledge that not only do particular individuals not progress through each stipulated stage of development, some may in fact acquire homosexual identity via alternative paths, reasons for these variations are not discussed nor are these alternatives understood or explored as models of development in their own right (Cox & Gallois, 1996).

2.7 Institutional contexts of heteronormativity

2.7.1 Introduction

Heteronormativity speaks to the idea that heterosexuality is the most natural and preferred form of sexual identity. It follows that sexual orientations which deviate from this norm are then classified as abnormal or 'less than' (Elia, 2003). This mode of binary thinking results in heterosexuality being marketed and reproduced as the ideal, creating a hierarchy of sexuality which positions heterosexuality as the most socially acceptable sexual orientation. Heterosexuality maintains its dominance as the revered sexual orientation through perpetual marketing and reproduction by various institutional contexts within society.

In the South African context, homosexuality was illegal until April 1994 when the apartheid era came to an end after which, South Africa became one of the first countries to legalise same-sex marriage and outlaw discrimination based on sexual orientation (Gevisser, 1995). However, the remnants of past discrimination remain embedded within South African society, and are, in varying degrees, perpetuated by numerous institutional contexts, specifically the legal system, organized religion, familial structures, education, and cultural norms.

2.7.2 A brief history of sexuality in South Africa

> And who can deny that this was the canker that afflicted the Biblical Sodom. No, Sir, history has given as a clear warning and we should not allow ourselves to be deceived into thinking that we may casually dispose of this viper in our midst by regarding it as innocent fun. It is a proven fact that sooner or later homosexual instincts make their effects felt on a community if they are permitted to run riot…Therefore we should be on the alert and do what there is to do lest we be saddles later with a problem which will be the utter ruin of our spiritual and moral fibre.

(Justice Minister PC Pelser, speaking in parliament, 21 April 1967 as cited in Retief, 1995.)

During the apartheid era (1948-1994), gay and lesbian individuals were positioned as social deviants: Immoral and promiscuous individuals who did not uphold the interests of white conservative South Africa (Cameron, 1995; Sanders, 1997). The Nationalist Party, the ruling party of the time, emphasised the values of Christian Nationalist apartheid ideology and so law included moral policing. The focus of this moral policing was to ensure that sexual acts were geared towards reproduction of a conservative, white South African nation (Retief, 1995). Subsequently, the Immorality Act of 1957 (also referred to as the Sexual Offences Act of 1957) prohibited ‘indecent sexual acts’ which included sexual intercourse between ‘whites’ and anyone of a different race (Gevisser, 1995).

In 1966, the police raided a gay party in a house in Forest Town, Johannesburg which sparked controversy and moral outrage among white conservative South Africans. As a result, the government launched a campaign against homosexuality and a sexual reproduction committee was established to investigate the prevalence of homosexuality within (white) South African society (Retief, 1995). In 1968, the findings of the investigation were published and the report stated that, ‘all true homosexuals drink excessively”, “butch lesbians use a dilder”

and that homosexuality was an infectious mental illness which could endanger the nation's youth (Retief, 1995). The committee concluded that older lesbians and gay men were seducing teenagers and thus 'spreading the disease'. Medical professionals argued that homosexuals should not be imprisoned but receive medical treatment as homosexuality was understood, at the time, to be a psychosexual disorder (Retief, 1995). Many sexual practices which were viewed as 'unconventional' were classified as mental disorders in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) including homosexuality which was only declassified in 1973 (Austin & Burke, 2009).

However, lesbians did not seem to be of serious moral concern aside from queries raised regarding lesbian sex, particularly the use of the dildo. The committee questioned not only the morality of the dildo but also its 'shape', 'size' and various other attributes as well as "butch role playing" (Retief, 1995). Subsequently, the Immorality Amended Act of 1969 not only prohibited males having sex with men under the age of nineteen, but also banned the manufacturing and distribution of any article intended to be used to perform an 'unnatural sexual act' (Retief, 1995). No mention was made of same sex acts between woman until 1988 when the Sexual Offense Act was amended and prohibited sexual acts between a woman and female under the age of 19, following social concerns that older lesbians were corrupting the minds of young girls (Gevisser, 1995).

At the time, disclosing one's sexual identity was not a viable nor practical option for lesbian women because of social pressure and very real life changing consequences, such as losing one's job or imprisonment (Cameron, 1995). Networking occurred through safe houses and private parties and the 'butch' lesbian identity, as well as defined gender roles within same sex relationships, became increasingly entrenched within the lesbian community (Cameron, 1995). For example, it was a common practice for lesbians at parties to wear either a blue

(butch) or pink (femme) bowtie, although neither 'femme' nor 'butch' lesbians would wear dresses (Cameron, 1995).

The early 1990's saw the dismantling of the apartheid era and in 1994 democracy was implemented in South Africa. Extensive negotiations between various social and human rights movements ensued. One of the predominant themes of these negotiations was the inclusion of gender and sexual rights in the Constitution in an attempt to guarantee that "multiple intersections of oppression were addressed through the equality clause in the Bill of Rights" (van Zyl, 2011, p. 337). The South African Constitution, which was then implemented in 1996, states first, that "Everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law" and that this equality includes that all citizens have "full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms" (SA Constitution, 1996: 2(9)(2)). The Constitution also prohibits unfair discrimination directly or indirectly by the state or any persons based on sexual discrimination: "Everyone has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected" (SA Constitution, 1996: 2(3) (10)).

The National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality also set out to challenge a number of residual discriminatory legislations affecting lesbian and gay individual's quality of life. These included, most notably, the legalization of marriage between same-sex partners in 2006, changes to adoption and parental rights, as well as the inclusion of same sex partners and/or spouses under medical aid and/or pension schemes (van Zyl, 2011).

Although sexual minorities are now legally protected from sexual discrimination in South Africa, there are still a number of countries worldwide such as Ghana and Uganda where homosexuality is punishable by death (Hepple, 2012). Additionally, in the majority of African countries homosexuality is still illegal and in countries such as Kenya and Tanzania, individuals can receive prison sentences up to 14 years long (Harrison, 2005; Hepple, 2012).

The criminalization and subsequent punishment of homosexuality reflect the high levels of homophobia that exists in the majority of African countries and concretely illustrates the way in which the legal system can, and is, often used as a tool to perpetuate and fix the sexual relations hierarchy, cementing the perception that sexual minorities as 'less than' their heterosexual counterparts (Elia, 2003)

2.7.3 Homosexuality is 'unAfrican'

There is a long standing belief within many African cultures that homosexuality is "a European import, alien to African culture" and a "white man's disease" (Sanders, 1997; pg. 101; Smuts, 2011, pg. 26). Sanders (1997) argues that traditionally, same sex activities in African cultures are not un-African whereas the gay lifestyle, specifically same-sex marriage is. Anthropological records confirm that sexual relations between same-sex individuals was common practice in the pre-colonial era, confirmed by early European travelers who collected anecdotal accounts of same sex sexuality in tribal societies (Sanders, 1997). However, due to the researchers own Christian biases towards sexuality, which asserted that sexual relations were only morally acceptable when undertaken for procreative purposes, they often under reported the frequency of same sex activities in their records (Sanders, 1997).

Conversely, Van Zyl (2011) argues that traditionally, the notion of marriage within Western society and African societies, does not refer to the same idea. Marriage regulated kinship within African cultures but in many of these cultures, marriage was polygamous and/or between same sex partners. Heterosexual monogamy, legislation of sexuality, and Christian marriage rights altered the meaning of kinship, marriage, and sexuality within many African cultures: "Precolonial African societies practiced widespread regulation of kinship through marriage, sexuality as an expression of (non-reproductive) desire often had no name, or was

not considered 'sexual' and consequently not policed" (Van Zyl, 2011, p. 338). Hence the assertion that homophobia, as opposed to homosexuality, was in fact the European import (Sanders, 2007; Van Zyl, 2011).

Consequently, it seems that contrary to popular opinion, homosexuality in itself, as well as same-sex marriage, is not necessarily traditionally 'unAfrican'. Regardless, this widespread belief aids in the perpetuation and concretization of heterosexual power relations in South African society, specifically those which are patriarchal in nature (van Zyl, 2011). Additionally, the belief that homosexuality is 'unAfrican' has very real consequences in the lives of black lesbians, particularly those who, due to socioeconomic circumstances, rely on public modes of transport and who live in areas which leave them vulnerable to homophobic attacks and violence (Smuts, 2011). Furthermore, the idea that homosexuality is unAfrican and thus 'abnormal' is a theme which illustrates, in part, the pervasive influence organized religion has on predominant attitudes towards gender and sexuality.

2.7.4. Religious institutions and homosexuality

Colonisation in Africa brought with it the spread of Christian discourse and in this way, sexuality and morality became infused within African culture (Sanders, 2007; Van Zyl, 2011). Traditionally, the majority of religious doctrine, approves only of sexual relations which promote procreativity and which take place between married heterosexual couples (Elia, 2003). Thus, sexual orientations falling outside this paradigm were, and still are, often perceived as immoral and/or unnatural. This includes religions such as Islam, which is the world's second largest religion (Sanderson, 2014a).

In South Africa, it is difficult to estimate the number of Muslim homosexuals because of the strict parameters prescribed by Islam which have resulted in the majority of Muslim gay

and lesbian individuals choosing to remain closeted (Harrison, 2005). However, in September 2014 an "Open Mosque" in Cape Town was opened by Taj Hargey, despite death threats, vandalism and the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC) of South Africa stating that the mosque is 'un-Islamic (Sanderson, 2014a). Hargey argues that the aim of the Open Mosque is to focus on "the teaching of the Quran itself, while rejecting all other theological principles in Islam, which do not stem from the Quran itself" (cited in Sanderson, 2014b). Imam Muhsin Hendricks, one of the first openly gay imams in the world, is also one of the leaders of the Open Mosque.

There are also a number of Christian sects, such as Anglican and Methodist churches which are accepting of homosexuality and have gay and lesbian priests and mothers (female priests). Additionally, while Catholicism has traditionally been outspoken regarding its anti-homosexuality stance, the church has become increasingly tolerant and the current pope, Pope Francis was quoted stating: "If someone is gay and searches for the Lord and has goodwill, who am I to judge" (as cited in Hale, 2015).

Statements such as these illustrate an increasingly tolerant and accepting stance towards sexual minorities within a number of traditional religious sects. However, such liberalism towards queer individuals is the exception rather than the rule, and many lesbians in South Africa still struggle to marry the divide between their sexual and religious identities (Smuts, 2011). Moreover, the movement towards developing religious doctrines which are more accepting of the homosexual other, highlights the power relations that exist and are perpetuated by binary categories within heteronormative society.

2.7.5 The South African education system and homosexuality

Historically the education system serves as an important platform regarding the introduction and perpetuation of heteronormative ideals within society. The South African schooling system is dominated by a culture which prioritizes and perpetuates heterosexual values over others (Davies, 2015; Elia, 2003). Many students and parents believe that homosexuals and heterosexuals should be educated separately. This idea is based, in part, on the notion that homosexuality is a contagious disease and/or the product of demonic possession (Davies, 2015). Legally, the basic rights of homosexual pupils and teachers are protected but schools are still unsafe and many gay learners drop out, commit or attempt suicide, and/or turn to drugs or alcohol. Overt forms of discrimination are frowned upon but the implementation of same sex sexual education programs, particularly regarding safe sex practices, as well as support systems, is almost non-existent and same-sex behaviour is often framed simply as 'problematic behaviour' (Davies, 2015).

Furthermore, the act of coming out can potentially damage a teacher's credibility as credibility is not necessarily based on facts but on opinion (Russ, Simmonds, & Hunt, 2002). Thus the individual's competence as a teacher, in reality, is irrelevant in this regard, as the stigma associated with homosexuality is pervasive in the South African classroom: "We wouldn't want a lesbian or gay to teach because they will, you know, encourage it." (anonymous parent as cited in Davies, 2015; Russ et al, 2002). Homosexuality is perceived by the majority of parents as immoral and deviant which results, in part, in the majority of both teachers and students choosing not to disclose their sexual orientations. The need to remain closeted creates the illusion that there are no homosexual learners and staff and therefore there is no need to enforce stronger policies which will support sexual minorities in the schooling

system. Conversely, learners and teachers are unlikely to feel safe disclosing their sexual orientation without these policies in place (Davies, 2015).

2.8 The coming out process and the work environment

Disclosing one's sexual identity in the workplace can be a stressful process due to the potential discrimination and/or rejection an individual may encounter (Griffith & Hebl, 2002). Membership of a minority and/or disadvantaged group often inherently includes stigma: "To disclose that one is a member of this stigmatized group is to announce an association with a group that has been historically devalued and even persecuted by society at large" (King, Reilly & Hebl, 2008; p. 567). In the case of homosexuality, this stigma is concealable and thus only potentially discreditable. In recent years displays of overt discrimination have, in general, become less frequent, due to changes in work place policies and legislation. However, nonverbal and subtler forms of discrimination have become increasingly common (Griffith & Hebl, 2002). Furthermore, types and severity of discrimination vary across work contexts. Thus while creative industries, such as marketing or advertising, tend to be more accepting of homosexuality, the South African education system is a still a difficult space to navigate for both gay teachers and learners (Davis, 2015; Smuts, 2011).

Disclosure or non-disclosure of sexual identity also has a variety of meanings in different contexts. For example, coming out can be positioned as a political act, through which one may hope to create political change, while the act of nondisclosure may be viewed as an act which perpetuates the marginalization of sexual minorities (King et al, 2008). Regardless, disclosure of sexual identity has been linked to improved general wellbeing and lower levels of anxiety and depression: Living a 'double life' impacts self-esteem, self-worth and the development of an integrated identity (King et al, 2008; Ward & Wistanley, 2005). From an organizational perspective, concealment of homosexuality also negatively impacts work

performance and employee satisfaction, as a lot of time and energy is used to pass as heterosexual.

A number of strategies may be used to manage one's sexual identity in the workplace. A common strategy is simply to 'pass' as 'straight', to create the illusion of a heterosexual identity, either by lying about the gender of one's partner or through using gender neutral pronouns and so on (King et al, 2008; Ward & Wistanley, 2005). Alternatively, an individual may simply refrain from disclosing personal information about themselves. Conversely, one may disclose indirectly, for example referring to their same sex partner or mentioning their sexual identity in passing. On the other hand, an individual may choose to directly disclose their sexuality by using explicit language to reveal their homosexuality and/or encourage their peers to view them as gay and 'out and proud' (King et al, 2008; Ward & Winstanley, 2005). The strategy which an individual adopts to either disclose or not disclose their sexual identity may depend on how supportive and accepting they perceive their work environment to be (Legate, Ryan & Wienstein, 2012).

Additionally, Legate et al (2012) argue that the potential psychological benefits of coming out need to be understood in this light as well. The negative consequences of disclosing one's sexual identity in a hostile work environment in which an individual may face potential discrimination, negative judgements, or rejection, appears to outweigh the personal benefits of disclosure. Consequently, disclosure benefits need to be viewed realistically and in relation to personal and socio-contextual variables (Legate et al, 2012).

The idea of understanding the coming out process in relation to work and social spaces supports the idea that disclosing sexual identity is a performative act. Ward & Wistanley (2005) argue that identity formation occurs through multiple social interactions and coming out essentially arises when an individual chooses to take up a particular subject position: The

process of coming out is characterized by revealing a part of one's self which was previously unknown or hidden and subsequently (Ward & Wistanley, 2005). Alternatively, should the individual choose not to disclose they then opt not to take on the role of 'lesbian'. Rather, as the presumed sexuality is heterosexuality, one automatically adopts the subject position of heterosexuality. This process occurs each time the individual enters a new work space and in various situations. Hence the notion that disclosure is a dynamic process as one continuously and actively chooses to take up, or not take up, the subject position of 'lesbian' (Ward & Wistanley, 2005). However, it is important to note that this may not always be the case as one's physical appearance, such as the manner in which they dress, may reveal their sexual orientation regardless of whether the person chooses to disclose or not.

Furthermore, an individual may have no choice but to disclose their sexual identity should they wish to access particular employee benefits such as medical aid, pensions, and/or compassionate leave (Smuts, 2011). Homosexual's rights in this regard are protected by legislation but the need to disclose in order to access these benefits, places the individual in the difficult position of not only having to reveal their sexual identity but also having to validate the authenticity of their same sex relationship (Smuts, 2011).

Chapter 3: Methodology

The aim of this research was to explore and understand how occupational contexts influence lesbian identity. The research examined the lesbian individual's negotiation of multiple identities and how this process is influenced by her external environments, specifically her occupational environment. The qualitative paradigm was selected as the intention of this investigation was to understand the participant's subjective experience and how each individual made sense of their experience, as well as identify common themes evident within their collective narratives. The primary focus of the research process was on the participant's personal negotiation of their specific workplace, within a unique historical, cultural, and societal context.

3.1 Research Design

The research design which was used in this study was a qualitative research design. Qualitative research aims at understanding and describing the individual's subjective experience as opposed to discovering an objective reality (Heppner & Heppner, 2004). The qualitative researcher is often sceptical of the existence of an objective reality and rather, appreciates that there are numerous ways of perceiving and making sense of one's experience of reality. They are therefore interested in exploring the individual's lived experience which is understood as being embedded within a particular cultural, temporal, and social context. Various methods are used to not only gain a better understanding of the individual's experience in the world but to do so using various methods. Therefore, the goal of qualitative research is to document the individual's experience using different strategies such as interviewing and observation, as opposed to "etic and nomothetic approaches which emphasize the goal of

discovering and describing universal principles by quantifying observed phenomena" (Heppner & Heppner, 2004, p. 139).

As a result, meaning and interpretation are of particular relevance throughout the research process. Generally, the quantitative researcher attempts to avoid interpretation in order to present unbiased knowledge, whereas the qualitative researcher acknowledges that interpretation of data is an inevitable part of the research process, as is the researchers own reflexivity (Wilson & Maclean, 2011).

Reflexivity is an important part of the qualitative research process. The researcher acknowledges that there is a large subjective component to research which influences all aspects of the process, from the choice of topic to the method of investigation (Wilson & Maclean, 2011). In this way, subjective and contextual factors, which are inevitably introduced by the researcher, are accounted for. These variables not only influence the research process but may also impact on the phenomenon being investigated. The researcher and participant will "bring their own meanings to the research, and reflexivity is an opportunity to explore this and the effects that may have resulted" (Wilson & Maclean, 2011, p. 191). Language also forms an important part of the interpretation and reflexivity components of the qualitative research process.

Traditionally, language is viewed as a medium of communication which is neutral and transparent: A tool which is used to describe ourselves and the world around us (Wilbraham, 2004). Simply, language reflects reality. However, in this context, the influence of language is taken into consideration. Language is used to construct particular versions of events in various contexts and in this way, it is used by individuals to convey a specific reality (Wilbraham, 2004). Consequently, the influence of language and the type of language employed should be considered and noted during the research process (Wilson & Maclean, 2011).

Reliability and validity are also two important aspects of the research process. Traditionally these two terms are used within quantitative research and there are various debates as to whether these constructs are applicable to qualitative research due to its nature and focus. However, it has been argued that this terminology needs to be replaced with language more fitting to the qualitative paradigm such as "credibility, accuracy of representation, and authority of the writer" (Krefting, 1991, p. 215). Therefore, the need to ensure rigor within qualitative research is still very much applicable. However, the way in which the latter is achieved is not necessarily through the direct application of the quantitative criteria of validity and reliability.

An alternative model for assessing trustworthiness is proposed, specifically Guba's model, which is based on four characteristics of trustworthiness: Truth value, applicability, consistency, and confirmability (Krefting, 1991). These categories fall broadly under the classification of trustworthiness, previously known as rigour (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Truth value or credibility, refers to the researcher's confidence in the "truth of the findings based on the research design, informants, and context" (Krefting, p. 215). In qualitative research, truth value is essentially subjective as truth is based on individual experience. Therefore, credibility refers first, to the researcher's ability to accurately represent multiple versions of reality and second, it stands to reason that other individuals who have had similar experiences should be able to identify the descriptions (Krefting, 1991). In this study, the researcher compared her findings with those of previous studies to see whether the results corresponded. The researcher's supervisor also cross checked interpretations and themes which were identified in an attempt to ensure credibility.

Creditability examines how compatible the results are with reality and the quantitative equivalent is internal validity which measures consistency of scores (Shenton, 2004).

Creditability can be endeavoured in many ways through triangulation and member checks being the most noteworthy. A member check approach was adopted in this study. This occurs on two levels: The first involved ensuring that clarifying information had been correctly recorded and perceived by participants; and the second involved a similar process but the assessment was carried out by independent sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). In this instance, both the participants and the supervisor acted as member checks to ensure a degree of credibility was attained and adhered to.

The second aspect of trustworthiness refers to applicability or transferability. Krefting (1991) explains that "research meets this criterion when the findings fit into contexts outside the study situation that are determined by the degree of similarity or goodness of fit between the two contexts" (p. 216). Although qualitative research acknowledges that each situation is unique and not necessarily generalizable, the findings of the research should still be applicable (to some extent) to other similar situations (Shenton, 2004). In order to do so, sufficient descriptions of the phenomenon being investigated should be provided, as well as information regarding contextual factors which may influence the investigation (Shenton, 2004). The findings of the research also need to be consistent in the sense that should the study be replicated in similar circumstances, the outcomes would be comparable (Krefting, 1991). Furthermore, transferability involves being able to generalize data and its quantitative parallel is external validity (Shenton, 2004). Many academics believe naturalistic studies cannot yield generalizable data even in the most conservative sense (Shenton, 2004).

However, Lincoln and Guba (1986) stress that rich descriptive data needs to be provided to establish a context which others can relate to, either in part or in its entirety, and in such cases some measure of transferability is achieved: The researcher has the responsibility to ensure enough information regarding context was provided for. In this study, in order to

comply with this requirement, factors such as data collection methods used, number of participants specified, the time period within which the data was collected and so forth are provided (Shenton, 2004). However, within qualitative research the idea of consistency is questionable as variability is inevitable, thus the idea of consistency is replaced with that of dependability.

The concept of dependability refers to "trackable variability, that is, variability that can be ascribed to identified sources" (Krefting, 1991, p. 216). The researcher should be able to describe the research design and implementation in detail, address how the data was gathered, and then evaluate the effectiveness of the inquiry (Shenton, 2004). During this process the researcher should note any deviations or sources of variability which may have influenced the investigation. This includes those on behalf of the researcher, such as increased insight, as well as the participant, for example informant fatigue.

Last, confirmability is the qualitative researcher's equivalent of the concept of neutrality. The subjectivity of the researcher and her influence on the research process is taken into account in the qualitative research process. However, "steps must be taken to help ensure as far as possible that the work's findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher" (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). In order to ensure confirmability, the researcher kept notes during the research process to document personal feelings, thoughts, and ideas that were generated during the research process. In this way the researcher attempted to identify any biases or preconceived assumptions she may hold. Therefore, the researcher's reflexivity was accounted for in an attempt to strengthen the credibility criteria of the research (Krefting, 1991). The researcher's supervisor also cross checked the analysis of the transcripts to ensure confirmability.

3.2 Sampling

The target population for this research was lesbian females over the age of 25. There were two reasons for the age stipulation: First, the individuals chosen to take part in the research needed to be working and second, for ethical considerations. The purposive sampling technique, specifically snowball sampling was used to recruit participants as the individuals needed belonged to a predefined group (Wilson & Maclean, 2011). The participants were not known or friends of the researcher but were contacted through mutual acquaintances. Seven participants were identified through this sampling technique and were contacted via email and text messaging. The research conducted was of a sensitive nature and therefore it was important that none of the participants felt coerced into participating hence choosing email and/or text message to make contact. The email and/or text message was generic thus each participant received the same mail which included all relevant information. Please see appendices for example of the email.

3.3 Participants

Approximately seven participants were recruited to participate in the research. Due to the nature, scope, and time constraints of this research it was not practically viable to use more than seven participants.

Participants were of various ages, ranging from 26 years old to 65 years of age. Five of the seven participants were White, one was Coloured and another Indian. The participants worked in a variety of industries including, finance, education, human resource management, advertising, advocacy and marketing. The variety of industries touched upon allowed the researcher to construct a basic idea of what it means to be lesbian within various occupational

contexts. However, an in depth investigation of lesbian identity within specific environments was not possible due to the sample size and scope of the research.

3.4 Method of data collection

Each participant was required to partake in a semi structured interview. Wilson and Maclean (2011) explain that semi structured interviews are interviews "in which the researcher has a small number of questions relating to the themes that are to be explored, but allows the interview to progress in a flexible manner, often letting the natural interaction with the interviewee guide the direction that the interview takes" (p. 201). In this way the researcher was able to steer the interview in a particular direction in order to explore common themes which arose during the interviewing process while allowing for the development of a natural dialogue between the interviewee and interviewer. This was an important aspect of the interview process as the researcher's aim was to understand the development and negotiation of lesbian identity in the occupational environment. Therefore, questions related to lesbian identity in the workplace were used whilst simultaneously allowing for a more flexible dialogue to develop with the intention of eliciting additional data regarding the participant's subjective experience.

3.5 Data analysis

Thematic content analysis was used to analyse the data collected in this study. Braun and Clarke (2012) define thematic analysis as "a method for systematically identifying, organizing and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set" (p. 57). This qualitative method facilitates the identification and interpretation of meaningful themes

within the data in relation to the research question. First, thematic analysis (TA) accounts for the active role of the researcher; how they may influence the process of identify meaning within the data set, which themes are selected, how they are interpreted and so on (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Second, TA not only allows for the exploration of relevant themes but is a flexible way of analyzing the data as one can do so in a number of ways (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The researcher can focus on examining themes across the entire data set or the researcher can focus on a specific part of the data. Furthermore, meaningful themes are not necessarily those that are common, but are patterns which are important in relation to the research question being asked.

The themes identified within a data set are done so in either an inductive or deductive manner. Inductive meaning that the themes selected are strongly driven by the data itself whereas deductive implies that the analysis is directed by the researcher's theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, most researchers work using a combination of both approaches. Braun & Clarke (2012) acknowledge that it is "impossible to be purely inductive, as we always bring something to the data when we analyze it, and we rarely completely ignore the semantic content of the data when we code for a particular theoretical construct" (pp. 58-59). Thus TA also allows for the exploration of semantic as well as latent meanings and in this way facilitates the investigation of implicit meaning within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

This method of analysis is also flexible in the sense that it is not bound to a particular theoretical orientation as are a number of other qualitative methods such as discourse analysis or grounded theory. TA is only a method of data analysis and therefore can be used to analyze qualitative data which can then be linked to the broader theoretical framework within which the researcher is working (Braun & Clarke, 2012). TA can be utilised by both the essentialist

and the constructionist paradigms, however the focus and results of each will differ accordingly (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The "research epistemology guides what you can say about your data, and informs how you theorise meaning" (Braun& Clarke, 2006). With regards to this study, the theoretical approach was situated within the social constructionist and relational narrative realms. Thus the researcher looked at how meaning and experience were socially constructed and reconstructed, as well as the manner in which individuals fashioned multiple and dynamic identities according to where and how they placed themselves within their narratives (Burr, 2003; Somers, 1994).

Braun & Clark (2006) identify six phases of thematic analysis but do state that analysis should be viewed as a recursive process and not as a linear model. The six steps are listed as follows:

- Familiarisation with the data: In this phase the researcher should become intimately familiar with the data by critically and analytically reading and rereading textual data, in conjunction with complimentary audio or visual data if applicable (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Clarke & Braun, 2013). During this phase the researcher makes notes about the data, highlighting items of potential interest with the aim of identifying information relevant to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

- Coding: The researcher begins the systematic analysis of the data through coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding involves identifying and providing labels for aspects of the data which are deemed relevant in accordance to the research question. Codes work as shorthand, however coding is also an analytic process thus "codes capture both a semantic and conceptual reading of the data" (Clarke& Braun, 2013, p. 121).

- Searching for themes: This phase starts after all data has been coded and collected and so the focus moves from coding to identifying themes. The collated codes are analysed and the researcher looks at how certain codes may merge to form various themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A theme "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning with the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 62). This is an active process meaning that themes are not waiting to be uncovered but are essentially constructed by the researcher (Clarke & Braun, 2013). The phase is complete when the researcher has collected all the coded data applicable to each theme.

- Reviewing themes: Braun & Clarke (2012) explain that this phase "involves a recursive process whereby the developing themes are reviewed in relation to the coded data and entire data set" (p. 65). This phase is aimed at checking the quality of the identified themes. In other words, the researcher must decide first, whether the themes are actually themes or merely codes and second, identify whether they communicate something important about the data in relation to the research question and in connection with other themes. Lastly, the researcher must decide what information should be included or excluded in each of the identified themes (Clarke & Braun, 2013; Braun & Clarke, 2012). Some themes may in fact be more than one theme, others may need to be combined, and certain themes may eventually be discarded (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

- Defining and naming themes: In this phase the researcher analyzes each theme in detail in order to identify what makes each one unique; the essence of each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The themes should be related but not overlap so as to

avoid repetition and each should have a specific focus related to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

- Writing up: Clarke & Braun (2013) emphasise the importance of this phase and explain that it involves, "weaving together the analytic narrative and (vivid) data extracts to tell the reader a coherent and persuasive story about the data, and contextualizing it in relation to existing literature" (p. 122). The aim of the report is to offer a convincing story regarding the collected data based upon the undertaken analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The report should in essence provide an argument that answers the research question.

3.6. Ethics

Due to the sensitive nature of the research conducted, all the participants who took part in the research were over the age of 25. The age stipulation was put in place in an attempt to safeguard against recruiting participants who were in the midst of identity formation. According to Erikson's psychosocial stages of development, identity formation takes place between the ages of 12 and 19 (Passer & Smith, 2009). It follows, that by the age of 25, the participants would have generally developed a stable sense of self. A second requirement of this study was that each participant would have come out at least three years prior to the study. This parameter was put in place to avoid interviewing participants who may still be struggling with their coming out process and thus may have fond the experience too difficult to talk about. Additionally, the researcher also ensured that debriefing and counseling resources were made available to the participants, should the interview process have caused any of the participants any distress. None of the participants made use of these resources.

It is important to note that the term 'coming out' refers to the idea that the individual is being open about their sexual identity, i.e. Identifying as lesbian, in at least one sphere of life. Furthermore, when the researcher refers to the occupational and/or work environment, the researcher is referring to the work spaces specific to the participant's narratives.

he researcher also acknowledged the importance of confidentiality and privacy due to the sensitive nature of the research topic. Participants were provided with information regarding the research project before agreeing to participate to ensure that they each had ample opportunity to make an informed decision concerning participation. Additionally, each participant signed a consent form before being interviewed. All data collected is stored in a secure place. Participants were also given the option to either disclose their real names or use a pseudonym. Only one participants opted for the latter.

Chapter 4: Discussion

4.1 Introduction

As the participant's narratives began to unfold, eight pertinent themes began to emerge, themes which challenged preconceived notions I held regarding the coming out experience, as well as the magnitude and forms of discrimination experienced by the participants. Based on the literature that I had read, as well as anecdotal accounts heard from others, I expected to hear experiences of blatant discrimination but this was not the case. Alternatively, what I discovered through the research process were subtler, more nuanced forms of discrimination that frequently went undetected, and were often accepted as part of the lived experience of many South African lesbians.

During the research process it became increasingly apparent that the metamorphous of discrimination was, in part, due to the implementation of the constitution and basic labour laws in the workplace. Additionally, numerous contextual factors, as well as the residual influence of the apartheid regime, still affect the various spaces within which participants negotiate their identity (Smuts, 2011). Discrimination was not limited to sexual identity but weaved its way into the complexities and confinements of gender identity. The influences of the heteronormative framework could again be identified not only in how a lesbian understood herself within the work environment, but within the adoption of gender roles and prejudices within the lesbian community itself.

Furthermore, I realized that while discrete forms of discrimination have become more common place, this was not always the case, and was often context dependent. Discrimination exists in various forms within different occupational settings: One of the participants works as an accounting teacher and many of the other participants had acquaintances, friends, or family working within the education sector. Lesbians within the educational system often choose to

conceal their sexual identity, in varying degrees, because they work with children and adolescents. The stigma attached to homosexuality which equates 'gay' and paedophilia is still very prominent within heteronormative society. Heteronormative biases such as the latter, while understandably upsetting, were often simply accepted as 'normal'. This acceptance inevitably limited an individual's agency regarding the construction and negotiation of their sexual identity within the occupational context (Rust, 1993; Smuts, 2011). This phenomenon is touched on within this analysis but is a topic which calls for a more comprehensive exploration. Additionally, socio economic influences within the work context, the idea of 'blue collar' vs. 'white collar' work environments, further highlights the importance and influence of contextual factors.

While the participants interviewed worked mainly within 'white collar' environments such as advertising, finance, marketing, and human resource management, there was an awareness of the struggle of lesbians working in other industries such as retail, hospitality, and construction. The blue collar lesbian's narrative describes a very different experience: One of an individual who falls within the bottom tiers of both the economic and heteronormative hierarchy, thus falling between the constitutional cracks. These stories challenge the effectiveness of the constitution but, again, falls outside the scope of this research as my participants, while aware of the existence of these narratives, did not share similar experiences.

Participant's narratives also illustrated the complexity of language. Words aid in the meaning making process while simultaneously dictating, and thus limiting, the vocabulary one uses to make sense of the world (Better & Simula, 2015). Growing up, participants often found that they lacked the words to describe the internal and external experiences of their sexual identity and expressed a sense of relief when appropriate signifiers were eventually discovered. This process challenged my ideas around language, essentialism, and social constructionism in

the sense that while I could identify the limitations of the essentialist vocabulary, I had no choice but to acknowledge that it still invariably, provides the words to name, describe, and understand lived experiences. The importance of being able to have words through which one is able to construct a coherent narrative is critical in the negotiation and validation of identity and cannot be forgotten nor dismissed, regardless of the heteronormative slant of the language used in the meaning making process.

Lastly, the eight themes which were identified during the analysis of the data often overlap and interlink and have been discussed accordingly. Seven participants were interviewed and the themes extracted were identified in relation to the research question. The early stages of the participants coming out process is included to provide context and substance to the narratives. Furthermore, in this research, the coming out process is understood as dynamic in nature, and contextual, and thus needs to be viewed as holistically as possible. Early coming out experiences, as well as the historical contexts in which these took place, aid in locating and understanding each participant's narrative: How they make sense of these earlier experiences often informs the way the participants understand themselves as not only lesbian, but as a woman in their respective working worlds.

4.2 Themes

a. The heterosexual assumption

In heteronormative society, there is an overarching assumption that heterosexuality is the default 'normal' sexuality and thus heteronormativity, "the myriad ways in which heterosexuality is produced as a natural, unproblematic, taken-for-granted phenomenon", results in a privileging of heterosexuality over other sexual orientations (Kitzinger, 2005, p.

478). Individuals grow up in contexts in which they are assumed to be heterosexual until proven otherwise. People inevitably ascribe to this assumption and make sense of themselves and the world around them through a heteronormative lens (Habarth, 2008). Consequently, many individuals unconsciously foreclose on their sexual identity by uncritically accepting the heterosexual label as their own (Eliason, 1995). Conversely, others will attempt to make sense of the self in this way but find themselves inevitably questioning the idea that they are 'straight'. Cass (1979) argues that this realization marks the beginning of the homosexual identity formation process.

All the participants could recall moments which led to them questioning the idea that they were 'straight'. A number of participants described knowing from an early age that they were somehow different:

"So I was one of those young ones who were already blooming" (Judith; 26 years old; Financial advisor)

"I was 11 I reckon." (Linda; 65 years old; Accounting teacher)

"I was six years old." (Claire; 32 years old; Marketing manager)

While others recognized that they did not fall within the presumed heterosexual category later in life:

"I've had two fiancées. I was bisexual for a long time. I know I did do boyfriends." (Adrienne; 60 years old; Environmental consultant)

"It was kind of from late 20s that I saw myself as bisexual but I was married to a man at that point with a daughter. As I say, even though I thought of myself as bisexual, I had never really acted on it in any way." (Nina; 49 years old; Researcher)

Irrespective of whether younger or older, participants recognized that they did not fit into the prescribed heterosexual category but attempted to conform nevertheless. This phenomenon is unsurprising as participants were socialized in predominantly heterosexual environments which positioned heterosexuality as the default sexual orientation. Furthermore, homosexuality is often stigmatized in society and thus given very little positive value (Cass, 1979; Rust, 1993).

Judith describes the experience of understanding, at some level, that she was somehow different to her heterosexual counterparts, whilst concurrently being unable to verbalise this difference. She explains this experience rather succinctly:

"I couldn't quite compute exactly what it was because I'd only been shown the straight way"

And continues to explain:

"I had boyfriends and stuff though cause you obviously don't understand"

Claire describes a similar experience:

"...I definitely had feelings for girls but I dated boys in high school…"

"…and which is why I sort of had just a few boys and that sort of thing, um, I've never had sex with a man but I've had a number of boyfriends."

And elaborates further:

"Um, a lot of my friends, and this seems to…and I don't know if this is still the trend but it seemed to be the trend at that stage during my late high school years, where they kind of automatically turned themselves bisexual because it was like a safe word. That they didn't want to completely say that they were fully gay, um, or fully straight for that matter. They just wanted

to rather say that they're bisexual, you know, or there's obviously the automatic response, phase, or whatever the case may be."

According to Cass (1979)'s development model of homosexual identity, at this point, participants have entered stage two of their sexual identity formation and are attempting to neutralise ambivalence associated with the label 'homosexual' by adopting the label 'bisexual' or understanding their homosexuality as 'a phase'. However, Rust (1993) argues that the understanding of bisexuality in this way, robs the sexual orientation of legitimacy. First, bisexuality is understood as a 'phase' which forms part of the earlier stages of homosexual identity development and is subsequently perceived as 'less than' the later stages of development. Second, bisexuality is simply understood as a stage beyond the shedding of heterosexuality but prior to the acquisition of a homosexual identity (Rust, 1993). It follows that an individual who identifies with the label 'bisexual' has yet to develop a fully integrated and mature identity.

Interestingly enough, almost all participants described themselves as bisexual first. In most of their narratives, participants and ascribed to the idea that bisexuality formed part of a process of personal exploration, a stepping stone towards uncovering their 'true' lesbian selves. Once being involved intimately with a female, bisexual explorations ceased as the feelings that participants had been told they "ought" to experience with men, were experienced with woman. Bisexuality, in this sense, appears to have helped participants make sense of themselves. Moreover, the label provided a space within which the individual could adopt an identity which they felt was 'safer' and more accepted within the confines of the heteronormative framework.

The acceptance and understanding of bisexuality in this way, highlights the pervasive nature of essentialism and the perpetuation of the binary classification system regarding sexual orientation. This form of dichotomous thinking does not take into account the broad spectrum

of sexual experiences: The individual is placed in a position where they are 'forced' to choose from two sexual orientations even if these labels do not accurately describe their experiences in the world (Cox & Gallois, 1996; Rust, 1993). This concept is illustrated through the narratives of the majority of participants: Bisexuality is described as an exploratory phase rather than as a form of sexuality in its own right.

Nevertheless, as stated earlier essentialism is pervasive and it follows that participants would make sense of their narratives from within this paradigm. Rust (1993) does emphasise the importance of keeping in mind that individuals do not experience their identities as socially constructed nor do they understand their sexual orientations as "variable descriptions of their sexual location" (p. 70). Rather, the individual experiences their sexuality as stable and inherent, retrospectively locating change within their personal narratives. Thus, one may describe the development of their sexual identity as an exploratory, goal orientated journey. This journey is informed and understood through the individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, through which homosexual identity is uncovered (Rust, 1993).

b. Language and the coming out narrative

The use of language across multiple social domains to construct a preferred sexual orientation plays out in numerous institutional contexts (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004; Habarth, 2008). If one thinks of various children's fairy tales, parables, stories and films, heterosexuality is the lens through which familial structures and intimate relationships are depicted, constructed, and understood. Therefore, it is to be expected that participants struggled to find the words to name and express their experiences.

As Linda states:

"I mean, I didn't even know that such a thing *(homosexuality)* even existed…"

And again, as Judith simply explains:

"I couldn't quite compute exactly what it was because I'd only been shown the straight way"

While Claire describes a similar experience as follows:

"I think in high school I pretty much knew, um, I felt that I kind of…it's strange, you don't sort of identify, especially as a teenager. I knew that I was very attracted to women but I didn't actually, kind of, put two and two together if that makes any sense?"

With time, participants inevitably found the words to name this difference whether it be through a chance encounter, a book, or through meeting other lesbians. This happened at various points in their lives and once the words had been found, participants were able to name and describe various experience's that had previously been inexplicable.

Claire explains that she found the word to describe herself when she was six:

"Um, but now, saying this as well, it's going to sound like a bit of a contradiction, the first time I actually in all honesty knew, I was walking down the corridors, this was in primary school, and I had these two girlfriends, female friends. And the one girl said to me, um, yeah, her sister is a bit sick and I was quite sensitive and compassionate child and I said "shame what's wrong with your sister" "No she has a mental illness" so I'm like "shame, what do you mean?" you know, she's like "she has a girlfriend" "okay, I still don't understand what you mean" she's like "No, she has a female friend that, um, that she is in a relationship with and then engages in sex so she is actually a lesbian". The strangest thing is, and I remember this so clearly, my

initial response in that split-second wasn't 'Oh, my word' it was "oh my word there's a word for me'. I was six years old."

While Charmaine (61 years old; Industrial psychologist) states that after she read the "The Well of Loneliness" and then dated a girl who:

"…belonged to a soft ball team and there were a whole pile of lesbians. I started to realize, you know, that I am not this weird thing in the world."

The acquisition of a language through which coherent and meaningful narratives were constructed, appears to have led to decreased feelings of self alienation and therefore a better understanding of self. One of the difficulties of deviating from the accepted heterosexual norm, is growing up in a society in which queer individuals find themselves unable to find the words to express and describe their experiences. Better & Simula (2015) speak of the limitations of binary language which they argue, fails to provide words which accurately describe the full spectrum of sexual experiences. Essentialist understandings of sexuality are accepted as fact, as are the taken for granted binary assumptions individuals use to try and make sense of themselves and the world around them.

Paradoxically, the language used by participants to make sense of their experiences forms part of the essentialist paradigm yet is also responsible for the poverty of signifiers available to describe the complexity of human sexuality, as well as the specific moral and social judgements infused within the available descriptors (Better & Simula, 2015). Regardless, these words allowed for the creation of coherent and personally meaningful narratives. For the majority of participants, this played a crucial role in the understanding and acceptance of self. In this way, participants were able to make sense of their sexuality within the heteronormative framework, thus 'normalizing' their experience.

It is inevitable that an individual who is born within a particular cultural and temporal context, would adopt the signifiers which give shape to that reality. However, the irony is that these labels 'lesbian', 'queer', 'straight', 'gay' etc., which aid in the understanding of the self, stem from the binary classification system which ultimately perpetuates the heteronormative hierarchy (Better & Simula, 2015; Shefer, 2004).

The idea that an individual is 'born' straight or 'gay' illustrates this point. Furthermore, the idea of sexuality as genetic, forms an important part of a number of the participant's narratives:

"There were no other lesbians around so I think you are just unfortunately genetically you know, genetically built that way." (Charmaine)

Linda concurs and states that her sexuality was, and still is, not a choice but something that she was born with:

"I was 11 I reckon. it's quite funny cause lots of people think you choose to be gay or you choose to be lesbian, It's like a career path, you know, and I firmly believe you are born lesbian or not lesbian, I really firmly believe that. You don't go gay…I've always said to someone that thinks that you choose to be gay that no one would ever choose a life that is so difficult."

Charmaine bitterly reflects on how difficult her sexuality has made her life and can't understand why people would believe that it is a chosen way of being:

"I mean the worst thing for me is I really do believe in this genetic thing. I mean I really think you are born this way."

The understanding of sexuality as genetic or based on the gender of the desired other appears to influence or form part of strategies which participants utilized to make sense of their sexuality and/or conform to the heteronormative framework (Better & Simula, 2015; Shefer,

2004). When living in a context which prescribes heterosexuality as normal whilst other ways of being sexually are understood as abnormal, the idea of sexual orientation being predetermined by genetics aids in normalizing the experience whilst simultaneously reinforcing the idea that homosexuality is an inherent 'faulty characteristic' of the individual. Cass (1979) refers to this strategy as the "personal innocence strategy". She argues that this method of coping is frequently used by individuals who accept their homosexuality, but view it in a negative light and thus do not wish to take responsibility for their sexual orientation. Statements such as "I was born this way" are common when this strategy is used. This may aid in increasing personal acceptance of one's homosexuality but feelings of isolation and alienation may increase (Cass, 979).

The idea of having to take 'responsibility' for one's sexuality when one differs from the heterosexual assumption, speaks to the inherent power dynamics which form part of the sexual hierarchy. The homosexual who uses language provided by the dominant paradigm to make sense of their narrative is then positioned as not taking accountability for their sexuality, a responsibility which their heterosexual counterparts are exempt from when they describe their heterosexuality as intrinsic and natural (Cass, 1979; Shefer, 2004).

c. Coming out in the South African context

South Africa was one of the first countries in the world to protect sexual minorities from sexual discrimination as well as the first country in Africa to legalise same-sex marriages (Sanders,1997). These two events, while noteworthy, unfortunately do not negate the fact that sexual minorities in South Africa live in a country which continues to favour heterosexuality and heteronormative values and ideals above others. South Africa remains embedded in the remnants of the countries infamous apartheid regime and continues to be a predominantly patriarchal and conservatively religious country (Sanders, 1997). Participants locate

themselves within these greater cultural, historical, and social narratives and it is within these versions of events that they attempt to make sense of their lived experiences, specifically their lesbian identity (Somers, 1994). With this in mind, it is understandable that coming out in the familial and social environment was an intimidating, and often scary experience, for all the participants.

Judith commented:

"At that age I don't think you have the emotional maturity nor the courage to cause when it's your first time coming out you don't know what kind of reaction you are going to get."

There was uncertainty around how loved ones would respond to the news that participants were lesbian. A number of individuals were worried that their parents would be disappointed in them because they were gay. Additionally, some of the participants came from backgrounds with strong religious and cultural influences.

Claire explains some of the fears she experienced around coming out to family and friends:

"…generally speaking it is far worse in your head…you always assume the worst, I guess it's a human thing as well."

Historically, religion plays a significant role in mainstream attitudes and ideas that individual's hold regarding gender and sexuality. Traditionally, the majority of organized religions only approve of sexual relations which promote procreativity and which take place between married heterosexual couples, while sexual orientations which fall outside this category are often positioned as immoral and/or unnatural (Elia, 2003). It follows that participant's religious beliefs, more often than not, substantially influenced various aspects of

their coming out processes as the majority of participants come from quite conservative religious backgrounds.

Claire states:

"…often religion is the biggest, um, the biggest hurdle to get over for any homosexual, bisexual…or even asexual and pansexual and all of them…but it's the biggest hurdle, it's religion, um, your conservative religions. And the first thing they clutch to is, you know, it goes against the bible"

She continues to explain:

"Strict religious environments that it is quite hectic…very, very hectic to come out"

While Charmaine feels that:

"Religious preaching is horrifying".

Reference groups, which includes religious groups as well as cultural groups, play significant role in the coming out process because they can either increase or decrease feelings of social isolation (Cass, 1979). I grew up in a Catholic household and then attended an Anglican boarding school for two years. While I am no longer a practising Catholic, my background, along with various stories I had heard from friends, in the media, and at work, informed my assumption that religion would be a major hurdle facing the more religious participants, or at least those who came from strict religious backgrounds.

Judith, who is Muslim, explains that one of her biggest battles with accepting her sexuality was trying to marry her religious beliefs and her homosexuality, explaining:

"I am very, I won't say very religious, but I practice my religion. So I have always had that form of conflict within me from the time I was a teenager."

"…And you already know everyone, they don't explicitly say no but being gay is wrong but you know that religiously they have already thrown it out that it is wrong.

Judith's concern is not without just cause. Islam is the world's second largest religion and prescribes strict parameters concerning sexuality and gender (Sanderson, 2014a). Homosexuality is prohibited within Islam and because of the religion's general intolerance towards gay and lesbian individuals, it is difficult to estimate the number gay and lesbian individuals living in South Africa (Harrison, 2005).

However, contrary to my somewhat biased assumption, and participants initial concern regarding the acceptance of their sexuality, a number of participants found an unexpected source of solace and support through their faith, either through an alternative interpretation of their religion, or through a priest/mother who they unexpectedly found support through.

Judith's mother responded to her news, telling her:

"You know my child if God has made you this way and you say he has made you this way then he knows best".

Imam Muhsin Hendricks is one of the world's first openly gay Imams and also one of the leaders of the Open Mosque in Cape Town (Sanderson, 2014b). Hendricks made the decision to be open about his sexuality not only for himself, but for other queer Muslim individuals who were struggling to make peace with their sexuality in light of their religious beliefs.

Judith is one of the individuals who was deeply affected by his decision to be open about his sexuality:

"…he came out publicly and said you know what, he is a gay imam and he doesn't see anything wrong with it. And then when he came out it was a bit of a ray of sunshine and I was like, you know what, it sort of stamps the fact that I can keep on practicing."

Claire also comes from a very religious background and her father, a devout Anglican, struggled to process the news that she was gay. Traditionally the Anglican and Catholic church have been publically vocal regarding their intolerance of homosexuality. However, over the years a number of Christian churches have become increasingly liberal, including Catholicism and the current pope, Pope Francis, commented that, "If someone is gay and searches for the Lord and has goodwill, who am I to judge" (cited in Hale, 2015). In Claire's case, a female priest (known as a mother in the Anglican church) came to her defence after Claire's parents sought her counsel regarding Claire's homosexuality:

"I'm going to ask you a few questions: Firstly, is Claire healthy?" "Yes.", "Is Claire mentally healthy?", "Yes.", "Is she doing drugs?", "No.", "Is Claire an alcoholic?" No.", "Does Claire know what she wants to do with her life, does she have a career going?", "Yes." "Then I really don't understand your problem because your daughter is 100% normal." And for an Anglican Mother to say that, that changed…that did a lot of the work for me…. It was kind of ironic that the church actually came to my defense…"

Kate (27 years old; Copywriter and part time lecturer)'s parents are both Catholic, as are Nina's, but both families have a more alternative and accepting interpretation of their traditionally conservative religion.

Kate describes her mother's beliefs as:

"Catholic, but kind of weird about it. Like my mom's quite esoteric and involves everything she likes from all kinds of religions and has her own little thing going. So ja, they were fine with that…my mom's interpretation of the bible is very non conservative or traditional."

While Nina explains:

"I grew up in a fairly religious background. I mean my family were catholic, I was catholic. But there has always been an openness around issues of sexuality…in a funny kind of way with the religious background there."

The negation of my assumption was a pleasant surprise and also confirms the notion that context plays a significant role in the negotiation and understanding of an individual's identity. This context includes various facets which interplay and significantly influence the narrative of individuals. However, it is important to note that while the participants in this research generally had very positive experiences in this regard, their narratives will differ greatly from other gay and lesbian individual's living in less accepting environments. Additionally, while it appears that traditional religions are becoming increasingly tolerant of sexual minorities, this tolerance in itself means that intolerance existed beforehand. The idea of progression being measured by an increase in tolerance illustrates the very real power relations which exist and are perpetuated by the binary classification system within heteronormative society. This point is again illustrated by the concern friends and family showed towards participants.

Friends and family were generally supportive of the participants and while, at times, it may have taken time for friends and family members to truly support them, none of the participants were rejected by family because of their sexuality. In fact, one of the major

concerns of some of the parents was not their children's homosexuality per say, but the fear that their daughter's lives would be infinitely more difficult because they were lesbian.

Claire was worried that she had somehow disappointed her mother because she was lesbian:

"Why are you crying?" I said, "I'm so sorry that I'm a disappointment to you." Her first reaction was like "No lovie, that's not why I'm crying. I'm crying because I fear what…the way the world might react to you." She said, "I fear that people won't be as open and understanding as I am".

And Kate had a similar experience with her mother:

"They were supportive but they were worried that it was going to be hard for me."

Furthermore, a number of the older participants grew up in apartheid South Africa and during this time homosexuality was not only thought of as morally wrong but was also illegal. Additionally, not only were gays and lesbians positioned as promiscuous individuals who did not maintain the interests of white conservative society, but homosexuality was often positioned as synonymous with paedophilia (Cameron, 1995; Sanders, 1997). However, lesbianism did not seem to be an area of great concern until 1988. There was widespread concern that older lesbians were corrupting the minds of the youth, and spreading the 'disease', homosexuality (Gevisser, 1995). Thus, when the Sexual Offenses Act of 1969 was amended, it prohibited sexual acts between a woman and females under the age of 19.

The early 1990s saw the dismantling of apartheid and in 1994 democracy was implemented in South Africa and the Constitution officially came into being in 1996 (Gevisser,1995).

Adrienne recalls when the constitution came into effect:

"I remember when the constitution came out and gays and lesbians were given rights and all that sort of thing. It was a huge gedunte… I think, no…I think that the fact that people now can get married, I think the fact that you now have a claim on your partner's estate, um, that type of thing. That's definitely changed…I think all those things are very positive changes."

Other participants voiced feeling proud to be South African because of the countries progressive stance regarding homosexuality, particularly within the African context. Although sexual minorities are now legally protected from sexual discrimination in South Africa, Africa as a whole remains predominantly homophobic. In a number of African countries such as Ghana and Uganda, homosexuality is punishable by imprisonment and in some cases, death (Hepple, 2012).

Claire explained:

"I'm a very proud South African, I'm very proud that it has been for a long time leagues ahead of any other country, the fact that the UK has only just caught up with us. I'm very proud of the fact that I do feel a lot safer in South Africa than I do probably anywhere else, like Namibia or Botswana, definitely not Zimbabwe, you know, I would crap myself a little bit." (Claire)

While Judith commented:

"Well, like I said my history and my family stem from Pakistan…Ummm…and I am very grateful I think. And I am very lucky because I sometimes wonder if my parents just stayed there? You know…how would my life have turned out, you know? So, in South Africa I am very grateful…"

Participants often became increasingly aware of the impact legislation in South Africa has on their lives when travelling or when considering immigration.

Claire commented:

"Travelling, particularly in Africa and Arab countries, is particularly difficult because homosexuality is either illegal or is perceived as immoral."

Claire explains that although the advertising industry in the United Arab Emirates is thriving, it is not a viable career move for her because of her sexuality:

"I mean the ad industry is really pumping in the UAE but it really wouldn't be wise for X and I to go there…"

While Kate describes, in hindsight, feeling a certain amount of relief being back in South Africa after visiting Kazakhstan with her girlfriend:

"…So it was a relief coming back home. I felt more at ease being in South Africa."

The coming out process is understood as a dynamic process which occurs every time a person enters a new space. Somers (1994) argues that one's social identity is created through "narratives and narrativity" and so an individual comes to be who they are "by being located or locating ourselves (usually unconsciously) in social narratives rarely of our own making" (p. 606). Travelling in different countries illustrates this point while demonstrating, in a very practical sense, the limitations sexual minorities regularly face. External factors, such as oppressive legislation and cultures, limit an individual's agency to be an active participant in not only their identity negotiation, but in the creation of their narratives (Ward & Wistanley, 2005: Elia, 2003). Lastly, while prejudice regarding homosexuality in South Africa remains prevalent, it is evident that the constitution does allow for participants to be actively involved in the negotiation of their identities, in varying degrees.

d. Being out at work is nice but not necessarily important

Disclosure or non-disclosure of sexual identity has a variety of meanings in different contexts. For example, coming out can be positioned as a political act, through which one may hope to create political change, while the act of nondisclosure may be viewed as an act which perpetuates the marginalization of sexual minorities (King et al, 2008). Furthermore, disclosing one's sexual identity in the workplace can be a stressful process as one may face potential discrimination, isolation, or job loss (Griffith & Hebl, 2002). Membership of a minority and/or disadvantaged group often inherently includes a stigma (King et al, 2008). In the case of homosexuality, this stigma is concealable and thus only potentially discreditable. On the other hand, disclosure of sexual identity in the workplace, has been linked to improved general wellbeing and lower levels of anxiety, as well as depression. Living a 'double life' impacts self-esteem, self-worth, and the development of an integrated identity (King et al, 2008; Ward & Wistanley, 2005). From an organizational perspective, concealment of homosexuality also negatively impacts work performance, as well as employee satisfaction, because a lot of time and energy is used to maintain the heterosexual guise.

While all participants were out in their work contexts, in some way or another, the majority did not feel the need to be "loud and proud" about their sexuality but did not believe in remaining 'closeted' either. Linda commented while laughing:

"I didn't ever go to anybody and say "I'm gay", you know. No, not loud and proud." Nina stated that:

"I don't think it is necessarily something everyone has to do. I just think it makes their lives easier if they do it."

Kate explains that being out at work as follows:

"I think it's nice. I think it's beneficial. I don't necessarily think it is important."

While Judith commented:

"I don't explicitly go out and tell people "hey…I am gay" in a conversation. If they assume it, they assume it."

Kate claims that her sexuality is:

"…not something I feel that I need to broadcast or something. I am not like proud, you know that pride thing. Again, I am not saying that I don't understand why you need to do it-you know the whole "change society thing". But at the same time, sexuality is lame to me."

Simply, a number of participants viewed their sexuality as a private part of themselves: As heterosexual individual's don't announce their sexuality upon arrival, they similarly felt that to do so was unnecessary.

Linda explains:

"I personally don't cause I don't see why, same as you don't go into any place and say, "Listen, I've got a husband." If they find out that you've got a husband, they find out that you've got a husband and that's it. You don't actually go and say, "Listen, I've got a husband.", "I've got a relationship with a man." The same way that I don't go and say, "I've got a relationship with a woman."

Another concern which was raised by four of the participants regarding coming out in the workplace, was the idea of their identity, and by extension, their work, being defined by their sexuality. In other words, they did not want colleagues to have preconceived notions about

themselves, as individuals, based on their ideas of what it means to be gay and then judge their work based on these preconceived notions.

As Claire states:

"Should someone ask about their sexuality, they will speak about it but often feel that it is not necessary to be overt, that their work should speak for itself, and do not want it to be categorized based on their sexuality."

These participants explained that they did not want their sexuality to define their identity:

"So yes, I do think about that very carefully because people do have definite boxes that they do put you in." (Nina)

However, Nina continues to explain:

"But when they have developed some relationship with you and then you know, you say you are lesbian, and they meet the partner, it is somehow easier for them. They have seen the other parts of your identity."

Along the same lines, there was also the idea of keeping in mind the way in which their sexuality may be received. Realistically, participants are not always sure how their heterosexual colleagues are going to respond to their homosexuality, and so coming out, in which ever way, is, at times, done so with a slight sense of trepidation:

"You know I don't feel the need to broadcast. Again, I don't want to alienate people…so I guess that somehow that is my own concern. So, as opposed to me being afraid of people knowing exactly what my sexuality is or not, some of it is not to make other people feel

uncomfortable with it. So for instance, if I am lecturing people, I won't go "Hi, I am Kate. I do this and I am gay." (Kate)

At the same time there are moments when openly talking about being a lesbian is important and needs to be done as Nina experienced:

"Although sometimes it might be necessary to do that. I mean I did an activity, a workshop, with a group of people from across Africa. They were journalists working, education journalists, community station journalists and the person who asked me to do it was clear that they wanted them to have a more progressive view in the community stations they were working in, but they were extremely homophobic. You know, to the point that people were talking about weapons and how gay people need to be killed. And then as the workshop went on, it became very clear that ummm…gay people are people with horns and I carried on with the workshop, it was an awareness one. At the end I then said that I am lesbian and I am going to go home and make supper for my children and it was necessary to do that because it was almost to shock them into seeing that this is a normal person. So sometimes that is necessary to put that identity in front but many times I would hold on with that, ja."

However, to openly speak about sexuality or to be more discrete does seem to be rather context dependent and not necessarily prescriptive.

e. Discrimination has become closeted

In recent years displays of overt discrimination have generally become less frequent, due to changes in work place policies and legislation. However, nonverbal and subtler forms of discrimination have become increasingly common (Griffith & Hebl, 2002). Six of the seven participants did not feel that they had personally experienced overt discrimination based purely on their sexuality, within the work context. Furthermore, these participants did not believe that

they had been unfairly treated, nor did they feel that they had not been promoted, or the like, because they were lesbian, which I had not anticipated. I had an idea in my mind that overt displays of discrimination were still very prevalent and entered into the research process with this perception in mind.

However, during the interview process I realized that this was not the case, with the exception of Charmaine. She reported that she had often experienced unfair treatment in the work place, including being excluded from a number of work opportunities because she was lesbian. Charmaine described experiencing both overt and covert forms of discrimination, not only personally, but towards other gay and lesbian individuals. She explained that in her role as a human resources manager, she often witnessed gay colleagues not being promoted because of their sexuality. Additionally, she was often subjected to off-hand offensive remarks being made, about her homosexual workmates, by senior management:

"I would have to go with results for people who would have to get promoted, we would get "Oh no, you can't let 'Johnny' become a manager…he is one of those." So very definite ahhh…But the sad thing is that everyone laughs along with the gay people whilst at the same time, you know, discriminating. But I suppose that is exactly the same as black white discrimination or black coloured."

Furthermore:

"… what I also know is the levels of discrimination are quite incredible, but it is so covert. People are always nice to you. It's not like anyone is, overtly rude to you, but you are kind of just excluded. Or if there is an issue, they all band against. I think it is a 100% reality that you live with endless covert discrimination and it plays out in all sorts of ways."

Charmaine's experiences are still very concerning but with that said, overall, I felt that there did seem to be a positive, more accepting change, within a number of work contexts. However, as the interviews continued it also became increasingly apparent that discrimination within the workplace, while less severe, still existed but was in a subtler form. Covert, or more discrete forms of discrimination, seem to have been experienced by most participants in varying forms. Applying for, and negotiating and receiving work benefits, is an avenue which continues to be challenging for homosexual individuals in the work place. One has no choice but to disclose their sexual identity should they wish to access benefits such as medical aid, pensions, and/or compassionate leave (Smuts, 2011). This places the individual in the difficult position of not only having to disclose their sexual identity, but also having to validate the authenticity of their same sex relationship (Smuts, 2011).

Nina elaborates:

"Even when people are negotiating, particularly benefits in the workplace, then it's tricky. Even if there hasn't, you know been any discrimination in an overt way, because when there…there is the law and then there are the basic conditions of employment…Firstly you have to disclose to be able to access those benefits and then you have to prove a whole lot of things and then you know you maybe not married. In another sense in a same sex relationship they take the time you have spent together. So even then, it forces you to access some of those benefits that would have…medical aid benefits for your partner for example. It then becomes something that forces you to disclose and many people just don't and so then those couples don't have any of the other benefits…constantly having to prove that this is a real relationship. So ja…those discriminations that, at that kind of level…ja…its more subtle."

In this way, homosexual individuals are essentially robbed of a certain amount of agency regarding their choice to disclose or not disclose their sexual identity in the work place.

One has no choice but to take up the subject position of lesbian, should an individual wish to access employee benefits, regardless of whether the occupational space is felt to be supportive or safe (King et al, 2008; Ward & Winstanley, 2005). Alternatively, an individual could choose not to take up this subject position but at great personal expense.

Going to work functions can also be a challenge and Nina states that a number of lesbians she has worked with struggle in this regard:

"And often when it is a very male dominated environment as well…It's the discrimination when you go to a function together."

Similarly, Linda explains that as a teacher she may attend staff functions with her partner but not functions where pupils may be present.

"I think, as I said I'm a teacher, so from a teacher's point of view…For example, Adrienne and I have never attended a matric dance. We never, you know, would go, just because I am a teacher and people are stupid as far as that's concerned."

Linda's experience highlights the assertion that identity negotiation and spaces are inextricably intertwined (Smuts, 2011). As a result of the greater social narrative regarding homosexuality and working with children, Linda chooses to be open about her sexuality in the staffroom while in the classroom, she has chosen to conceal her sexual identity (Elia, 2003). Furthermore, although the majority of participants felt comfortable going to work functions as a couple, they generally would avoid public displays of affection:

"And in that sense I won't openly display public affection or whatever you know? And it's out of respect for those who don't understand. I don't expect them to understand." (Judith)

f. Being considerate of heteronormative sensibilities

During the interviews, it became increasingly apparent that participants were very aware of their heterosexual colleagues and how their homosexuality may affect and/or be construed by them. This awareness appeared to be automatic and formed part of the identity negotiation process within various work spaces. It often included a form of self-censorship, which did not necessarily form part of a passing or concealment strategy: The heterosexual other was, more often than not, considered before themselves. There were a number of daily activities, everyday pleasantries, and ways of being that were unconsciously tweaked, events which in the heterosexual narrative, are a given, such as holding a partner's hand, kissing under a tree, going to a work function, or having a family photo on your desk or as a screensaver.

Nina described a gay colleague's struggle regarding family photos:

"Ja…I mean what always stuck in mind was someone saying to me what do they put on as their screen saver in their office. They just can't put up photos like everyone else-like family photos…so they can't bring that into the…and it wasn't that she was sure that she couldn't it just wasn't sure if it could happen so she just left it out."

Claire speaks about adjusting her clothing in the work environment so as not to offend:

"Actually, coming to think about it now, the one way that I have been affected, with me personally in the working environment, is that. I don't know if it's that or if it's because I feel that every now and then I do cut my hair short because I prefer it that way, where I have to sort of soften it a little bit with jewellery and make up just to sort of feel that if I had to dress as a very butch woman, it would be harder on the eyes...Yeah, sometimes I am a bit weary of how I dress and if, you know, I can be a little bit more effeminate within the working environment."

Or Linda's poignant comment:

"Um, in that you can't be 100% open, it doesn't matter who you are, what you are, you can't walk down the street holding hands. You can't stand under a tree in the park and you know, just kiss, it just wouldn't work."

Understanding the motivations behind this self-monitoring process appears to be complex but also predominantly based on first, not offending their heterosexual colleagues and second, self-protection:

"…there is that stigma attached, so it makes…naturally, I think one puts up a shield to protect yourself. And you don't want to expose yourself to unnecessary finger pointing or gossiping, or having someone writing something on your door or however people are going to react." (Linda)

"…there is always that, at the back of your head, are people going to accept it or aren't they? Especially when you're younger, I think, it's very-extremely difficult." (Linda)

Offense is often avoided by being considerate of the heterosexual's ignorance and possible prejudices they may hold, the latter being understood and excused as a by-product of just "not knowing any better".

Judith feels that this is particularly relevant when interacting with Muslim men in the workplace:

"Like I said I know in the Islamic religion, especially men, they are very like, they just don't understand it at all. They just can't understand it. For them it's like, "you gay-you need to sort your shit out."

Kate describes this experience:

"I don't know what my concern is about doing that. I don't think that I am so altruistic that I am concerned about other people's feelings or that I am going to offend these people. That's a bit…you know assumptive that this will be offensive. So yes…I am aware of myself doing that."

In this way, participants attempted to control potential incidents which may offend heterosexual sensibilities. This also resulted in the burden of responsibility regarding "offense" being unfairly distributed and participants would more often than not, adjust accordingly.

Charmaine commented:

"So you give in to social pressure which is people in the environment do not want to be made uncomfortable with your difference and you bow down to their pressure by pretending you aren't different."

Interestingly enough, re-education of the heterosexual other, formed part of this adjustment process. I pondered whether the willingness to take on this role may be partly influenced by the participant's own personal struggles accepting and understanding their sexuality. Homosexuals, bisexuals, and heterosexuals in South Africa grow up, in varying degrees, within the same heteronormative framework and participants seemed able to keep this context in mind when negotiating various levels of homophobia within the work environment. Furthermore, this automatic response illustrates how entrenched heteronormativity is within South African society. I was surprised at not only the pragmatic approach many of the participants adopted towards people who were often simply intolerant of their sexuality, but also at the willingness and patience they displayed regarding 're-educating' their heterosexual counterparts:

"…I think as gays and lesbians and bisexuals, I think we often stand back defensively and shout back…and forget that we actually need to educate people, because people inherently fear what they don't understand. The moment that you teach them and make them understand, the fear is gone, and you can't expect them…you can't expect the…you know, a fifty year old man, who went to the army and had three sisters to look after, um, you know, who was brought up in Padhuid, you know, part of the Anglican church to suddenly, you know, wake up and say "Ok cool, well here's my rainbow flag" prancing down the street with you, it's not going to happen because they…people, inherently, come from different backgrounds and, you know, for them to understand you, you need to understand them first." (Claire)

The need to be understanding of the origins of the straight individual's ignorance and bias may be practically necessary, but also highlights the pervasiveness of the heterosexual assumption. The idea of heterosexuality as not only normative, but somehow morally superior, is highlighted by the notion that a child's safety, or thinking, may be impinged upon should the teacher's sexuality come to light. Moreover, I found the ease with which Linda accepted these blatantly offensive prejudices concerning and difficult to process:

"It's not an issue for me but I think as I said, specifically working with children, I just – I just feel that from that point of view I have to be sensible. It's not that I'm hiding that I'm gay or that I'm ashamed of it or anything like that, I just feel that it is a sensitive issue, you know...people send their kids into school where they think they're safe, you know, and like I said, it doesn't matter about the loud and proud movement, people still have this image. I think that's why us gay teachers wouldn't advertise the fact to the school board."

The idea of overt and covert discrimination, as well as the automatic absorption of the heteronormative concern as one's own, is a concerning reality for gay teachers in South Africa, of which there is very little literature available. Linda's experience demonstrates how the act

of coming out can potentially damage a teacher's credibility regardless as credibility is based on opinion rather than fact (Ross, Simmonds, & Hunt, 2002). Subsequently, Linda's competence as a teacher is potentially rendered null and void in light of her sexuality due to the pervasiveness of the stigma associated with homosexuality in the South African classroom: "We wouldn't want a lesbian or gay to teach because they will, you know, encourage it." (anonymous parent as cited in Davies, 2015; Ross et al, 2002):

"I am a teacher and people are stupid as far as that's concerned if they know you're gay. They don't want their girls to associate because you'll lead them astray but they'll quite happily send the girls off on a camping trip. And there is a single male, you know, not thinking that the single male will lead the girls astray, you know, just because you're a deviant in their mind." (Linda)

Kate relates a similar encounter at the school where her mother is a teacher:

"My mom is a teacher and she is…so she is at this all-girls school. And then their new head mistress was gay and then it was like this whole big issue. All these people protesting, particularly at all sex schools…having a gay teacher…"

Homosexuality is thus perceived as immoral and deviant which results in both teachers and students choosing not to disclose their sexual orientation. What follows, is the idea that there are no homosexual learners and staff and therefore, no need to enforce stronger policies which will support sexual minorities in the schooling system. Additionally, learners and teachers are unlikely to come out without these policies in place (Davies, 2015).

Historically, the education system is an institution which plays an important role in regarding the introduction and perpetuation of heteronormative ideals within society, and the South African schooling system is no exception (Davies, 2015; Elia, 2003). Many students and

parents still believe that homosexuality is a contagious disease and therefore homosexuals and heterosexuals should be educated separately. Legally, the basic rights of homosexual pupils and teachers are protected but schools remain unsafe and unwelcoming, for both homosexual learners and educators. This results in the majority of gay individuals choosing to conceal their sexual identity within the educational context (Davies, 2015).

g. Discrimination is a fickle beast

During the research process I became increasingly aware of how discrimination had become, not only a lot more "underground', but that the levels and forms of prejudice varied greatly in different contexts: The notion of subtler discrimination seems to vary across industries in South Africa. Thus while creative industries such as marketing or advertising tend to be more accepting of homosexuality, the education system, as well the hospitality and retail industries, are still difficult spaces to navigate for sexual minorities (Davies, 2015; Smuts, 2011). The majority of participants were aware that while they may not have personally experienced overt forms of discrimination, lesbians in other industries had. A number of the participants knew of a friend or colleague who had suffered in the work place because of their sexuality. Claire speaks about her wife and how, while not directly aimed at her, she was often subjected to derogatory remarks about homosexuals by her manager:

"I don't know if he thought that he was trying to get closer to her and just be friendly as a boss but often…and he was racist and prejudiced, he was every kind of –ist you could think of, sexist, homophobic…Overly crass gay couples come in and he would sort of…they would walk in and he would be very pleasant and what not, they would walk out and he would say "Yeah, these fucking queers" and "These fags must fuck off" and, what did he call them, fudge packers and what not."

Charmaine explained that she sometimes helps out in her partner's business and there are certain clients who she needs to monitor her sexuality around. The clients in question are Muslim and her partner feels that they would not do business with her company should they know that she is lesbian:

"…because she didn't want anyone to know we were involved. The owner wouldn't do business with us anymore and I must hide in the back and do the deliveries."

Kate acknowledges that both socioeconomic status and race have an impact on the levels of discrimination a lesbian in South Africa may be subjected to:

"Your sort of middleclass, I guess more liberal environment as opposed to your…scope…target…in contradiction to being such a liberal country that has such high hate crimes…that have been thrown against woman. Ja, so that often translates into "black lesbians in the township get violated" as opposed to…whatever…across the board…racially quite affluent white middle class people in the workplace. That may help you think that you have a powerful position generally in whatever workplace you are in. Typically, the arts and often your own advertising firm or clothes line or whatever…right!"

Along the same lines, the impact of the Constitution and legislation in South African lesbian's lives also appears to vary according to race, socioeconomic status, and industry (Smuts, 2011). Six of the seven participants acknowledged a difference in levels of discrimination as a result of the Constitution, and took comfort in knowing that should they be subject to discrimination in the work place, individuals did have legal support. However, other concerns were also raised. Nina spoke about her apprehension regarding travelling in Africa and the possible repercussions because she is legally married to a woman in South Africa:

"If I have to travel to African states it's going to be tricky. You know I am married formally now so the visa applications and stuff, so I could run into some problems."

Adrienne explained that while the changes have been progressive, she remains sceptical:

"I think it's changed but I don't think…I still, as I said, I have said repeatedly, there is still a stigma attached and I'd have to be proved wrong to change my opinion there." Additionally, the impact seems to be dependent on where one is placed in the racially and economically within South African society, thus the "on the ground" impact of the Constitution is debatable."

Nina explains that she has counselled lesbians within in various industries who are subject to enormous amounts of discrimination within the workplace: More butch identifying lesbians in the retail, construction and hospitality industries seem to experience a number of difficulties. For this reason, they are hesitant to reveal their sexuality and because they are scared of harassment and losing their jobs:

"I do know that, from my experiences, of working with workers, that there are certain sectors that are a lot more difficult to…If you are on a construction site or you are working in a mining environment where people maybe have to change their clothes, like the construction sites and so…firstly the woman are the minority and if they are butch identifying it's hard to engage with…But now with more butch identifying say in the retail sector, there is little chance that you are going to find them, say sitting at the till. There have been things like that, like the dress code. There is expected way, especially in the hospitality sector of how you dress…And then a butch identifying woman becomes very problematic in that particular context cause a woman has to look in a particular way. Ummm…and so I have found that butch identifying woman won't get jobs in that or they won't last very long. If there are more feminine and no one knows

then it is not an issue as such. So the sector you know, what kind of norms operate in that sector, how they…what they want from the woman."

h. Gender and sexuality

Gender and sexuality are very much intertwined and it becomes difficult to separate out whether discrimination experienced in the work place is experienced because a participant is a woman or because they are gay. Participants across the board explained that the experiences of discrimination that they had encountered were generally as a result of being female, as opposed to being lesbian. This became particularly prevalent with the older participants where the heteronormative assumption of being "Mrs", married to a male, became the default assumption they encountered on a regular basis. To not fall within this category was often not even considered and when it was, it was viewed as "odd": To be an older woman in one's own right as opposed to an extension of a male, seemed to be viewed by others as strange.

Adrienne comments:

"…women, specifically, are classified as married or unmarried. You know and it's a mister you don't know if he is married or unmarried. I mean it's very interesting that as you get older everybody just presumes automatically that you are a Mrs. Smith, you know, they don't even, even if you tell them Miss Smith they will still call you Mrs. Smith, you know.

Charmaine described similar experiences:

"I go wobo when people call me MRS. I go crazy. I go to the lawnmower shop with my lawnmower and they go "hello" and I go "hello, I would like to book my lawnmower in" and they go "Okay, and your name is…" and I say "Elliot." And they go, "Okay, Mrs. Elliot." And I go "Now why would I be Mrs. Elliot?" and they go "Mrs. Elliot?'. And I go listen to me "I am Dr. Elliot. Secondly, you can call me Ms. Elliot or you can call me Charmaine Elliot but I

do not wish to be associated with this status that you automatically assume me to be associated with like some dim witted little woman with some great big penis person who is actually making all the decisions and looking after me."

Additionally, a number of participants described being told by family members and friends that their sexuality was just a 'phase', eventually they would settle down, get married and have children. This idea in itself does not just speak to the heteronormative assumption but includes the idea that a woman's place in the world is defined by her gender, as perceived within patriarchal society.

Participants also described finding it easier to establish rapport with their male colleagues should they buy into the 'all boys' culture which was a common in a number of work environments, speaking about woman as a 'man' would. Their male co-workers seemed to find it easier to accept their lesbian colleagues in this way. Claire candidly describes this experience:

"So if you're a lesbian and you're thrown into that, they either kind of see you and acknowledge you as one of their own, like you're a buddy and they'll talk to you about chicks…"

In this way, being lesbian and being seen as "one of the guys" is seen as an advantage in the workplace and Claire continues to explain:

"…if you're working with a sort of more conservative male, white male dominated or even black male dominated environment, being gay can sometimes actually work to your favour because they'll either accept you as one of their own and then you'll talk about women."

There are times when being a gay woman is seen as an advantage over being a heterosexual woman. Claire was told in a conversation with a male colleague:

"To be honest I don't think a straight woman would be able to cope".

One can assume that the colleague in question was referring to the female gender stereotype and as Claire is perceived as a 'butch' lesbian, she thus has the more masculine traits which are needed to succeed in this particular work environment *(advertising and marketing).*

Patriarchal influence is not only evident in this regard, but is also illustrated by the heterosexual's need to define gender roles within same sex unions. In the work environment, participants are often faced with situations where their heterosexual colleagues assume that the gendered self, the doing self, conforms to the gender roles which are common in heterosexual relationships. Therefore, in their minds, it follows, that within a same sex union, the same applies (Butler, 1990). Participants were often asked if they are the 'man' or 'woman' in the relationship. All of the participants found these types of questions very offensive.

Claire really struggled with this idea:

"First question is, who's the man in the relationship? And I…it's my Achilles' heel, I cannot stand that question. I mean it's completely illogical firstly and like, no, we're two women."

Nina commented:

"Ummm…I mean I would hate that kind of…the thing is that what makes it worse is when people don't ask and they think and they dwell on that. They start only seeing you with that in their…you know trying to work out that…"

Butler's (1990) notion that gender and sexuality are the product of a "performative twist of language", is illustrated by this need by the heterosexual other to recreate traditional gender roles within same-sex relationships (p. 25). She argues that gender itself is essentially the product of repetitive acts as opposed to something that an individual 'is'.

Furthermore, a number of the more butch identifying lesbian participant felt that their appearance aided in being accepted by the men they worked with, while others found that their male colleagues felt threatened by their "unconventional" appearances:

"…Or they'll completely reject you because you are a threat to them." (Claire)

Similar forms of prejudice appear to be somewhat pervasive within the lesbian community itself: older, more masculine lesbians who were described as "fighting the good fight", struggle with younger, more feminine lesbians who have embraced, by conventional society's standards, a softer womanly look. Charmaine describes going to "The Dungeon", a lesbian club in Johannesburg during the Apartheid era (when homosexuality was illegal):

"And you would go to the Dungeon club and you would wait for the police raid and you would have to go very butch otherwise they wouldn't let you in cause everything was grubby about the whole thing."

Claire describes this trend:

"A lot of your older lesbians who I suppose are a bit more kind of butch have issues with your feminine lesbians. The older wiser lesbians versus the newer lesbians and the newer lesbians have been brought up into an era where we…brought up in a sort of more liberal environment, where your older lesbians had to kind of fight the good fight."

However, in post-apartheid South Africa the need to be a specific 'type of gay' is not as prevalent: This form of prejudice within the lesbian community appears, to some to degree, to mirror the discrimination against the feminine, held within the traditional heteronormative framework. Nina commented:

"…except when it falls into the kind of stereotypes where it creates the same power relationships, with the butch lesbians and the more feminine. That is problematic."

Butler (1990) argues that the existence of heterosexual norms within homosexual contexts, specifically the development of gendered identities such as 'butch' and 'femme', cannot simply be explained as perpetuations and duplications of heterosexual identities within the homosexual context (Butler, 1990). She asserts that the imitation of the heterosexual original illustrates the categories purely constructed existence, and reveals it to be nothing but the imitation of the perception of a discourse of natural sex. Furthermore, the idea of prescriptive gender roles within same sex relationships, based on traditional heterosexual relationships, where the masculine is still perceived as the superior, highlights how entrenched sexism is within South African society:

"Where I think your older lesbians felt the need, in order for society-and it's a warped thing-in order for society to accept them, they have to feel that they had to dress like men and be like men. And often you'll see like older lesbians, your sort of butch lesbians, are always with feminine lesbians because they cannot grasp the notion of having two feminine lesbians together because in their minds they have to look like a man with a woman, if that makes any sense?" (Claire).

Claire continues to explain:

"You don't have to be butch to be lesbian, it is a very strange. In a working environment, it can cause a very tense environment as well and add tension to a working environment when you have a mix of different gays and lesbians."

4.3 Conclusion

The participant's narratives uncovered eight themes which shed light on the experience of lesbian woman in South Africa, particularly within the occupational environment. The themes which emerged illustrate the extent to which the negotiation and creation of sexual identity cannot be divorced from the social narratives and spaces within which an individual locates themselves. Furthermore, these narratives and spaces influence the extent to which a person experiences themselves as an autonomous being within their narrative.

The participant's stories illustrate the positive effects that changes in legislation and basic labour laws have had in the lives of sexual minorities in South Africa. This, in conjunction with the more liberal and accepting stance of traditionally conservative religions, seems to have provided most of the participants with supportive environments within which to navigate the coming out process. The latter was an unexpected finding. While it may not be relevant in the lives of all South African lesbians, this change, albeit slight, illustrates a shift within the predominant heteronormative narrative in South Africa.

On the other hand, the metamorphous of discrimination within the occupational environment, from overt to covert, also illustrates how pervasive the stigma attached to homosexuality is in South Africa, particularly within the educational context. Lesbians working within the educational system are particularly vulnerable to the potential effects their sexual identity can have on their professional reputation and credibility. Homosexual teachers in South Africa continue to work within a cultural context which supports and perpetuates the notion that homosexuality and paedophilia are synonymous.

Furthermore, socio economic influences within the work context, the idea of 'blue collar' vs. 'white collar' work environments, also has a profound influence on the negotiation of lesbian identity in the occupational environment. Additionally, experiences of

discrimination often seemed to be as a result of participant's gender rather than their sexual orientation. These experiences, coupled with the adoption of gender roles and prejudices within the lesbian community itself, illustrates the pervasive influence of the heteronormativity within South African society. The latter demonstrates the very real power dynamics which are produced and reproduced by binary categories, as well as the constructive nature of both gender and sexuality.

Lastly, the complexity of language, how words aid, detract from, and limit the meaning making process, is illustrated by the participant's narratives. Their stories highlight the importance language plays in the construction of a coherent narrative which is critical in the negotiation and validation of identity. Paradoxically, it was within the essentialist vocabulary that participant's eventually found the words to make meaning of their experiences, even though the limitations of this language, was also responsible for the poverty of signifiers available to describe their experiences in the world.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Individuals grow up in societies, such as South Africa, in which heterosexuality is positioned as the default sexual orientation: The heterosexual assumption, the idea that a person is straight unless otherwise stated, is confirmed, maintained and perpetuated in a variety of contexts such as the occupational, social, and/or familial environments (Ponse, 1976). It is within these settings that a woman may discover that she differs from the heterosexual norm and must then attempt to negotiate and repetitively, in varying degrees, and not always by choice, partake in the coming out process. Thus, homosexual identity formation can be understood as a dynamic process which includes the location and negotiation of multiple identities within a variety of settings, which either prohibit, or permit, the development of one's sexual identity (Rust, 1993; Smuts, 2011; Somers, 1994; Valentine, 1992).

Legally, according to Section 9 of the Constitution, lesbians in South Africa should be able to express their sexual identities in public, and in theory, should be protected from discrimination and persecution (Potgieter, 2008). Yet social norms often dictate otherwise and sexual minorities must then adjust accordingly: An individual may feel able to disclose her sexual identity within her social environment but may choose to remain closeted in her work context in response to possible discrimination and/or rejection (Smuts, 2011). Subsequently, the coming out process includes, not only understanding and defining the self within predominantly heterosexual environments, but choosing which environments to identify as lesbian, and which to remain under the guise of the heterosexual assumption (Ponse, 1976). Additionally, the latter illustrates the inherent power relations which exist, and are perpetuated, within heteronormative society.

Thus the aim of this study was to explore the negotiation of lesbian identity in relation to various settings, in this case, the work environments specific to the participants interviewed

in this study, as well as identify strategies which were used by participants to negotiate these various occupational settings in South Africa. Existing literature states that while the importance of a liberal constitution cannot be denied, the majority of lesbian women choose not to disclose their sexuality for fear of being stigmatized (Smuts, 2011; Polders et al, 2008). Therefore, a secondary aim of this research was to investigate the practical 'on the ground' influence of the South African constitution; what it means for the participants in terms of power differentials and perceived safety. Furthermore, my hope was that this study would first, add to existing literature which could be used to gain a better understanding of what it means to be a lesbian living in the South African context. Second, that this understanding may aid in in the development of supportive environments as opposed to perpetuating structures which validate stigma and discrimination within occupational settings (Kwesi & Webster, 1997).

Various schools of thought regarding the understanding of sexual identity and the coming out process were touched on in relation to the experience of being a lesbian woman in South Africa. While the essentialism paradigm understands identity as the inevitable result of fixed, unified characteristics which are intrinsic, and often positioned as undeniable, social constructionism argues that identity is not pre-given and supports the idea that identity is "shifting, multiple, fluid, contextual and partly irrational" (Kiguwa, 2004; Shefer, 2004, p. 199). On the other hand, relational narrative theory asserts that the individual understands the self, and their place in the social world, through narrative (Sommers, 1994). Social identity is thus created through "narratives and narrativity" and so an individual comes to be who they are "by being located or locating ourselves (usually unconsciously) in social narratives rarely of our own making (Somers, 1994, p. 606).

Relational narrative theory acknowledges the temporal, spatial, and relational qualities of identity, while simultaneously acknowledging identity negotiations as opposed to an identity determined only by circumstances (Somers, 1994). With this in mind, it was also important to

describe and establish an understanding of the various temporal, historical, social, and cultural settings which influence the development of lesbian identity in South Africa. Therefore, various relevant institutional contexts were also discussed. Furthermore, the role which language plays in understanding the self, through facilitating, encouraging, and/or limiting the construction of a coherent personal narrative, was also explored in this study (Better & Simula, 2015).

As the primary focus of this research was to understand the participant's personal negotiation of their own specific workplace, within a unique historical, cultural, and societal context, the qualitative paradigm was selected. The qualitative paradigm facilitated the exploration of the participant's subjective experiences and how each individual made sense of their experiences, as well as identify common themes evident within their narratives. Reflexivity also plays an important role within the qualitative research paradigm and during the study I attempted to acknowledge the effect my own personal biases and experiences may have on the research process. In order to do so, I documented personal feelings, thoughts, and ideas which were evoked during this study. Additionally, my research supervisor cross checked the analysis of the transcripts to ensure confirmability.

The target population for this research was lesbian females over the age of 25. There were two reasons for the age stipulation: first, the individuals chosen to take part in the research needed to be working and second, for ethical considerations. Participants were contacted via email and/or text messages which were standardized and included all relevant information. The research conducted was of a sensitive nature and therefore it was important that none of the participants felt coerced into participating which is why electronic forms of communication were selected email to make contact. Seven participants were identified using the snowballing sampling technique and were required to partake in a semi structured interview.

Once the data had been collected and transcribed, the information was analysed using thematic content analysis (TAT). Braun and Clarke (2012) define thematic analysis as "a method for systematically identifying, organizing and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set" (p. 57). This qualitative method facilitates the identification and interpretation of meaningful themes within the data in relation to the research question. Additionally, TAT accounts for the active role of the researcher; how they may influence the process of identify meaning within the data set, which themes are selected, how they are interpreted and so on (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Eight themes were identified during the research process. The participant's narratives illustrated the extent to which, the negotiation and creation of sexual identity cannot be viewed independently, but rather, needs to be explored and understood in relation to the multiple spaces and greater social narratives within which an individual locates themselves (Somers, 1994). Moreover, these narratives and spaces influenced the extent to which participants experienced themselves as autonomous beings regarding the creation and recreation of their personal narratives.

The implementation of a more liberal constitution and basic labour laws in South Africa appears to have had a positive influence in the majority of the participant's experiences in the workplace. Additionally, participant's reported that their social and familial environments were more supportive than they had expected, and a number of participants had found solace and care through their religious beliefs. The latter was an unexpected finding: I grew up in a Catholic household and then attended an Anglican boarding school for two years and thus assumed religion would be a major hurdle facing the more religious participants. Furthermore, based the literature that I read prior to the study, as well as anecdotal accounts heard from others, I anticipated hearing stories describing experiences of blatant discrimination in the

workplace but this was not the case. Interestingly enough, while the Constitution seemed to have resulted in a decrease in incidents of discrimination, I discovered that discrimination still existed but in more discrete forms, and often passed by undetected and/or was simply accepted as 'the norm' by a number of participants.

This acceptance also appeared to include the consideration of the heterosexual other who was, more often than not, considered before themselves. Participants were very attuned to their heterosexual colleagues and how their homosexuality may affect and/or be construed by them. This awareness appeared to be automatic, formed part of the identity negotiation process within various occupational settings, and included forms of self-censorship which did not necessarily form part of a conscious passing strategy. Understanding the motivations behind this self-monitoring process appears to be complex but also predominantly based on first, not offending their heterosexual colleagues and second, self-protection. Furthermore, the re-education of the heterosexual other, seemed to have formed part of this adjustment process. I was surprised at not only the pragmatic approach many of the participants adopted towards people who were often simply intolerant of their sexuality, but also at the willingness and patience they displayed regarding this "re-educating process".

Similarly, I realized that while discrete forms of discrimination have become more common place, this was not always the case, and was often context dependent. Discrimination exists in various forms within different occupational settings. Furthermore, socio economic influences within the work context, the idea of 'blue collar' vs. 'white collar' workers, appears to have a profound influence on the negotiation of lesbian identity in the occupational environment.

During the research process, it also became apparent that discrimination seemed to be experienced by participants as a result of their gender identity as well as their sexual orientation.

Thus, the influences of the heteronormative framework were apparent, not only in the manner in which participants located themselves within the work environment, but also by the adoption of gender roles and prejudices within the lesbian community itself. The latter demonstrates, the very real power dynamics which are produced and reproduced by binary categories as well as the constructive nature of both gender and sexuality.

Lastly, the complexity of language, how words can facilitate, as well as limit the meaning making process, formed a pertinent part of this research (Better & Simula, 2015). Growing up, participants often found that they lacked the words to describe the internal and external experiences of their sexual identity. All participants expressed a sense of relief when appropriate signifiers were eventually discovered. This finding challenged my preconceived notions regarding language, essentialism, and social constructionism. I could identify the limitations of the essentialist vocabulary, but also had no choice but to acknowledge that it still invariably, provides the words to name, describe, and understand lived experiences. The importance of being able to have words through which one is able to construct a coherent narrative is critical in the negotiation and validation of identity and cannot be forgotten nor dismissed, regardless of the heteronormative slant of the language used in this process.

5.1 Limitations

Due to the sample size and the broad and subjective definition of ‘work context’ used within this study, the findings of this research are more descriptive in nature. There are many occupational environments in South Africa and so the narratives of lesbians working within these various contexts will differ accordingly. Additionally, the sample size, as well as the definition of ‘workplace’, used within this study may impact the credibility and transferability of this study: Individuals, specifically lesbians working within alternative work environments

than those described by participants in this study, who have had similar experiences may not identify with the researcher's findings which thus limits the ability to generalize the data (Krefting, 1991).

5.2 Recommendations

Lesbians working in the South African educational system appear to be particularly vulnerable to both overt and covert discrimination because of their homosexuality. Many students and parents still believe that homosexuals and heterosexuals should be educated separately (Davies, 2015). Legally, the basic rights of homosexual pupils and teachers are protected but schools remain unsafe and unwelcoming, for both homosexual learners and educators. This phenomenon was briefly discussed in this study but is a topic which calls for a much more comprehensive analysis, as the need for supportive structures for sexual minorities, within the educational environment, is apparent.

Furthermore, while the participants interviewed in this study worked mainly within 'white collar' environments, lesbians working in other industries such as retail, hospitality, and construction are regularly subjected to various forms of discrimination because they are gay. The 'blue collar' lesbian falls within the bottom tiers of both the economic and heteronormative hierarchy, and as a result, seems to fall between the constitutional cracks. Their stories challenge the effectiveness of the Constitution and warrant further investigation as the need for better supportive systems for lesbian woman within these environments is evident.

Reference List

Austin, T. & Burke, A. (2009). Introduction. In A. Burke (Ed), *Abnormal psychology: A South African perspective* (pp. 2-38). Goodwood, Cape Town: Oxford Press

Better, A., & Simula, B. (2015). How and for whom does gender matter? Rethinking the concept of sexual orientation. *Sexualities*, 18 (5/6), 665-680.

Bill of Rights. Chapter 2 (ss 7 – 39) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996. Pretoria, South Africa: Government Printers.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3 (2), 77-101.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2012). Thematic analysis. In H. Cooper (Ed), *APA Handbook of research methods in psychology*: *Vol 2. Research designs* (57-70). Washington D.C, U.S.A: American Psychological Association.

Bucholtz, M & Hall, K. (2004). Theorizing identity in language and sexuality research, *Language in society*, 33, 469-515.

Burr, V. (2003). *Social constructionism*. New York, USA: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble*: *Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York, USA: Routledge.

Cameron, E. (1995). Unapprehended felons: Gays and lesbians and the law in South Africa. In M. Gevisser & E. Cameron (Eds). *Defiant Desire: Gay & lesbian lives in South Africa* (pp.89-98). Braamfontein, South Africa: Raven Press

Clarke, V. & Braun, V. (2013). Teaching thematic analysis: Overcoming challenges and developing strategies for effective learning. *The psychologist*, 26 (2), 120-123.

Cox, S.& Gallois, C. (2010). Gay and lesbian identity development. *Journal of homosexuality*, 30 (4), 1-30.

Davis, R. (2015). Homosexuality in South African schools: Still a largely silent taboo. *The Daily Maverick.* Retrieved from http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2015-02-17-homosexuality-in-south-african-schools-still-largely-a-silent-taboo

DeLamater, J.D. & Hyde, J.S. (1998). Essentialism vs. social constructionism in the study of human sexuality. *The journal of sex research*, 35(1), 10-18.

Elia, J. (2003). Queering relationships. *Journal of homosexuality*, 45 (2-4), 61-86.doi:org/10.1300/J082v45n02_03

Eliason, M.J. (1995). Accounts of sexual identity formation in heterosexual students. *Sex roles*, 32, 821-834.

Gergen, K.J. (1985). The social constructionist movement in modern psychology. *American Psychologist*, 40 (3), 266-275.

Gevisser, M. (1995). A different fight for freedom: A history of South African lesbian and gay organisation from the 1950's to the 1990's. In M. Gevisser & E. Cameron (Eds). *Defiant Desire: Gay & lesbian lives in South Africa* (pp.14-88). Braamfontein, South Africa: Raven Press

Griffith, K.H. & Hebl, M.R. (2002). The disclosure dilemma for gay men and lesbians: "Coming out at work". *Journal of applied psychology*, 87(6), 1191-1199.

Habarth, J. M. (2008). Thinking "straight": Heteronormativity and associated outcomes across sexual orientation.

Hale, C.J. (2015). The Pope Francis: The statement that changed the church on LGBT issues. *Time*. Retrieved from: http://time.com/3975630/pope-francis-lgbt-issues/

Harbeck, K. (1992). *Coming out the classroom closet*. Binghamton, New York: The Haworth Press.

Harrison, P (2004). South Africa's top sites: Gay and lesbian. Kenilworth, Cape Town: Spearhead

Hepple, J. (2012). Will sexual minorities ever be equal? The repercussions of British Colonial sodomy laws. *The Equal Rights Review* (8).

Heppner, P.P. & Heppner, M.J. (2004). *Writing and publishing your thesis, dissertation and research: A guide for students in the helping professions*. Belmont, California: Brooks/Cole, Cengage Learning.

Hunter, S.V. (2010). Analysing and representing narrative data: The long and winding road. *Current narratives*, 2(5), 44-54.

Kiguwa, P. (2004). Feminist critical psychology in South Africa. In D. Hook (Ed.), *Critical psychology* (pp. 278-315). Landsdowne, Cape Town: UCT Press.

King, E.B., Reilly, C. & Hebl, M. (2008). The best of times, the worst of times: Exploring dual perspectives of "coming out" in the workplace. *Group organization management*, 33(5), 566-601.

Kitzinger, C. (2005). Heteronormativity in action: reproducing the heterosexual nuclear family in after-hours medical calls. *Social Problems*, 52 (4), 477-498.

Krefting, L. (1991). Rigor in qualitative research: The assessment of trustworthiness. *The American journal of occupational therapy*, 45(3), 214-222.

Kwesi, B. & Webster, N. (1997). Black, lesbian and speaking out. *Agenda feminist media*, 36, 90-93.

Legate, N., Ryan, R.M., & Weinstein, N. (2012). Is coming out always a "good thing"? Exploring the relations of autonomy support, outness and wellness for lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals. *Psychological and Personality Science*, 3(2) 145-152.

Passer, M.W. & Smith, R.E. (2009). *Psychology: The science of mind and behaviour. Fourth edition.* New York, USAL McGraw-Hill.

Polders, A., Nel, A.J., Kruger, P., & Wells, H.L. (2008). Factors affecting vulnerability to depression among gay men and lesbian women in Gauteng, South Africa. *South African journal of psychology*, 38 (4), 673-687.

Ponse, B. (1976). Secrecy in the lesbian world. *Urban life*, 5 (3), 235-260.

Potgieter, C. (2008). Black South African lesbians. *Journal of lesbian studies*, 7(3), 135-151.doi.org/10. 1300/J155v07n03_10

Prentice, D.A. & Miller, D. T (2007). Psychological essentialism of human categories. *Current direction in psychological science,* 16(4), 202-206.

Retief, G. (1995). Keeping Sodom out of the laager: State repression of homosexuality in apartheid South Africa. In M. Gevisser & E. Cameron (Eds). *Defiant Desire: Gay & lesbian lives in South Africa* (pp.99-115). Braamfontein, South Africa: Raven Press

Russ, T.L., Simmonds, C.R., & Hunt, S.K. (2002). Coming out in the classroom…An occupational hazard? The influence of sexual orientation on teacher credibility & perceived student learning. *Communication Education*, 51 (3), 311-324

Rust, P.C. (1993). "Coming out" in the age of social constructionism: Sexual identity formation among lesbian and bisexual women. *Gender and society*, 7(1), 50-77.

Sanders, A.J.G.M. (1997). Homosexuality and the law: A gay revolution in South Africa?, *Journal of African Law*, 41(1), 100-108.

Sanderson, S., (2014a). I am an imam, but I'm also gay and I'm prepared to die for this. *The South African.com: News for global South Africans.* Retrieved from: http://www.thesouthafrican.com/i-am-an-imam-but-that-im-also-gay-and-im-prepared-to-die-for-this/

Sanderson, S., (2014b). South Africa's open mosque puts gay Muslims on the map. *The South African.com: News for global South Africans.* Retrieved from: http://www.thesouthafrican.com/open-mosque-gay-muslim-south-africa/

Shefer, T. (2004). Psychology and the regulation of gender. In D. Hook (Ed.), *Critical psychology* (pp. 187-208). Landsdowne, Cape Town: UCT Press.

Shenton, A.K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for information*, 22 (2), 63-75.

Smuts, L. (2011). Coming out as a lesbian in Johannesburg, South Africa: Considering intersecting identities and social spaces. *South African Review of Sociology*, 42 (3), 23-40. doi:10.1080/21528586.2011.621231

Somers, M. (1994). The narrative constitution of identity: A relational and network approach. *Theory and Society*, 23, 605-649.

Valentine, G. (1993). Negotiating and managing multiple sexual identities: Lesbian time-space strategies. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 18 (2), 237-248.

Van Zyl, M. (2011). Are same-sex marriages 'unAfrican'? Same-sex relationships & belonging in post-apartheid South Africa. *Journal of social issues*, 67(2), 335-357.

Wall, T. F. (2005). *On human nature: An introduction to philosophy*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth

Ward, J. & Winstanley, D. (2005). Coming out at work: Performativity and the recognition and re-negotiation of identity. *The sociological review*, 53 (3) 447-475.

Wilbraham, L. (2004). Discursive practice: Analysing a Loveline's text on sex communication for parents. In D. Hook (Ed.), *Critical psychology* (pp. 487-521). Landsdowne, Cape Town: UCT Press.

Wilson, S. & Maclean, R. (2011). *Research methods and data analysis for psychology*. Maidenhead, Berkshire: McGraw-Hill Education.

APPENDIX A

Participant Information Sheet



UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

School of Human and Community Development
Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, Johannesburg,
South Africa
Tel: (011) 717-4558
Fax: (011) 717-4559
Email: jussyvr@gmail.com

Hello,

My name is Justine Destanovic. I am studying a Master's degree in Clinical Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. I am conducting research as part of my degree and am inviting you to take part in this study. I am undertaking an exploratory study regarding the negotiation of lesbian identity in the workplace. In this research project I want to try and understand how lesbian identity is negotiated in the workplace; whether you feel comfortable revealing your sexual identity at work, whether you feel that doing so is necessary and what factors influence this decision.

I am inviting you to take part in this research study. Should you wish to take part, I will be interviewing you at a location convenient for you and myself. The interview will take between an hour and an hour and a half, and will be done by me. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to, there are no right or wrong answers, and you may stop the interview at any time with no negative consequences. Participation is voluntary and you will not get any benefits or money for participating in the study.

The transcript of the interview will be stored in a secure location and will only be seen by myself and my supervisor, Dr Peace Kiguwa. Should you wish to remain anonymous the option of using a pseudonym is available and personal information, like your name, and workplace will not be included in any part of the research report.

It is necessary, with your permission, for me to record the interview in order for me to remember as much detail as possible. Your interview will not be heard by anyone else other than myself. The audio copies of the interviews and transcripts will be kept in a password-protected file on a computer which only I have access to. The printed out transcripts will only be seen by myself and my research supervisor and will be stored in a locked cupboard. Should the research be published, the interview recording, and transcript will

be kept in a secure location for 2 years. In the case that the research remains unpublished, the narrative, interview recording and transcript will be kept in a secure place. A copy of the research report, based on the study, will be kept in the library at the University if the Witwatersrand and will be available to those who have access to the library.

If you do choose to participate please can you fill out the two consent forms attached and give them back to me; the one is consent to participate and the other is consent for the audio recording.

Please feel free to contact either me or my supervisor if you would like any further information, have any further questions, or would like to report any negative affects the study has had on you.

Warm regards

Ms. Justine Destanovic
(Clinical Psychology Student)
076 029 6501
Email: jussyvr@gmail.com

Dr Peace Kiguwa
(Research Supervisor)
011 717 4537
Email: Peace. Kiguwa@ wits.ac.za

If you would like to report any problems or complaints that you have with regard to any part of the research process you can contact the secretary of the University of the Witwatersrand's Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical) Saintha Maistry**,** on 011 717 4613 or at saintha.maistry@wits.ac.za.

Counselling services

We do not expect that the interview will harm you in any way but if you feel that you are having difficulties after having participated you may access one of the following free therapy services or discuss other options with me.

Emthomjeni Community Psychology Clinic	011 717 4513
Lifeline	0861 322 32

APPENDIX B

Consent Form (Interview)

I _____ consent to being interviewed by Justine Destanovic for her study regarding the negotiation of lesbian identity in the workplace.

I understand that:

- Participation in this interview is voluntary.
- I have the choice to not answer any questions I do not want to answer.
- I may stop the interview at any time.
- Direct quotes will be used in the report, however, I do have the option of using a pseudonym should I wish to remain anonymous.
- After the study is completed, a copy of the report will be kept in the library at the University of the Witwatersrand. The copy will be available to people who have access to the library.
- If a journal article is published the interview recording (or notes taken) as well the transcript will be kept in password-protected files as well as in a locked cupboard for 2 years. If no publication arises they will be kept in these places for 6 years.
- There are no direct benefits for me in participating in this study.
- There are no anticipated risks for me participating in this study.

Signed _____

Date _____

APPENDIX C

Consent Form (Audio Recording)

I _____ consent to my interview with Justine Destanovic for her study regarding the negotiation of lesbian identity in the workplace, to be tape-recorded. I understand that:

- The tape and transcript (these are written documents which contain what has been said in the interview) will be heard by the researcher and her supervisor.
- The tape and transcript will be stored in a secure place, which only Justine will have access to, while the study is ongoing.
- A copy of the transcript will be emailed to me
- Only the researcher and/or her supervisor will have access to my transcript
- After the report is finished my interview recording and transcript will be kept in a safe place, that only the researcher will have access to.

Signed _____

Date _____

APPENDIX D

Interview Schedule

- *Basic demographic information*

  - Name
  - Age
  - Race
  - Home language
  - Relationship status
  - Highest level of education
  - Occupation
  - Residential area

- *Discovering lesbian identity*

  1. How old were you when you came out/realized you were lesbian?
  2. Please can you share with me what the experience was like regarding emotional reactions, practical concerns and so on
  3. When you first realized you were gay, what concerns did you have with regards to how your sexual identity may influence your life?
  4. Looking back would you say those concerns were valid? Motivate
  5. Who was the first person you shared your sexual identity with? Why?
  6. What does the process of coming out mean to you?
  7. What does being a lesbian mean to you?

- *Identity negotiation in the workplace*

  1. Are you out at work? What motivated this decision?
  2. Do you feel that it is necessary to be open about your sexual identity at work?

  3. Have your family, friends, or colleagues influenced your decision to disclose/not disclose your sexual identity at work? Elaborate

4. Do you feel that your cultural background has influenced your decision to disclose/not disclose your sexual identity at work? Elaborate
5. Do you feel that your religious background has influenced your decision to disclose/not disclose your sexual identity at work? Elaborate
6. Do you feel that being lesbian/Do you feel that being open about your sexual identity at work will influence your work environment at all, regarding
    - colleagues
    - clients
    - Possible work promotions

- *Stigma, stereotypes and discrimination*

1. How do you feel lesbians are viewed in South Africa?
2. How does it feel to be a lesbian living in South Africa?
3. Has the fear of discrimination/being stigmatized because of your sexual identity influences your decision to disclose/not disclose your sexual identity in the workplace? Elaborate.
4. Have you ever experienced discrimination in the workplace based on your sexuality? Elaborate
5. Do you worry about your safety? Elaborate
6. What are some of the lesbian stereotypes you are aware of? How do you feel about them?
7. Do you feel that these lesbian stereotypes have affected your decision to disclose/not disclose your sexual identity in the workplace?