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The experiences of Black lesbian and bisexual female students at a South African urban university

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The experiences of Black lesbian and bisexual female students at a South African urban university

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UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Declaration

I **Naledi Bianca Raba (Student number: 1824021)** am a student registered for **Masters of Arts in Clinical Psychology** for year 2018-2020. I hereby declare the following:

- I am aware that plagiarism (the use of someone else's work without their permission and/or without acknowledging the original source) is mendacious.
- I confirm that ALL work submitted for assessment for the above course is my own unaided work except where I have explicitly indicated otherwise.
- I have followed the required conventions in referencing the thoughts and ideas of others.
- I understand that the University of the Witwatersrand may take disciplinary action against me if there is a belief that this is not my own unaided work or that I have failed to acknowledge the source of the ideas or words in my own writing.
- It has not been submitted before any other degree or examination at this or any other university.

17 June 2020

Naledi Bianca Raba

Date

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First and foremost, I thank God for giving me the strength and courage to persevere with the completion of my thesis.

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To all my participants, I thank you for your time in sharing a part of your life with me.

To my parents, I thank you for your prayers and sacrifices and I appreciate you more than you will ever know.

Abstract

South Africa is well-known for its constitution that is inclusive of the rights of all individuals, irrespective of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Despite the existence of a progressive constitution, there is still a high prevalence of institutionalised homophobia and discrimination. Consequently, there is a clear disconnect between government policies and the realities of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual and other gender non-conforming (LGBTIQA+) individuals. As microcosms of wider society, tertiary education institutions have become a great concern regarding the experiences of LGBTIQA+ students. Whilst these students share queer identities, their experiences may be both racialised and gendered owing to the stratified society that South Africa is. This study was conducted to investigate the lived experiences of black lesbian and bisexual female students.

The aim of this research was to explore the experiences of black lesbian and bisexual female students at a South African urban based public university. Six participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique. The participants were black, female students who self-identified as lesbian, bisexual or queer. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. The researcher conducted all the interviews in English. The data was audio recorded and analysed thematically. Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the Non-Medical Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of the Witwatersrand.

The findings of this study revealed that students experienced homophobia and discrimination at the university. Forms of discrimination included intrusive questioning, verbal remarks from peers and lecturers, as well as an attempted sexual assault. Furthermore, a heightened fear of discrimination from the masculine-presenting students was reported. The Humanities Faculty was described as more open and accepting of LGBTIQA+ students. There were more negative than positive experiences revealed regarding student residences. Despite the negative experiences at the university, positive experiences were also reported. Two student societies aimed at creating inclusive and supportive spaces for LGBTIQA+ students were noted. These student societies were generally described in this present study as safe spaces that allowed for free expression of sexual orientation and gender identity. Concerns regarding policy implementation and commitment from university management were raised. Lastly, it was found that intersectionality of race, gender, class and sexual orientation influenced the experiences of students in this present study.

Keywords: black, lesbian, bisexual, LGBTIQ, homophobia, tertiary, heteronormativity, intersectionality

Table of Contents

Declaration	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	iii
List of Tables	vii
Glossary of Terms	viii
Abbreviations	ix
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1. Background and Rationale	1
1.2. Aims, Objections and Research Questions	3
1.3. Theoretical Framework	4
1.4. Chapter Organization	5
Chapter 2: Literature Review	6
2.1. Research Engines and Keywords	6
2.2. Homophobia in Tertiary Institutions	7
2.3. Human Rights and Sexuality	11
2.4. Intersectionality	13
2.5 Mental Health and Sexuality	17
Chapter 3: Research Methodology	19
3.1. The Qualitative Research Approach	19
3.2. Methodological Framework and Study Design	20
3.3. Study Site	20
3.4. Recruitment and Sampling	20
3.5 Data Collection and Analysis	22
3.6. Reflexivity	23
3.7. Ethical Considerations	24
Chapter 4: Findings	26

4.1. General Experiences at the University 26
4.2. Discrimination at the University 29
4.3. Experiences at Orientation Week 32
4.4. Spaces and Services at the University 34
4.4.1. The Humanities Faculty being 'safer and more accepting' 34
4.4.2. Visibility and Representation 35
4.4.3. LGBTIQA+ Student Societies 36
4.4.4. Residences 41
4.4.5. Support Services 43
4.5. University Policies 45
4.5.1. Gender-neutral Bathroom Policy 46
4.5.2. *Mx* title Policy 49
4.6. The Influence of Intersectionality 51
Chapter 5: Discussion **57**
5.1. General Experiences at the University 57
5.2. Discrimination at the University 59
5.3. The Humanities Faculty being 'safer and more accepting' 61
5.4. Visibility and Representation 62
5.5. LGBTIQA+ Student Societies 63
5.6. Residences 64
5.7. University Policies 65
5.8. The Influence of Intersectionality 67
Chapter 6: Conclusion **70**
6.1. Limitations and Recommendations 73
Appendix 1: Participant Information Sheet 84
Appendix 2: Participant Consent Form 86
Appendix 3: Interview Schedule 87
Appendix 4: Non-Medical Clearance Certificate 90

List of Tables

Table 1: Research engines and keywords 6

Table 2: Participant details 21

Glossary of Terms

Black	A term used to refer to a racial category.
Lesbian	A woman who is sexually or romantically exclusively attracted to other women (Gess, 2017).
Bisexual	An individual who is sexually or romantically attracted to both men and women (Gess, 2017).
Cisheteronormativity/Cishet	A term referring to the societal and structural assumption that all individuals identify with the sex they were assigned at birth (Gess, 2017).
Heternormativity	A term widely used to describe the presumption that only two sexes exists. The term also assumes that heterosexuality is natural and normal and that individuals can only be attracted to individuals of an opposite sex. Heteronormativity is not only tied to notions and acts of sexuality, it is also related to how heterosexuality is accepted and privileged as the foundational structure in society and culture (Herz & Johansson, 2015; Kitzinger, 2005)
Tertiary	University or any other recognized education provider offering diplomas, degrees and other post-school level courses.
Post school	Schooling or specialized training and learning done after the completion of a high school education.
Higher education	Any schooling or training beyond high school, for example in colleges or universities.

Abbreviations

OCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
LGBTI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex
SADC	South African Development Community
IHL	Institutions of Higher Learning
SOGIe	Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Expressions
LGBTIQA+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual, plus
O-Week	Orientation Week
GALA	Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action LGBTIQ Archive
CCDU	Counselling and Careers Development Unit

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Background and Rationale

South Africa is well-known for its constitution that is inclusive of the rights of all individuals, irrespective of their sexual orientation. Chapter 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa advocates for the rights and protection of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual (LGBTIQA+) individuals. Although there have been decades of the implementation of the Bill of Rights, the South African government has not fully succeeded in changing the prejudiced perception and treatment of lesbian and bisexual female students to align with the constitutional rights (Kheswa, 2020; Sithole, 2015). The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights states that "Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status" (OHCHR,1996, para.1). Despite South Africa's reconstituted legislature post-apartheid, it is unfortunate and tragic that our constitution has not been able to guarantee positive changes in social discrimination (Kheswa, 2016; Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017).

Munyuki and Vincent (2017) highlight that tertiary institutions are often experienced as unsafe and unaccepting spaces by LGBTI students. Research performed in various South African institutions reveals that homophobia exists within university communities (Kheswa, 2016; Kiguwa & Langa, 2017; Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017; Potgieter & Reygan, 2012; Sithole, 2015). This poses a great concern because tertiary institutions are viewed as the representation and microcosm of wider society (Nduna, Mthombeni, Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Mogotsi, 2017).

There is a need and a legal obligation for a focus on creating inclusive spaces within tertiary institutions. Some universities in South Africa have existing policies, for example the University of the Witwatersrand's Anti-Discrimination Policy, as well as the Sexual Harassment, Sexual Assault and Rape Policy (https://www.wits.ac.za/search-results/?q=diversity+policies, 9 April 2020). These policies are aimed at protecting all students from unfair discrimination, providing a safe institution, free of any form of sexual harassment or violence, as well as creating an inclusive and diverse community. The fundamental concern for management in tertiary institutions is ensuring that there is an analysis on transcending existing formal policies to infiltrate the daily lives of lesbian and bisexual female students (Munyuki & Vincent, 2017). An institution can be safe and still not

be inclusive for students who have been othered and ostracized throughout their lives as demonstrated in studies (Kiguwa & Langa, 2017; Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017; Potgieter & Reygan, 2012; Sithole, 2015). In their discussion about creating inclusive campus environments, Munyuki and Vincent (2017) emphasize that there is a need for acknowledgement that there are aspects of institutional cultures that create discomfort for lesbian and bisexual female students. Through exploring the experiences of lesbian and bisexual female students, the aim of this study is to investigate and interrogate heteronormative spaces within a South African public university to contribute to identifying the institutional spaces and cultures that may create discomfort and exclusion for lesbian and bisexual female students.

Although there is wide research on the topic of gender identity and sexual orientation internationally, this cannot be said for the global South. Nduna et al. (2017) highlight that studies on gender and sexual orientation diversity in institutions of higher learning are limited in the Southern African Development Community (SADC). In order to challenge heteronormativity in Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) and advocate for safer and inclusive spaces, there needs to be research to authenticate that there is exclusion for students who are non-confirming to cisheteronormativity. Cisheteronormativity is a concept that refers to the societal and structural assumption that all individuals identify with the sex they were assigned at birth (Gess, 2017). Numerous researchers give emphasis to the minimal sexuality research conducted in South Africa and the African continent in the field of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity expressions (SOGIe) (Kiguwa & Langa, 2017; Matebeni, Reddy, Munyuki & Vincent, 2017, Potgieter & Reygan, 2012; Prado-Castro & Graham, 2017; Sandfort & Southey-Swartz, 2013). This lack of research limits the implementation of transformative and evidence-based interventions in these contexts. While research suggests that experiences of LGBTIQA+ students are mixed, it is also clear that campuses can be experienced as difficult environments for LGBTIQA+ students due to judgement (Munyuki & Vincent, 2017). Furthermore, research findings highlight that formal policies in tertiary institutions do exist, however more work needs to be done to ensure effective implementation of such policies (Kiguwa & Langa, 2017; Munyuki & Vincent, 2017).

This study contributes with findings that could possibly inform how tertiary institutions can practically make changes to ensure inclusivity for lesbian and bisexual students in South Africa. This study builds on existing South African studies (Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017; Prado-Castro & Graham, 2017) in that it also looks at intersectionality of the lived

experiences of black lesbian and bisexual female students. These studies emphasize that experiences of LGBTIQA+ students are layered by multiple interacting identities (Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017; Prado-Castro & Graham, 2017). Intersectionality is key in understanding what shapes the experience of an individual who may be considered a minority in society (Boonzaier & Mkhize, 2018). This study focuses on the experiences of the female student which allows for a more in-depth investigation to their specific gendered experiences. Furthermore, this study not only focuses on sexual orientation, it also explores other aspects such as gender identity, race, socio economic status and other identities in order to fully comprehend the experience of black lesbian and bisexual female students. Moreover, this study contributes findings that could inform duty bearers on how to address intersectionality strategically for inclusivity and transformation in the South African higher education society, particularly in the tertiary institution context.

1.2. Aims, Objectives and Research Questions

The aim of this research was to investigate and understand the experiences of black lesbian and bisexual female students at a South African urban based public university. This research explored how the various spaces (i.e. classrooms, student residences, support services etc.) within the tertiary institution may shape the lived experiences of these students on campus. Furthermore, this research intended to explore the behaviours in which the intersectionality of race and gender impacts the lived experiences of the lesbian and bisexual female students.

Study Objectives

- To document the experiences of black lesbian or bisexual female students at a South African urban based public university.
- To determine how the intersectionality of race, gender, sexuality and class influences the lived experiences of lesbian or bisexual female students.
- To determine particular forms of discrimination in relation to race, gender, sexuality and other aspects of identity that may exist within the campus context.

Research Questions

Based on existing research and the aims of this study, the following research questions are posed:

- What are the experiences of black lesbian or bisexual female students on campus at a South African urban based public university?
- What are the forms of discrimination towards black lesbian or bisexual female students that exist within the campus context?
- How does the intersectionality of race, gender, sexuality and class, or other differences influence their lived experiences as a black lesbian or bisexual female student?

1.3. Theoretical Framework

This research draws on the framework of intersectionality theory, a theory that requires research to examine the intersections of social categories or identities (Jibrin & Salem, 2015). Intersectionality theory is entrenched in the writings of Black American feminists who opposed the perspective of a universal gendered experience and proposed that there are several systems of oppression that overlap and work together to produce inequality (Collins, 1991; Davis, 1982). Intersectionality theory states that in understanding social phenomena, it is best to examine the intersecting or overlapping power structures such as sexual orientation, race, gender, and class simultaneously (Choo & Ferre, 2010; Crenshaw, 1991; Meyer, 2012). Furthermore, intersectionality theory argues that global experiences of black women are also shaped by race and class (Viruell-Fuentes, Miranda & Abdulrahim, 2012). As such, examining these social positions independently when exploring experiences of black women is more likely to provide a homogenized, narrow, distorted and unhelpful view as these social positions occur simultaneously (Meyer, 2012; Viruell-Fuentes, Miranda & Abdulrahim, 2012).

This research aimed to explore how the intersections of race, gender, sexual orientation and class influence the lived experiences of black lesbian and bisexual female students in a formerly whites-only institution. Crenshaw (1991) further emphasizes that power structures such as race, gender, class and sexuality are often critical in shaping experiences of women of

colour and thus viewing an experience of discrimination of black women on a single categorical axis does not allow for a full understanding of that experience.

1.4. Chapter Organization

Chapter one provides an introduction of the study, its context and includes a background and rationale for the study. This chapter also outlines the research aim and specific objectives.

Chapter two outlines the literature review method used and the rationale for the appropriateness of this method. Provides a review of literature on the topic of gender identity and sexual orientation in local and global institutions of higher learning within the last two decades.

Following chapter two is the description of the methodological approach, research methods and analytic technique which was used in the study. In **Chapter three** is where I also highlight the challenges experienced with the research approach.

Chapter four presents findings of the study, and these are presented as six main themes. These outline the experiences of black lesbian or bisexual female students at a public university with a focus on discrimination within the campus context and as well as the influence of intersectionality on their experiences.

Following the findings of the study in **Chapter five** is where a discussion on the findings are presented interwoven with existing literature and reference to the intersectionality as the theoretical framework for understanding the findings.

The research report ends with **Chapter six** where the conclusions are listed, including the limitations and the recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, a review of literature on the topic of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity expressions (SOGIe) in institutions of higher learning is presented. A breakdown of the keywords and research engines used in pursuit of the research is provided. I reviewed the literature related to the experiences of lesbian and bisexual students in local and global tertiary institutions. This was accomplished by reviewing literature focused on Homophobia in tertiary institutions, Human Rights and Intersectionality within the last two decades. The literature review illustrates the lack of focus on the topic of SOGIe research in institutions of higher learning in the global South. The review focused on Homophobia and Human Rights and concludes with a discussion on intersectionality and how it influences lived experiences of lesbian and bisexual students.

2.1. Research Engines and Keywords

I utilised research engines EBSCO Host, Taylor and Francis, SABINET and African Journals Online and also followed on leads from my supervisor. Table 1 below, illustrates the search engines, keywords and phrases used in acquiring literature for this study.

Keywords

	EBSCO Host	**Taylor and Francis**	**SABINET**	**African Journals Online**
Sexual Orientation	145 527	118 493	3 004	1 700
Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity	17 427	61 386	3 036	532
Sexual Orientation Discrimination	34860	37 211	2 907	523
Sexual Orientation Discrimination in University	14	33 373	2 764	707
Homophobia	32 369	15 344	621	326
Homophobia in University	296	13 284	591	138

Homophobia in South African Universities	25	3 171	531	200
LGBTI Students	1400	737	97	38
Lesbian and bisexual Students	3 229	17 166	244	263
Intersectionality	8 946	162 019	8 712	149
Intersectionality of race, gender and class	280	26 266	1 277	50
Intersectionality of race and sexuality	169	21 947	1 162	42

I discovered numerous articles on the topic of sexual orientation and gender identity, however as the search became more context specific to South African tertiary institutions, less articles were found to be available. Many of the articles found were either international articles or irrelevant in that they focused on different contexts, namely workplace environments or secondary schools.

2.2. Homophobia in Tertiary Institutions

Ngidi and Dlamini (2017) describe homophobia as a form of discrimination defined by an irrational fear, loathing or disgust towards members of the LGBTIQA+ community. Central to homophobia, is its exclusion of individuals who are non-conforming to heterosexuality. Homophobia is a form of *othering.* Sithole (2015) further explains the concept of *othering* as the removal of anything that appears as a foreign body from the dominant culture. Several researchers corroborate that prevalence of homophobia within tertiary institutions (de Wet, 2017; Kiguwa & Langa, 2017; Lesch, Brits & Naidoo, 2017; Munyuki & Vincent, 2017; Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017; Ngidi & Dlamini, 2017; Sithole, 2015). For example, a study investing challenges faced by gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students at a South African university found that these students experienced labelling, discrimination, sexual abuse as well as unfairness in residence allocation (Sithole, 2005). Furthermore, research

suggests that LGBTIQA+ students are exposed to misjudgement, marginalization and ostracism from their peers (Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017; Munyuki & Vincent, 2017).

There is a perception lesbian and bisexual students as people who are deviating or challenging the norm of heteronormativity and as a result of their sexuality they are marginalized and ostracized (Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017). Lesbian and bisexual students are treated unfairly and discriminated against as a result of their same-sex sexual preferences. Internationally, researchers found that lesbian, gay and bisexual students experience negative affect and attitudes in tertiary students (Negy & Eisenman, 2005). Furthermore, research focused on experiences of lesbian and bisexual students, in tertiary institution residences that highlights hostile and unaccommodating environments may lead to problematic drinking, personal and academic failures for these students (Holland, Matthews & Schott, 2013; Negy & Eisenman, 2005; Woodford, Krentzman & Gattis, 2012). Moreover, research in the South African context outlines that there is evidence of negative attitudes towards members of the LGBTIQA+ community in university communities and this leads to high levels of stigma and discrimination (Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Ganga-Limando, 2014).

Although research displays a high prevalence of homophobia in South African tertiary institutions (de Wet, 2017; Kiguwa & Langa, 2017; Lesch et al., 2017; Munyuki & Vincent, 2017; Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017; Ngidi & Dlamini, 2017; Sithole, 2015), many of these studies are not based population-based studies and so have limitations. These studies are based on small sample sizes ranging from five to twenty participants. It is therefore difficult to generalize the greater LGBTIQA+ student population as the conclusions drawn from these studies pertain only to the participants interviewed. Additionally, a vast majority of research on the topic of SOGIe focuses on students who are living openly as LGBTIQA+. Therefore, the voices and lived experiences of students who are not living openly may not be documented.

Research on homophobia in South African university communities list a range of factors which are thought to contribute to stigma, discrimination and homophobia (Graziano, 2005; Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2015; Whitehead, 2010). These include culture and cultural beliefs, religious affiliation and beliefs, as well as societal values and norms. According to Whitehead (2010), religious beliefs and affiliations can significantly influence attitudes towards same-sex sexual relationships. In an exploratory study examining the experiences of twenty gay and lesbian students, all participants listed religion as a strong family value that

they found to create an interference with their process of disclosure to their family members (Graziano, 2005). Additionally, Mavhandu-Mudzusi and Ganga-Limando (2014) listed religious belief systems and cultural gender belief systems as sources of stigma and discrimination mentioned by all twenty of the participants in their study. In many Christian religious belief systems, being LGBTIQA+ is regarded as an act of disobedience to God, an act characterized as sinful or of evil possession (Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Ganga-Limando, 2014). Cultural gender belief systems refer to expectations based on gender roles and sexual orientation including dress codes, sport codes, body movement associated with femininity and masculinity (Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Ganga-Limando, 2014). Cultural gender beliefs emerged as a source of stigma and discrimination as participants reported that failure to adhere to these expectations may lead to exclusion and classification of belonging to the LGBTIQA+ community.

Research on the topic of SOGIe is based on qualitative research designs, using mainly individual interviews or focus groups to collect data. This indicates that conclusions from the data are based mainly on analysis and interpretations drawn by the researcher (Cozby, 2009). Moreover, some of the studies researching experiences of LGBTIQA+ students rely on snowball sampling in recruiting participants. This sampling method may not be ideal as it may lead to a select group of students who share similar experiences from particular friendship groups (Etikan & Bala, 2017) .

Several researchers investigating lesbian and bisexual students' experiences in South African universities share findings that prove that homophobia exists in tertiary institutions (Cornell, Ratele & Kessi, 2016; Kiguwa & Langa, 2017; Lesch et al., 2017; Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017; Sithole, 2015). Naidu and Mutumbara (2017) share two main themes from their participants' narratives. The first theme is the perception of lesbian women as abnormal and the second, is the use of derogatory words as verbal harassment. Homophobia also emerges from the African views of homosexuality. In discussing lesbianism in South Africa, Prado-Castor (2017) highlights that there is an existing strong belief of homosexuality being a Western concept, thus it is viewed as un-African. Any sexuality that is different from heterosexuality is automatically labelled unnatural and deviant in society (Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017). This automatic negative labelling translates to negative behaviours including exclusion, the use of denigrating words and even violence. Msibi (2009) further adds that homophobic violence emerges from the belief that the lesbian and bisexual community are a threat to what is 'natural'. Kiguwa and Langa (2017) share three broad

themes that demonstrate the prevalence of homophobia in tertiary institutions: the first theme is harassment based on perceived sexual orientation, the second theme is how residential spaces enforce heterosexuality and the third theme discusses survival strategies. All students who participated in the study described a phase where they experienced a form of harassment based on their perceived sexual orientation. This finding further attests to the need for inclusivity for lesbian and bisexual students at universities. Lesbian and bisexual students are not accepted or welcome in heteronormative spaces and are also treated unfairly. Residential spaces enforce heterosexuality and in doing so legitimize negative attitudes towards lesbian and bisexual students (Munyuki & Vincent, 2017). Residential spaces are considered a home away from home for the students who do not reside where the university is based and therefore should be more accommodating and inclusive for lesbian and bisexual students. Several researchers echo that university residences are homophobic spaces that perpetuate heteronormativity and in doing so they intentionally or unintentionally exclude lesbian and bisexual students (Cornell et al., 2016; Kiguwa & Langa, 2017; Sithole, 2015).

Whilst research focused on residential spaces in tertiary institutions highlights the prevalence of harassment and violence towards LGBTIQA+ students (Kiguwa & Langa, 2017; Sithole, 2015), some of these studies are based on a single setting or residence. Therefore, the experience may be different from residence or residences in other tertiary institutions.

Sithole (2015) discusses how labelling is considered a form of homophobia because even though it can be subtle in nature, it may extend to micro aggression. An overwhelming sixty-seven percent of his respondents reported an account or moment where they were labelled by fellow students (Sithole, 2015). Two of the labels which were commonly used are *trassies*, an Afrikaans word for homosexual or *isitabane,* a Nguni word for homosexual. These labels are both derogatory and demeaning and can negatively affect one's self-esteem. Sithole (2015) further denotes how labelling can result in lesbian and bisexual students finding difficulty in disclosing their sexuality to their friends and family. Labelling is a form of homophobia because it further stigmatizes lesbian and bisexual students and it is a form of discrimination and exclusion.

Kiguwa and Langa (2017) further convey that creating diverse and inclusive spaces in universities is an ongoing challenge. Spaces such as residences, lecture halls, health facilities, bathroom facilities etc. are not inclusive for lesbian and bisexual students. Sithole (2015) shares an example of exclusion from a teaching staff member in a lecture venue, where sixty-

seven percent of respondents indicated to have experienced deliberate isolation from their lecturers in a class. Examples of exclusion in the lecture halls may include being ignored by a lecturer, exclusion from other students in group projects and preference for inclusion given to heterosexual students (Sithole, 2015).

The various forms of homophobia within the tertiary institution context range from verbal abuse, discrimination, exclusion and physical violence. Appearing in the results of their study, Mavhandu-Mudzusi and Ganga-Limando (2014) highlight that all twenty participants experienced stigma or some form of social devaluation including name-calling, and other discriminatory and exclusionary behaviour. Furthermore, Mapayi, Oginni, Akinsulore and Aloba (2016) add that homophobic environments may also result in members of the LGBTIQA+ community concealing their identity and sexuality and developing feelings of shame, guilt, self-loathing and low self-esteem. Sithole (2015) lists different forms of homophobia reported by participants which consists of labelling, marginalization by lecturers, exclusion and discrimination from fellow students, discrimination from worship, unequal treatment in health facilities and allocation of residence. Though no studies focus on this, the prevalence of homophobia in tertiary institutions is assumed based on qualitative and small-scale quantitative studies and is found to be concerning, not only for the effects the negative treatment has on students but also because as a form of social discrimination, homophobia is ultimately a violation of human rights.

2.3. Human Rights and Sexuality

Researchers raise the concern of the chasm between human rights and the right for LGBTIQA+ students to freely express their sexualities (Mapayi et al., 2016; Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Ganga-Limando, 2014; Munyuki & Vincent, 2017; Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017; Sithole, 2015). Despite university policies and spaces that have been created for the inclusivity of lesbian and bisexual students, homophobic and discriminatory views and practises persist. Due to the lack of policy protection for lesbian and bisexual students at some universities, the violation of human rights continues (Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017). There are laws and policies centred around protecting human rights based on sexual orientation and gender identity, however there is also strong evidence indicating the violation of human rights of LGBTIQA+ students in tertiary institutions (Mapayi et al., 2016;

Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Ganga-Limando, 2014; Munyuki & Vincent, 2017; Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017; Sithole, 2015).

In discussing the violation of human rights, Sithole (2015) highlights that homophobia and gender discrimination are manifestations of otherness. The existing homophobia, discrimination, exclusion and othering in tertiary institutions is in direct contradiction to South African Human Rights policies. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights acknowledges that "Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of one's nation, ethnic origin, religion, language or any other status" (OHCHR, 1996, para. 1). Naidu & Mutumbara (2017) fittingly argue that the phrase *any other status* in the statement above, seemingly covers sexual orientation. However, as highlighted by various research concerning experiences of LGBTIQA+ students in tertiary institutions, there is still a long way to go for tertiary institutions in their protection and advocacy for these students.

Where policy exists, for instance at the University of Witwatersrand, one of the objectives of the Anti-Discrimination Policy is "to prohibit the different manifestations of unfair discrimination, based on, but not limited to, race, gender identity, sexual orientation, nationality, conscience and beliefs" (https://www.wits.ac.za/search-results/?q=diversity+policies, 9 April 2020, p.2). Although some legal mechanisms and policies created for the legal recognition and protection of all, such as The Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act and Civil Union Act were expected to result in some positive shifts and experiences for sexual minorities, this has not concretized in a way that fully supports and protects lesbian and bisexual students (de Wet, 2017).

One of the main themes in Mavhandu-Mudzusi and Sandy's (2017) article *Human Rights Violation: Its impact on the mental well-being of LGBTI students at a South African rural-based university*, revealed processes of how lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex students felt their human rights were violated. Most participants reported a general violation of their rights to education by tertiary institution employees, including lecturers. For example, stigmatisation and discrimination in the classrooms when lecturers refer to homosexuality as a sin or denial of financial assistance due to a student's sexuality (Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2017). Moreover, tertiary institution health facilities reflect the campus environment and therefore are heteronormative healthcare systems providing heterocentric healthcare services (Kleinhans, 2019). Campus spaces seem to police student sexualities in a way that results in an internalized disapproval where students find themselves self-policing (Lesch et

al., 2017). Despite the existing language of inclusivity, advocacy and tolerance in post-apartheid South Africa, many South African institutions, including education institutions perpetuate patterns of heterosexism (Francis & Msibi, 2011).The narratives of the lesbian students in the study conducted by Naidu and Mutumbara (2017), were indicative of a deep fear that aggressive remarks could easily turn into violent behaviour and corrective rape. Graziano's study (2005) reveals exactly how the levels of victimization including verbal harassment, graffiti on dormitory doors, death threats and as well as physical abuse may result in fears around disclosure for gay and lesbian students.

Whilst research illustrates how the human rights of LGBTIQA+ students are violated in tertiary institutions; little is mentioned in the studies about existing anti-discrimination policies in tertiary institutions. It is unclear if participants are oblivious of these anti-discrimination policies or if these policies exist at their respective institutions of learning. In some studies, participants reported that some individuals such as lecturers and university employees violated their rights, however not much was said on whether this was reported and how these grievances were dealt with. This may indicate that such incidences are not reported enough or there is a lack of trust from LGBTIQA+ students on whether their grievances will be escalated and dealt with accordingly. Hames's study (2007) revealed how lesbian students who were subjected to homophobia, racism and gender violence hid behind their silence. In another study by Jagessar and Msibi (2015), one of the themes in the findings was ingrained denial, which was described as the excusing and the tolerance of homophobia. Despite how rife homophobia was, students often excused homophobic incidents with the notion that 'it is not all that bad' (Jagessar & Msibi, 2015). Furthermore, students hardly raised a complaint on homophobia or discrimination as there seemed to be a concern of greater jeopardy in reporting harassment due to sexual orientation (Hames, 2007).

2.4. Intersectionality

There is a wide body of research focused on intersectionality and how it influences the lived experiences of LGBTIQA+ students (Cornell et al., 2016; Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017; Prado-Castro & Graham, 2017). Intersectionality is a term introduced by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989 in her discussions of black women's employment in the United States of America (Yural-Davis, 2006). The concept of intersectionality is rooted in the notion that there are

interrelationships which exist between categories or markers of social differentiation and these influence the experience of an individual (Kulick, Wernick, Woodford & Renn, 2017).

Many researchers emphasise that exploring experiences of women, particularly black women without examining the influence of intersectionality does not allow for a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of their lived experiences (Cornell et al., 2016; Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017; Prado-Castro & Graham, 2017). Exploring experiences through an intersectional lens allows for broader perspective on different inequalities and how their interaction shapes experiences. In her book, titled *Blackwashing Homophobia*, Judge (2018) accentuates that "Intersectionality loosens the grip of universalising categories such as 'lesbian' and 'woman' in recognizing that 'the lesbian' is never devoid of class, race and other forms of identity content, despite that these are not always explicitly named" (p. 8). Furthermore, in his article based on a population of lesbian and gay leaders in the United States, Pastrana (2006) adds that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people of colour, hold multiple subordinate identifiers, namely "a LGBT sexual identity, a non-white race and a non-confirming gender identity/expression" (p. 221). It is therefore critical to view experiences of black lesbian and bisexual female students through an intersectional lens.

International (Meyer, 2012; Pastrana, 2006) and local research (Cornell et al., 2016; Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017) suggests that black lesbian and bisexual students may experience discrimination and stigmatization more severely due to their race and gender and other social markers. Prado-Castro and Graham (2017) highlight that existing research on homosexuality is focused on white, middle-class populations. Therefore shifting the focus of this research to the black population allows for a diversified perspective and a further understanding of the realities and experiences of black students. Naidu and Mutumbara (2017) discuss the intersectionality of race, gender and sexual orientation, arguing that black lesbian students are confronted by several overlapping indices of discrimination and as a result of these intersecting identities, their experience of discrimination may be heightened.

A population of students studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal shared their narratives on the intersecting identities of being black, African and lesbian. These students indicated that although safety and bodily harm already exist for women, there was an amplification of risk aimed at them due to their race, gender, as well as nationality (Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017). Similarly, Cornell et al. (2016) found that students who often experienced forms of violence, both direct and indirect, were those who did not necessarily fit the ideal student

discourse. For example, students who are black, female, from a working-class background and identify as part of the LGBTIQA+ community (Cornell et al., 2016). The quote below was captured in a report from research conducted by the Triangle Project in the Western Cape following the trail of nineteen year old Zoliswa Nkonyana, a lesbian who was stoned and stabbed to death because of her sexual identity:

A patriarchal orientation towards women as subservient to men is so entrenched, that in many African communities, female same-sex sexuality is not only seen in light of it being 'deviant' sexually, but is also regarded as a transgression of a woman's gendered position in communities (Lynch & Van Zyl, 2013, p. 3)

The quote highlights the deep-rooted patriarchal beliefs in African communities which not only dictates how women are expected to navigate their sexualities, but also inform violent policing behaviour. Additionally, this discrimination is arguably heightened in African communities where patriarchal masculinities and behaviours are disguised as expectations of tradition and culture (Naidu & Ngqila, 2013). The view that homosexuality is un-African still exists in African society (Nel, Vawda, Mbokodo & Govender, 2017), with homosexuality being referred to as unnatural or as a 'white disease' or 'colonial import' (Nkosi & Masson, 2017). There are 72 countries worldwide that criminalize homosexuality, 32 of them being African countries, where punishments include imprisonment and the death penalty (Hairsine, 2019). Naidu and Mutumbara (2017) concur and argue that being a lesbian is still perceived as sinful in many African cultural traditions.

These patriarchal beliefs and behaviours are not only entrenched in tradition and culture but also extend to religious spaces. In the article titled, *Sinful(!) Liaisons: Being Lesbian and Religious*, Naidu (2013) argues that the view of same-sex relationships as a sin appears to be amplified within African churches as it is understood as a construction of western and white invention. In a study based on a population of homosexual and bisexual students from the University of the Witwatersrand, it emerged that students found it difficult to accept their sexuality due to negative responses from the church which left them feeling labelled and different (Nkosi & Masson, 2017). Furthermore, participants found the Christian perspective of homosexuality 'being a sin' to be baffling as they grappled with their sexual identity (Nkosi & Masson, 2017). These cultural and religious perspectives present challenges for

black lesbian and bisexual students as they adopt a heteronormative stance that not only forbids nonconformity, but also dictates what will be acceptable or not regarding sexuality.

Cornell et al. (2016) point out that globally, in dominating educational discourse, the existing typical representation of an ideal student is white, male, middle-class and heterosexual. Thus, students who do not fall within those categories may question their belonging and experience exclusion and alienation. Students who are black, female, working-class and homosexual may experience isolation and segregation as a result of the category they belong to. Bearing in mind the South African context, particularly due to the history of racial segregation in the country, race and class are closely interwoven (Boonzaier & Mkhize, 2018). Therefore, social class too, is considered a fundamental intersecting identity in understanding experiences of black lesbian and bisexual students in tertiary institutions.

It is not uncommon for young people to not be able to live openly as lesbian or bisexual due to their social class and dependence on their families with the hope that when they reach university, they will be free (Nduna & Jewkes, 2013). In a study exploring the challenges faced by LGBTIQA+ youth and their parents, findings revealed that some of the participants were rejected by their own family members (Siwela, Sikhwari & Mutshaeni, 2018). Rejection from family members can make it difficult to make independent decisions about ones' sexuality, particularly if one is dependent on their families. Many LGBTIQA+ youth with economic support relocate from rural areas to urban areas to seek comfort and freedom (Thobejane & Mohale, 2018). Due to the lack of economic resources, some LGBTIQA+ youth end up homeless and often adopt unhealthy coping mechanisms including substance abuse and risky sexual behaviour (Thobejane & Mohale, 2018).

There is a need for further research focused on the experiences and perspectives of black female lesbian and bisexual students in a space that supposedly epitomises freedom for them. This current research is critical to interrogate the argument of intersectionality on lesbian and bisexual students experiences of their sexuality. Furthermore, research on experiences of lesbian and bisexual students' needs to be conducted with lesbian and bisexual students because heterosexual students are only able to share their perceptions but not the reality or the lived experiences of these students. If the aim is to create inclusive spaces for lesbian and bisexual students, it is these same students who should be leading and participating in dialogues and research about inclusivity within South African tertiary institutions.

2.5. Mental Health and Sexuality

There is a growing body of research in the field of SOGIe discussing mental health within the LGBTIQA+ community (Abaver & Cishe, 2018; Herek & Garnets, 2007; Kleinhans, 2019; Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2017; Meyer, 2003; Müller, 2015). Mental health refers to ones' emotional, psychological and social well-being and is mainly affected by biological factors and life experiences such as trauma and abuse (MentalHealth.gov, 2019). Research brings to light experiences of trauma and abuse resulting from discrimination and stigmatisation experienced by members of the LGBTIQA+ community which may contribute to the development of mental health problems (Abaver & Cishe, 2018; Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2017). The LGBTIQA+ population suffer from more mental health problems relative to the heterosexual population, with the prevalence of suicidal attempts and successful suicides ranging from eleven percent to forty-two percent (Consolacion, Russel & Sue, 2004). Despite the concerning pervasive mental health issues within the LGBTIQA+ student population, discrimination and victimization continues.

The second theme that emerged in Mavhandu-Mudzusi and Sandy's (2017) article *Human Rights Violation: Its impact on the mental well-being of LGBTI students at a South African rural-based university*, was the impact of discrimination on the mental wellbeing of their participants. Feelings of suicide and attempted suicide were common, with some participants reporting personal accounts of self-harm and suicidal attempts triggered by labelling, stigmatisation and violent attacks (Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2017). Furthermore, researchers found that non-heterosexual women appeared to consume more alcohol and may be at a greater risk for alcohol related problems in relation to their heterosexual counterparts (Herek & Garnets, 2007). Other mental disorders that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) students are at greater risk for include depression and anxiety (Kleinhans, 2017). Although members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) population reportedly experience higher levels of depression, suicide and substance abuse due to ongoing discrimination and victimization, they are also less likely to access and utilise health services (Müller, 2015).

Many individuals within the LGBTIQA+ community have experienced great difficulty in accessing mental healthcare services (Müller, 2015). This is due to the ongoing discrimination, harassment and denial of care from mental health professionals (Müller, 2015). In a study exploring experiences of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students at a South African university, fifty-eight percent of the participants reported unjust treatment

within health facilities (Sithole, 2015). Similarly, participants in Kleinhans' (2019) study which explored access to healthcare services inside campus healthcare systems, reported structural and systemic barriers to accessing healthcare, particularly for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) students. Although inclusive and non-discrimination policies in higher education institutions exist, it emerged that implementation of these policies has not infiltrated into campus healthcare services (Kleinhans, 2019). There is a silencing of the healthcare needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) students through structures that promote and perpetuate a heteronormative discourse (Kleinhans, 2019). In order to destabilize heteronormativity, to attempt to successfully create inclusive spaces in universities, several steps need to be undertaken. These steps include fully exploring the experiences of black female lesbian and bisexual students, thoroughly analysing the existing spaces and structures and interrogating the intersectionality and how it plays a role in how lesbian and bisexual students experience homophobia in tertiary institutions.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

The aim of this research was to explore and understand the lived experiences of black lesbian and bisexual students at a South African urban based public university. This study assumes an interpretivist paradigm. Chilisa and Kawulich (2012) highlight that this paradigm is concerned with understanding the world as it is experienced by others. The assumptions of this paradigm include the view that reality is socially constructed, and knowledge is subjective and context dependant (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; Thanh & Thanh, 2015). Since this research is centred on engaging with participants and understanding how they make meaning of their lived experiences, a qualitative approach was used to conduct and analyse the data. This current chapter begins with an explanation and rationale of the research approach and methodological framework. It will then discuss the research process in detail, provide an in-depth description of the study site, the process of recruitment and sampling. As a phenomenological researcher, I have included reflections of my experience throughout the research process.

3.1. The Qualitative Research Approach

A qualitative research approach was adopted for the study. Sofaer (2002) expresses that this research design relies on gathering information from participants founded on their experiences. Qualitative researchers are focused on meaning and how people experience the world (Willig, 2001). Furthermore, qualitative researchers tend to be focused on the quality and texture of participant experiences rather than any causal relationships (Willig, 2001). Considering that this study is focused on exploring and understanding lived experiences of black lesbian and bisexual students, a qualitative approach is best suited.

Cozby (2009) emphasizes that qualitative research allows for people to provide narratives of their worlds or experiences in their own words. Thus, allowing for construction of stories as they are seen through the eyes of the people who experienced the phenomenon in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of their experiences (Nieuwenhuis & Smit, 2012). Qualitative research aims for an in-depth collection of data from participants. One of the greatest advantages of qualitative research is its richness and level of depth in exploration and description of the data (Nieuwenhuis & Smit, 2012). Therefore, qualitative research aims to

provide descriptions and explanations that are based on participants' meanings and not to predict (Willig, 2001).

3.2. Methodological Framework and Study Design

This research is informed by the interpretivist paradigm. Nieuwenhuis (2007) states that the interpretivist paradigm assumes that "human life can only be understood from within" (p. 4) and therefore does not rely on observations but rather requires a focus on participants' subjective experiences of how they construct their social world. This paradigm fits the study since it is focused on exploring and understanding human experiences. This research is focused on engaging with participants and understanding how they make meaning of their lived experiences as black lesbian and bisexual university students studying at a previously whites-only university.

Chilisa and Kawulich (2012) highlight that interpretivist research relies on methodologies that are meaning oriented such as interviewing and participant observation, with open-ended research questions. Creswell (2009) concurs that the more open-ended the research questions are, the better, as this will allow for the researcher to attentively listen to what participants say or do in their life settings. Consistent with Chilisa and Kuwilich's view of the interpretivist paradigm, Thanh and Thanh (2015) further point out that interpretative researchers tend to use predominantly qualitative methods as these often contribute to constructive reports that are necessary for the researcher to have full understanding of their participants' contexts and experiences.

3.3. Study Site

The study was conducted at the University of the Witwatersrand, a South African public university situated in central Johannesburg. The Wits 2018 Annual Report indicates the latest student numbers at 39 953.

3.4. Recruitment and Sampling

The overall objective of the research was to explore the experiences of black lesbian and bisexual students at a South African urban based public university. Due to the specific criteria needed to fulfil the requirements of this research, a purposive sampling method was used.

Initially, correspondence was sent to LGBTIQA+ student organizations at the university, notifying them of the research topic and requesting that they circulate the invitation for participants. Due to a lack of response from this community, invitations were shared on social media platforms as well as posters placed around on campus and in residences. These sampling methods yielded six participants who self-identify as black and lesbian or bisexual or queer. The inclusion criteria for participation required that the participants identified as black, lesbian or bisexual and were currently registered as students at the university. Two of the participants identified as queer. Although they are both in same-sex relationships, they felt that identifying as lesbian or bisexual was limiting and did not fully encapsulate how they identify sexually. All participants were registered students. While participants were recruited from all faculties, three of the participants were from the Humanities Faculty and the other three participants were each from the Engineering, Science and Commerce Faculty respectively.

The aim for the small sample size was to allow for thorough exploration of the research topic and data collection. Qualitative research works better with a smaller sample because the size of the sample is crucial for the depth of data that is collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The table below provides a description of the participants.

Table 2

Participants' Details

Participant	Pseudonym	Biological sex	Gender	Sexual orientation	Level of study	Faculty
1	Ayanda	Female	Woman	Queer	Masters	Humanities
2	Babalwa	Female	Non-binary	Bisexual	First year	Humanities
3	Asanda	Female	Woman	Lesbian	First year	Humanities
4	Azola	Female	Queer	Queer	First year	Commerce
5	Busi	Female	Woman	Lesbian	Second year	Engineering
6	Angel	Female	Woman	Lesbian	Second year	Science

3.5. Data Collection and Analysis

Individual interviews were conducted on campus at a location that allowed visual and auditory privacy for the participants. All participants were informed about the research topic, purpose of the study and as well as their right to withdraw at any time (see Appendix i for participant information sheet). Permission was requested to record the interviews and consent forms were completed (see Appendix ii for the consent form). Semi-structured interviews were used to obtain data. Interviews are considered useful as participants are more likely to participate and respond to interviews rather than written surveys (Cozby, 2009). In face-to-face interviews, there is interaction between the researcher and participants, which can often allow for establishing rapport, which not only encourages participants to be involved but can help them be more comfortable and honest with their responses. An interview schedule was used to guide the interview. The interview schedule was drawn up based on the initial research questions. Most of the questions began with the statement "tell me about" so that participants felt free to respond at length. Probing questions were included in the interview schedule in the event of limited responses as a way to extract extensive information from participants. The interview schedule was also read by my supervisor.

Individual interviews were recorded using a cell phone and a computer. The individual interviews were conducted in English. Transcription was done after each individual interview of the audios were collected. Transcriptions were prepared for a thematic analysis to organize the data. Thematic analysis refers to a widely used analysis method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns or themes found within collected data (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Braun & Clarke, 2006). This analysis allows for the researcher to identify similar themes within the data and themes that respond to the research questions directly. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis method was used to analyse the data.

The first phase is focused on familiarizing oneself with the data. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. No translation was needed. Transcription of each audio recording took approximately six to eight hours. Throughout the interviews, I encouraged the dialogue to be as similar to ordinary conversation as possible since the interviews were semi-structured. Once all the audios were transcribed, I read the transcripts and noted down ideas generated from the data. The transcripts were also read by my supervisor. This served a form of triangulation which qualitative researchers use to add to the validity and trustworthiness of the research (Nieuwenhuis & Smit, 2012). In this phase, it was very clear that there were both differences and similarities from the experiences shared by participants.

The second phase involves generating initial codes, where the analysis of the data occurs with a purposeful aim to capture the content of the data. In this phase, I reviewed the transcripts, highlighting and writing notes directly on the transcripts to emphasize important and relevant points from the data.

The third phase involved searching for themes; Braun and Clarke (2006) add that tables or even mind maps can be used at this phase. I went through the written notes and highlighted sections on the transcripts to establish themes from the data. This was particularly challenging due to the amount of important and relevant information yielded from the data.

Fourthly, all the themes are reviewed and refined to determine that all the collected data has been captured. In reviewing and refining the themes, I checked the transcripts repeatedly to see if the established themes worked in relation to the data.

The last two phases involve defining and naming themes. There were eight themes to begin with but with reviewing the notes and transcripts, I was able to narrow it down to six main themes.

To achieve credibility and trustworthiness of the data, I ensured that the research process was transparent and I constantly discussed my research and findings with my supervisor. This resulted in some back-and-forth in analysis and interpretation of the data. The transcripts were read by my supervisor as a form of triangulation which qualitative researchers use to add to the validity and trustworthiness of the research (Nieuwenhuis & Smit, 2012). My supervisor and I agreed on the outcome of analysis.

3.6. Reflexivity

Patnaik (2013) defines self-reflexivity as the acknowledgement that the researcher has an important role in the research and that a researcher needs a particular level of self-awareness on how they may influence the research. The researcher's own experiences will affect how the researcher engages with participants and how the researcher analyses data (Patnaik, 2013).

As a black, female researcher who identifies as queer, I am aware that my race, gender and sexuality may have placed me in a position of being an insider throughout this research process. My race may have allowed for participants to feel comfortable, particularly when discussing racial identity. Since race is a visible identity marker, I believe there was an

instant connection between the researcher and participants. For instance, one of the participants, Ayanda reported that she would not have participated in the study if I was not black. Similarly, to race, I presume being a female researcher also aided to establish rapport, particularly with the feminine-presenting participants. I noted that there were moments when it seemed that the more masculine-presenting participants presented with an unwillingness to share more intimate details. I attribute this to how I present as a feminine woman, but also to their lack of knowledge of my sexual orientation; at this point I could have been assumed to be heterosexual by default and thus perceived as an outsider. I feel the perceived differences, regarding sexual orientation are important to note in the relationship between researcher and participant and the information that participants felt comfortable enough to share.

My experience as a black queer female postgraduate student at the University of the Witwatersrand is coloured with feelings of invisibility and exclusion. As a feminine-presenting woman, I constantly felt like my sexual orientation was invisible and I feel this speaks to the heteronormative discourse and environment perpetuated in spaces and systems within the university. I was able to easily access support services and I think this was mainly due to my previous experience in higher education as an undergraduate. Whilst LGBTIQA+ organisations already exist on campus, it appeared to be targeted to undergraduate students. As a postgraduate student, I constantly felt excluded from the campus and the residences. Although there were initiatives and events centred around celebrating and advocating for LGBTIQA+ students, it never felt like these initiatives were fully supported by the university management and the greater university community.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the Non-Medical Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of the Witwatersrand, protocol number MCLIN/18/010 IH. This research was informed by several ethical principles, namely, informed consent, beneficence, confidentiality, voluntary participation and anonymity. Ogletree and Kawulich (2012) highlight that ethics are to be considered at every step of the research design and implementation process. Informed consent allows for participants to have a choice in participating in the study without a feeling of coercion or deception (Ogletree & Kawulich, 2012). Ethical principles of confidentiality and anonymity were crucial as participants shared very personal details in relation to sensitive topics of race and sexuality.

Furthermore, due to the sensitive nature of the research topic, participant's identities were respected and protected, particularly for instances where the participants are not living openly or have not disclosed their sexual orientation. Pseudonyms were used to ensure that all participants felt respected and their identities were protected. Participants were assured that I would be the only person who knew their identities. My supervisor and the readers would not know their identities. Participants were informed of free counselling services available at the university or with organisations servicing the LGBTIQA+ community if they thought this was needed, following the interviews.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the study, divided into six main themes:

I. Participants' general experiences at the university,
II. Discrimination at the university,
III. Experiences of the orientation week,
IV. Spaces and services at the university,
V. Policies at the university and
VI. The influence of intersectionality on the experiences of lesbian and bisexual students.

The first two themes describe the participants' general experiences at the university, discrimination and more specific experiences in relation to the orientation week. The third theme highlights the spaces and services available at the university that participants had experienced as either inclusive or exclusive. The fourth theme discusses policies related to sexual orientation and gender identity at the university. Lastly, the theme of intersectionality is discussed.

4.1. General Experiences at the University

The responses to the participants' general experiences at the university were varied. There were several factors that influenced participants prior to coming to university, including whether or not they had disclosed their sexual orientation, the nature of the responses they received, their expectations moving into a tertiary institution and their current level of study, i.e. undergraduate or postgraduate as well as exposure to another tertiary institution prior to relocating to the University of the Witwatersrand.

Half of the participants said that they had negative experiences upon arrival at the institution for different reasons. The first participant was pursuing her postgraduate studies and had previously studied at another tertiary institution. As a queer-identifying postgraduate student, Ayanda described her general experience at the institution as follows:

> *So, because I've been so isolated at Wits, I wouldn't be able to say that I've like meshed with any other black queer women or black queer people in general. Early last year when I was kind of starting off my studies there were these LGBT research*

> *Friday meetings that they had. I don't know if they still have them and it was there where I met people I guess we like I was studying something in relation to black LGBT or were LGBT+ but I guess in like terms of friends and even like romantic connection I haven't had much of that specifically like at Wits because like I said it's been a very isolating experience because I don't know too many people I would say I know more people that are involved in the academics, yeah in the academics of black queerness but not so much on like on a personal level, yeah.* (Ayanda, Masters student)

For Ayanda, there seemed to be a distinction between the academic life and the general life as a student and whilst she accessed a community of like-minded people in a research group, she seemed to have hoped for more outside a focused research group. Another participant described having difficulties in adjusting to the first year of university. Azola highlighted experiencing ignorance which affected her mental health as expressed below (Second year student):

> *Uhm, okay well I can only really, the first thing that came to mind was the first time I got here cause at that time I didn't, I didn't even know what queer was. So, I got here and I was like I know I'm not straight, that's for sure. I know I don't like to dress up, I don't like makeup and heels and stuff like that. So, when I got here it was really hard to adjust essentially because no matter where you go, you'll find ignorant people and they tend to make their opinions very loud so, and I live in an all-female res so that makes things also very hard essentially so when I got here struggled a lot with it. It did have a massive impact on my mental state and then I had to like to go to therapy sessions because like it was really it was, it was a lot.*

Whilst Azola was unclear about queer identities she seemed to have had a sense of difference that she hoped would be clarified through interactions with knowledgeable people. Her disappointment seemed to have stemmed from what she refers to as *"ignorant people"*. It was unclear from the quotation if she sought therapy on campus or outside. As a queer identifying person, Azola also found herself a misfit in an all-female only residence; this suggests that this type of a residence, whilst common across universities, might be experienced as fostering a cishet culture and feminine identity that brings discomfort to non-binary students. Furthermore, some participants indicated intrusive behaviours from other

students, particularly in relation to asking questions about their sexuality based on their presentation including their dress code, mannerisms etc.:

> *I guess that's because I know who I am. I'm comfortable with who I am and I can stand my ground, so most of the discrimination I have faced here at Wits happens in class. You know what I'm studying it's mainly dominated by men and obviously some of them don't really understand the life we choose to live. Some of them come up to you and ask like, "Okay so what's happening?", not that it's any of their business but I really don't mind informing people you know? Even after that some of them remain ignorant to it but I mean that's your choice. I can't really force my, the way I choose to live my life down your throat. So, yeah, they do come up to me and they're like, "Okay uhm please just briefly explain you know what you are and what you stand for?", and then you tell them like, "No, I am lesbian. I date other girls", and then you get questions like, "So, does that mean you want to be a man?" I'm like, "No there's a different term for that if you, if you feel like you were born in the wrong body and that's being transgender, I'm not transgender I'm just lesbian" and then they're like, "Ok so why do you dress the way you dress?" I feel like honestly clothes should not have a specific gender.* (Busi, Second year student)

The other two participants described more positive experiences at the university. Babalwa (Second year student) expressed that she had a more positive experience due to the environment that she grew up in, which she felt was accepting and diverse and this made it easier for her to be comfortable with being different at the tertiary institution:

> *"Uhm and in general I'd say my experience as a queer person has been, it's better than most people. I guess maybe that's just like the environment I grew up in, it's always been like very diverse so we don't really judge you cause you different."*

During the interview, Babalwa shared that she was not born and raised in South Africa (country names withheld for anonymity). She described her immediate family as very accepting of her sexuality. Whilst Babalwa expressed a different and positive experience, she used a comparative statement and attributed her experience as "*better than most people*" suggesting that she was aware of students whose experiences were discomforting and unpleasurable. Similarly, another participant also described having a more positive

experience, but her reasoning was related to her gender expression. She felt that being feminine in her presentation made it safer for her because her peers could not *'see'* that she was lesbian. This finding was present throughout the interviews and will be discussed further in theme five. It appeared that having a more feminine or presumably more feminine presentation provided a camouflage for Angel (Second year) to bypass prejudice and gaze:

> *I don't know if it matters a lot, like I don't see myself as being different like it's not something that I would think of as like it draws attention to people. I don't know if it does but maybe it's also because I'm like very girly so people don't know that I am, like they don't notice me so they can't make comments on what I am because they don't know what I am.*

4.2. Discrimination at the University

A common theme throughout the interviews was discrimination. Discrimination was described by participants in various forms within and around the university spaces. Participants also described anticipatory discrimination when faced with situations where they felt they could be discriminated against:

> *Uh, I think there's always this like little part that's afraid because of how people react because I feel like if you black and not like this kinda like straight and like, I guess binary person. There's always like that little bit of judgment and for me personally let's say like I'm walking and there's like a group of black men, I'm always afraid like, "Do I look outwardly gay?" Because there's always kinda like this fear, I don't know like they might attack me in some way or form. So, there's always that like part that fears.* (Babalwa, Second year)

In the excerpt above, Babalwa specifically describes her experience of having to question if she looks gay because she fears judgement or even physical harm. This concern was shared by other participants, particularly those who are masculine presenting. There was a common theme about the importance of how one looked to the public as it may attract the wrong, unwanted or dangerous attention. Furthermore, Babalwa also alludes to the discomfort of the intersection of her racial identity and sexual orientation. This discomfort communicates an apprehension that there is an expected uniformity in blackness. One that means being black

and straight, to not further divide the black people by being queer. This fits with the stereotypes and arrogance of black African identities as cishet (Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017).

In the following excerpt, Azola (Second year) shares an experience where she felt unsafe at the university and she attributed it to her masculine presentation:

> *I know, this other day like last week or something I was walking back from campus to res and this other man is like giving me such a horrible look and it was probably because of the way I was dressed and I was just, you know when you just like, there's nothing I can do. Like another friend of mine that I met through these queer spaces and stuff, his roommate I don't know what happened but there was a physical assault against like someone hit, like beat the s*** out of him because of his sexuality and he also has this PTSD now cause every time zone like like* (demonstrates pretending to hit someone). *And like there's so many stories that I've had being here not just from myself but from like other people. It's really sad. Yho, there's a lot of trauma that people go through in this space.*

This indirect exposure to violence through experiences of other queer students has vicarious impacts and might have led to the kind of suspicion that Azola describes she experienced on this day.

In another interview, Busi (Second year) describes a more verbal form of discrimination which at times may be overlooked as it is not physical. The questioning or interrogation of one's sexuality or gender is experienced as a daily occurrence from her peers at the university:

> *So most of the discrimination I have faced here at Wits happens in class. You know what I'm studying it's mainly dominated by men and obviously some of them don't really understand the life we choose to live. Some of them come up to you and ask like, "Okay so what's happening?", not that it's any of their business but I really don't mind informing people you know?*
> *So, yeah, they do come up to me and they're like, "Okay uhm please just briefly explain you know what you are and what you stand for?", and then you tell them like, "No, I am lesbian. I date other girls", and then you get questions like, "So, does that mean you want to be a man?" I'm like, "No there's a different term for that if you if*

you feel like you were born in the wrong body and that's being transgender, I'm not transgender I'm just lesbian" and then they're like, "Ok so why do you dress the way you dress?" I feel like honestly clothes should not have a specific gender.

In her description, Busi uses *'obviously'* in her reference to her male classmates who do not accept her sexual expression; a sign of general apathy experienced by Busi as a lesbian from cismale in her society. Whilst Busi seems okay with being questioned and explaining herself, this level of questioning about the way she dresses, is in itself an expression of unwarranted structural violence by the male students in her class. Their line of questioning implies that she has committed something that she should not have done; she has transgressed. This is problematic and policing behaviour. Two participants mentioned experiences of indirect judgement from peers at the university and this speaks to the experience of students who feel they constantly must navigate spaces, feeling uncomfortable and unsafe due to responses received based on sexual orientation or gender. For Asanda, she observed the following:

I feel like the classes I'm in, there's not much judgment. Okay, there's not direct judgment. Maybe there are people that do judge me, but they don't say it to me. So, it's fine, it doesn't have anything to do with me. (Asanda, First year)

Ja, it was early this year when my friends and I were having a conversation about Somizi, Somizi Mhlongo and it was about the incident that happened at church where the pastor was, I don't know something happened at Somizi's church where the pastor said something about gayism and he didn't take it well and yeah something happened and then my friend asked another friend, not me and I was there and she asked her, "Do you think it's ok for gay people to be allowed at church?" That offended me and I never told her that it offended me. I feel like I know it's a sin, that I know, I know being lesbian is a sin but it doesn't mean because I sin differently from you then I shouldn't be allowed at church you know cause I'm a Christian and that really offended me. I would say that's the only time in these two years that I have been offended by someone, like I've been offended by someone saying something about my sexuality, yeah but it wasn't direct. (Angel, Second year)

Here again is a vicarious experience of prejudice and violence. It is uncertain if the friend who posed the question, asked genuinely or used this opportunity to communicate their

disapproval to Angel. Either way, this left Angel feeling like a 'sinner'. The fact that Angel could not, and did not, express how she felt about this conversation to her friends demonstrates how unfriendly and unwelcoming the conversation was. The two friends who were in conversation, took up the space in such a way that did not respectfully explore difference, because if they did, Angel would have been able to participate in the conversation in a way that destabilised the assumed heteronormativity of sexual orientation.

4.3. Experiences at Orientation Week

Orientation Week refers to the first week of university when all first-year students are welcomed to the university and introduced to university life.

Orientation Week follows from Welcome Day. During this week students will learn the values of the Wits community, discover the full array of what can be done as a Wits student and how to find support when needed. Although there is much to learn, there are also many student volunteers and staff members who are ready to offer advice and support throughout the transition to Wits. The aim of 'O Week' is to enable Witsies to consider how to explore and pursue intellectual and personal interests. (https://www.wits.ac.za/orientation/, 3 February 2019).

There were a few participants who mentioned their experiences of Orientation Week (O-Week) and a common theme present throughout was an invitation to the LGBTIQA+ student societies and information about LGBTIQA+ support services that were available for students. Not all participants shared the same experience with O-Week, however those who did, indicated that LGBTIQA+ information was made available in their first week of university:

> *Well GALA, it was like an invitation from O-Week. And I was like, "Okay, maybe I should join". And then there was also ACTIVATE but I never have time to go to ACTIVATE because I'm busy. So, it's kind of like easy access for me. At least I have a space to go to and feel comfortable.* (Asanda, Second year student).
>
> *Well, it hasn't been really that difficult but when I first came here, I stayed at res so during O-Week, the house comm basically asked for people who identify within the LGBTQI+ spectrum, so obviously hands up okay they collect us. So, there was a white*

> *lesbian there, shap. So, when they try to organise events, they try by all means to include everyone, so they usually come to us and ask for opinions. (*Busi, Second year student)

Both Asanda and Busi felt that information about student societies and support services was easily available during O-Week. Asanda mentioned *Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action* (GALA), a centre for queer culture and education in South Africa which is located at the university. She also mentioned *ACTIVATE*, a student society and solidarity network for LGBTIQA+ students focused on promotion and advocacy. For Busi, she felt included in the organization of events at her residence which indicates that there are existing initiatives in the organisation that are aimed at creating inclusive spaces and experiences for LGBTIQA+ students.

In another interview, a participant shared a different experience of O-Week, indicating that in her experience of O-Week, not much information was provided about LGBTIQA+ issues, spaces and available services.

> *I don't know if they do talk about the LGBTQ a lot in a O-Week but I feel like O-Week should be one of the periods where they focus a lot on letting people know that they're welcome if you are part of the LGBTQ and they should also have talks about it in residence, because you know most of the residences are same gender res and having a roommate who's like a lesbian when you're not might make you feel uncomfortable so I feel like they should talk about it a lot at res. Especially for first years, so they may know and also, I also know about the residence things that first year you're not allowed to have a single room, so I feel like if you're maybe transgender and you don't feel comfortable with having a roommate because you're still transitioning and you're not comfortable being around people like being naked around people, I mean you have to be in your room to change. I feel like they should consider that for first years, so they should allow first years to have single rooms if they don't feel comfortable being around their roommate yeah.* (Angel, second year student)

For Angel, there was no information provided during O-Week which raises a concern about the planning of O-Week across faculties as Angel is from a different faculty in comparison to Asanda and Busi. From her quote above, it is unclear if Angel was unable to receive the information due to it being unavailable or if the O-Week facilitators she had, might have not

been comfortable sharing information related to LGBTIQA+ student societies and support services. Angel also addresses her residence experience; she highlights the anticipated anxiety of making another student 'uncomfortable' because of ones' sexual orientation. Angel might have internalised anticipated disapproval or discomfort from others in response to her sexual orientation.

4.4. Spaces and Services at the University

Participants were very responsive when sharing their experiences about the various spaces and services available within the institution. The questions focused on inclusive and exclusive spaces within the institution and how participants experienced spaces and services at the university.

4.4.1. The Humanities Faculty being 'safer and more accepting'

The first common theme was the disparity between the Humanities Faculty and other faculties such as Commerce, Science and Engineering. There was a perspective that participants felt more welcome and accepted in the Humanities Faculty. This raises questions about whether the Humanities Faculty has more LGBTIQA+ students or if it is, in fact experienced as a more welcoming and accepting environment. If the Humanities Faculty is more welcoming and accepting, it feels important to look at how other faculties can 'adopt' these measures to ensure that LGBTIQA+ students in other faculties experience the same level of acceptance. This finding should be read against the fact that the Humanities was overrepresented in these interviews.

The following excerpts describe experiences of students at the different faculties:

> *Ja, uhm definitely. I feel welcome in some spaces, like the queer spaces as I mentioned. Actually Humanities, this side of campus is the most welcoming actually. Once you go into the Commerce and the Science and even if you leave and you go to like Education campus it's not the same experience. Uhm because I don't know like Science and Commerce people like they very* (sighs)*, how can I say this? They're not open-minded at all, like they're very narrow minded, like in terms, for them sexuality is literally just gay and straight. There's no you know, acknowledgment of pansexuality and bisexuality and things like that, it's just very, it's just, even in like I*

think the way I navigate spaces is based on the way people are dressed. (Azola, first year student)

I don't know if the spaces relate to me like in terms of my identity or my race, but just like socially I don't feel like I belong like let's say on west campus or like something like very mathematical or science. I think the, especially on east campus there's a lot more, I guess open-minded in a way if that makes sense so they feel very accessible to me. I think the most spaces that I feel like I belong the most would be Arts School and would be GALA, that's on the 7th Floor of WAM. Yeah, GALA is the lesbian and gay yeah thing. But yeah, uhm, I feel like any space doesn't really hinder on my sexual identity. (Babalwa, first year student)

Both Azola and Babalwa describe the Humanities Faculty and East Campus as a more accepting environment with more open-minded individuals. For Azola, who is a Commerce student, this means that she is constantly navigating spaces where she feels she does not belong. University campuses can sometimes be tough environments for students who are LGBTIQA+, and who may be misrecognised, judged or excluded by their peers (Munyuki & Vincent, 2017).

4.4.2. Visibility and Representation

Another common theme that emerged in the participants' responses was visibility and representation. Participants expressed their views on the lack of representation and visibility of queerness in different capacities within the institution. In the except below, Ayanda (Masters student) shares her view:

I think representation is just important in all its capacities and I struggled with this cause it was kind of a similar conversation that I had had at … (another tertiary institution) *just before I left and they were asking about representation of lecturers right? In that I want, I want to be able to have a black queer woman be my supervisor or see represented in front of me, in front of the classroom. It would mean something to me, well it means something to me that my supervisor you know but it would have meant something to me at **** (another tertiary institution) as well to know that there's someone standing in front of a classroom that represents me so that I don't know how that would be controlled in policy but like just a wide representation of*

> *people in each Faculty, in each discipline because it means something for you to be able to see yourself in front of the classroom you know? Do you know what I mean? So, policy regarding the demographics of lecturers. I think my, I know it's things that I want, I struggle just to imagine what the practicalities of it would be so it's also important for funding for particularly black queer student.* (Ayanda, masters student)

Ayanda shares her insights on the importance of representation of black queer staff members. She addresses the importance of visibility and representation as well as the impact that it may have in making a student feel seen and represented within the institution.

In another interview, a participant in agreement with Ayanda emphasized the importance of visibility and representation in relation to feelings of acceptance and recognition.

> *Actually, I have no idea. I don't know how. I feel like something would be representation, to somehow have people or something on a wall or anywhere that makes us feel like, okay we belong and that we are represented within this like institution or organisation. I mean I know that there are people in seats who do identify as queer. I have not seen them or met them but that just knowing that they there uhm makes me feel happy. I don't know what their race is but if I knew they were black that would make me happier because there's like a level of acceptance and success within this institution. So, I think just like any form of representation could help with our experiences, to feel basically accepted and recognised.* (Babalwa, first year student)

For Babalwa, her suggestion of even having *'something on a wall'* speaks of her need for representation that is visible and concrete. Both Babalwa and Ayanda express how much visibility of black queer staff members would mean to them. When a university fails to have cultural artefacts and symbols that acknowledge black students, it implicitly upholds white student identities (Boonzaier & Mkhize, 2018).

4.4.3. LGBTIQA+ Student Societies

The reactions to the questions regarding LGBTIQA+ student societies at the university were varied. The reactions ranged from participants who were unaware of the existing student societies to participants who were aware of them, but felt they were not active or visible

enough. Other participants were fully aware and active within those societies. Below is an excerpt of a participant who was unaware of any LGBTIQA+ student societies at the University of Witwatersrand:

> *No, no not at all, not at all, not at all. I can't even speak on it because it's very very non-existent. Except for like that group of like black women that gathered on Fridays and talked politics and feminism like I wanted to join it but for some reason I was unavailable every time that they met but yeah, but no I haven't had any other affiliation with any student bodies.* (Ayanda, Masters student)

In further discussions with Ayanda, it appeared that her lack of awareness of the student societies at the universities was not only as a result of lack of visibility or awareness of these societies. Ayanda indicated that as a part time student, her time on campus was very limited and therefore she might not be around when these societies are being advertised. Furthermore, Ayanda also indicated that due to her own conflicting feelings about her sexuality, she had not yet had the opportunity to immerse herself in the university culture and thus that may have impacted her lack of awareness of these student societies.

Another participant described the LGBTIQA+ student societies on campus as lacking visibility and exposure not only within the university environment but as well as on social media. In the excerpts below, Babalwa shares her insights:

> *So that's kind of like gave me motivation to join again and yeah, I just joined but to be honest I don't think a lot of people know about ACTIVATE, cause like they're just aren't really out there. Even in the social media it's very dry, so I just feel like if you're not gonna market yourself out there then no one's gonna really know about you. There has to be a word of mouth kind of thing cause I mean I wasn't even sure if it was like a society but uhm otherwise the experience with it has been good so far. They have a new management so I think that they're going in a very good direction. They have like a lot of diverse events happening. I think I'm gonna stay a member of it, yeah.* (Babalwa, First year student)

Her response regarding GALA was as follows:

> *I found out from two of my friends. I think it was at the beginning of May, so before that I didn't know that it existed. Uhm, they just came to me like and they were like, "Hey, we found a library. It's on the same floor of WAM and yeah, they got like all*

> *these lesbian, gay book, bisexual" uhm and yeah she was like, "It was like this really cool thing to find. It felt nice, cosy and warm". So, I went there and I think I touched on the topic of the size of it cause I was expecting this like massive library, when I get there, it's like a room with shelves and books and this other table with a woman on her laptop. And I was like, "Wow". I was expecting something more that though but I mean at least that's something. I haven't been there a lot of times maybe twice yeah and it's very like nice cosy space. We can sit on the floor and do work.* (Babalwa, First year student)

Whilst Babalwa was pleased to find a 'cool' queer space, she was also disappointed as she was expecting a larger space. She uses the phrase '*I mean at least that's something'* alluding to her feeling like she should be grateful as there are not many queer spaces in the university to begin with.

She further continued to highlight that she felt that there was lack of support from the institution for LGBTIQA+ student societies. In the excerpt below, she details what this means for her as a bisexual student at the University of the Witwatersrand:

> *It makes me feel like there isn't a lot going on in terms of like documenting our experiences or even on giving us the space to archive these documentations. It just, it feels like they kind of shoved us in this little room and they're like, "Oh here, put all your stuff in here and if anyone wants to come, they can come", because I mean when you look at the main library, it's not all one topic you know? Uhm just like a little like, maybe literature section. Why could they not have put in that in that space as well? Is it a comfortability issue maybe? Maybe students would feel better like being in a private space? So, I guess that's how they're going about it. Yeah it does make me question like why is it not there like as a section in this huge library? Still, there's not a lot of books is in there, which makes me think that there's isn't a lot available in terms like documentation and that kind of like makes me feel like there isn't a lot for me to kinda look at in terms of like queer history cause it's so limited. So yeah, so to learn one would have to just Google stuff now but it's something instead of nothing.* (Babalwa, First year student)

Here, Babalwa felt that the university did not provide an appropriate queer space. She described feeling 'shoved' indicating internalized rejection from the university when a larger space was not allocated to the GALA library. Although Babalwa initially was talking about

books, she uses the word 'us' indicating that the university's failure to provide a larger space for the GALA library, meant the university failed to provide a space for her as a bisexual student and the rest of her community.

Some participants identified the existing LGBTIQA+ student societies as safe spaces for them within the university. In the excerpts below, participants described their experience as members of the student societies:

> *Uhm, well initially when I got here I did research some of these spaces. Like, I didn't know about GALA and ACTIVATE right? I knew about Safe Zones because that's what's on the website. So, I knew about that but Safe Zones is not an actual group, it's more so of you email, you get support in terms of that then they refer you to CCDU or something or they refer you to GALA or ACTIVATE, so it's not an actual group. So, when I got here, I was looking for them actually and then one of the friends that I met at res whose queer as well and genderqueer took me here, uhm GALA is actually right here, at Wits Arts Museum. So uhm yeah, initially I didn't get involved in the activities, like I didn't go volunteer and stuff like that. I would just sit there and listen because I felt like there's a lot that these people can teach me, how to survive and navigate in these spaces so I mean I've never lived in Joburg, so it's a big adjustment but now that I'm much more comfortable with my sexuality, now that I've worked on accepting myself, I'm volunteering for things. I'm getting involved and going out, chanting at Gay Pride and stuff like that. So yeah, the way I found out was actually through chance and since then I've just been going, getting and being more and more active in these things and spreading awareness but now I really don't care what people say about my sexuality. Like, I post about it all the time even though I know my sister and cousins can see* (laughs) *and they probably thinking things, I mean who knows? I'll probably will get questions very soon.* (Azola, second year student)

For Azola, joining a LGBTIQA+ student society was about survival and navigating in the tertiary environment. This indicates that the existing student societies like GALA and ACTIVATE play an enormous role in supporting LGBTIQA+ students. Although Azola found a place of safety at GALA, it is important to note that she agreed with one of the other participant's opinions, that the university did not fully support LGBTIQA+ student societies.

Nah, like I remember I was at GALA right? And they were telling me how Wits only supporting Pride like a couple years ago. Like it's a new thing to have Wits support Pride and even Wits Pride was like, it hasn't been here for 3 years. (Azola, second year student)

Similarly, to Azola, Asanda shared her first experience of being a part of ACTIVATE and GALA and described how she experienced them as welcoming and educating spaces for her:

Oooh GALA, uhm first time I went there I think it was the second week of school. I just got there. I didn't know anyone. I got lost obviously in the beginning cause I'm a newbie. I just saw everyone, with a smile and they're like, "Hello, fresh new blood here!" I'm like, "Okay" and I sat down and I was still blonde that time. So, yeah, I was acting like a blondie anyway. So, got there, sat down, we played a sex game actually. It wasn't like a sex; it was an introduction game. (Asanda, first year student)

She further described her experience at GALA, the activities and discussion that take place:

We just have like common discussions. Well, not common. Some of the discussions we have are those that you will never hear in the outside world. So, like oh, Kanye West when he mentioned that "slavery was a choice", we spoke about that but in the lesbian perspective. What we think about people thinking of us, Uhm, I'm trying to remember what we said because what he said was involved a bit of pettiness, but it was also kind of like a valid statement, in a way because slavery was kind of like a choice but then why do we? It's also like English, how do I explain this? You know when people ask you "Did you choose to be gay?" And you say, "yes or no". It's kind of like that. So, I if he said yes, I chose to be gay. What is your reason for choosing to be gay? It's like, No, I like girls". Whereas I didn't choose to be gay. Just yeah, I was born with it. Uhm so if those type of issues we don't mention to the outside world. We know the outside world would actually like come after us, probably shoot us and kill us. But yeah, we have deep discussions as well, not really deep. We had a sex talk sometime, how-to put-on condoms on sex toys, it was a bit scary, but interesting. We learnt about the little dosage, ARVs, PrEP. Yeah, I do about that but those have been existing. Ja it's like educational stuff, what's your ideal partner. (Asanda, first year student)

For Azola, GALA not only provides a place of safety, but there is also educational content focused on sexual education.

4.4.4. Residences

In discussing experiences in residences, participants revealed both positive and negative experiences. Negative experiences were indicative of them feeling unsafe and excluded in residences, while the positive experiences described feelings of support and inclusion in their residences regardless of their sexual orientation.

In the excerpt below, Azola shared her own residence experiences and described feeling safer in her residence as opposed to surrounding areas, namely Braamfontein:

> *Like I said I live in an all-female res which means the amount of masculine-appearing you know individuals there is not a lot. It's maybe if, how many I've seen other than me? And there's like 600 in the res so that has played a lot but nonetheless I have spoken to some of them and they've actually given me a lot of support and I like, what I found with uhm my res particularly is that I have found people that are not looking at the way I present and judging me based on that. That has been very helpful but my experience, YHO! It terms of being queer outside of Wits, Yho, that was an adjustment because Braam is not, it's not inclusive at all like certain parts of Braam it's literally dangerous to be outside of the norm. There was even a time where somebody grabbed me and they pushed me into a corner. I was terrified and I was just there to get a haircut. (*Azola, second year student*)*

For Azola, she was able to receive support from students regardless of her sexual orientation and gender expression. She described her residence as an environment where she does not feel judged based on her gender expression. The non-judgemental environment in student residences is crucial for LGBTIQA+ students to establishing a sense of belonging in the home away from home. Students who identify as LGBTIQA+ can flourish and be happy living in residence environments that are more accepting and understanding (Munyuki & Vincent, 2017).

Later in the interview, Azola reported a friend's negative experience that occurred in a student residence due to their sexual orientation:

Oh, it's happened and it's happened through people that I know. Uhm like for instance, one of my friends like, she has, her one of her friends, this other guy or whatever, he said some (inaudible 2 seconds). *So, there's an openly gay man at Men's Res right? I'm sure there's a lot more gay people there but he's like, "I'm gay" and uhm this friends of hers decided to call him "a girl" because of his sexuality and I was looking at them like "Wow" and then there was another time one of my friends uhm who also lives at men's res whose like "I'm so openly gay", he was wearing lipstick and they did not like it there at Men's Res. So, they formed a little gang or whatever and they said they were going to beat the shit out of him, if and when they saw him. Mind you he lives there. And I'm just, I'm just and it's like I don't even know what to say to him at that point. I was very worried about him like what was gonna happen when you got to res? Because they legit were looking for him and we were hiding with him, so there's quite a few offences like that.*

Although Azola has not experienced discrimination in her residence, she was very aware of experiences of harassment and violence towards other students who are not heterosexual in other residences. Whilst her own personal experience is a more positive one, she is still left with anxiety and concern for other students.

In the following excerpt, Busi shared her own negative experience:

Ja, I've had an experience where we almost got sexually assaulted with a friend of mine because we did not wanna go out with these guys, also from Wits, so that was quite scary. I am not gonna lie, that was quite scary and escaping it was I don't know, it was a miracle from God I guess. Yeah ok so we basically went with these girls they straight, they identify as straight and the house comm for that particular res which I'm not gonna mention, came up to us. They were buying these girls drinks so obviously they offered us drinks too, because we know these guys we kinda like trust them we get the drinks and it's all a good time and then they're like, "Our rooms are just right around the corner", and we're like, "No" and the other ones agreed to go and obviously I'm not gonna go and they're like, "No, why you're not going I mean you've drank our alcohol?", you know? So, it was that situation. Where it was like

kinda like tried to grab us but we could escape before that. (Busi, second year student)

Busi described a disturbing story that further illustrates the violence and abuse that LGBTIQA+ students are subjected to in spaces where they should feel safe. Busi emphasized that the students who attempted to assault them, were people that they knew and trusted, which demonstrates how students are at times targeted by fellow students. Student residences should provide safety for all students regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation.

4.4.5. Support Services

In discussing support services, participants reported varied experiences in relation to access and availability of support services at the university.

In the excerpt below, Ayanda shared her experience:

> *Yeah no, visibility I think if you… I'm sure I went onto the website. Well, picture wise, it's not like every time you get a Wits email regarding the CCDU, there isn't necessarily a picture of a Black woman sitting on a couch there, no. So, if you looking to do, or if you looking to see that kind of person you would actually have to go on the website and scan by surname and kind of make assumptions to know if those people were there. So, in terms of its visibility and representation I can't say that it's there, maybe I didn't look hard enough but I didn't know. I can say like I don't know that is there. Unless it was visible, I probably would've opted to see someone in Wits first before seeking external, uhm external help. But I was ugh, even if I tried to see someone here, she probably sees so many people. She'd be so fed up by the time they see me I don't wanna like you know, but no in terms of visibility I can't. I don't necessarily know that it's there unless you go out of your way I guess to do your own research and go onto the website and see who are the actual… Do you they have them on the website? The actual practicing people?* (Ayanda, Masters student)

Here, Ayanda discussed her difficulty in accessing support services at the university. She highlighted the importance of representation and visibility. Whilst she mentioned the Counselling and Careers Development Unit (CCDU) at the university, she also highlighted

having to seek ‘external help’ due to her perceived lack of representation and visibility at the facility.

Another participant, Azola shared her experience in the excerpt below:

> *So, in terms of getting support in terms of mental health and emotional support and all of that, that was fine, that was easy, I just had to go there. Academic support it was okay, yeah, it's okay. I haven't had anyone deny me help before. I don't know probably a look, that’s the most I’ve got but I don't notice those anymore but that’s the most in terms of support. Uhm, what other support did you say?*

For Azola, accessing mental health support services was an easy process for her, however this was not the same when accessing academic support. Whilst she described accessing academic support as *‘okay’*, she mentions receiving ‘a look’ which implies some form of disapproving or discriminatory behaviour towards her. It is unclear from the quote if Azola was receiving the responses from staff or senior students, however it is it unfair for students to have to pretend that they do not notice unfair treatment.

Azola also reported on her experience at the university clinic:

> *Ja, like I went to the clinic and it was pretty standard. They just gave me you know the forms and procedures and stuff. The only thing that's probably happened it's just someone mistaking me for being straight and I corrected them but it was fine from there. So, that’s nothing has yeah but then again, I've only been there like once so I couldn't say I was denied this, this and the third, cause I've heard stories of that happening, quite a few times so I really don't know in terms of the clinic. I haven't been there enough times to be discriminated against.* (Azola, Second year student)

Azola reported an incident where she was assumed to be heterosexual, which illustrates and perpetuates a heteronormative discourse. Although Azola reported this incident nonchalantly, one cannot deny that having to correct someone about your sexual orientation requires some form of disclosure. Furthermore, whilst Azola felt that she had not been discriminated against while at the university clinic, she is aware of other students who have less favourable experiences due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Regarding accessing support services academically, Busi described a more positive experience where she felt she received equal treatment from her lecturers:

> *Well I've never really had problems there. Uhm, I'm gonna speak mainly on academics. When consulting I've never faced any form of discrimination. I believe that the lecturers treat everyone the same, I think they trained to do so but I haven't really faced any discrimination there. On health, I can't really comment much on that cause I usually go to my private GP.* (Busi, Second year student)

Another participant, Angel reported on her experience:

> *Uhm, accessing support, I think it's easy because like everyone talks about it, there's pamphlets about it everywhere and yeah and we also get emails about it like close to exams you get emails about like if you're feeling pressure for exams this is where you go so I think the support group on campus is doing good.* (Angel, Second year)

For Angel, she felt that accessing support services at the university was an easy process as information was readily available. She also mentioned that 'everyone talks about it' indicating that many or most of the students at the university have knowledge about available support services at the university. This availability and accessibility of information indicates that the university is progressive in this regard and needs to be commended.

4.5. University Policies

There were similarities in participant responses regarding the university introducing new policies aimed to address LGBTQIA+ students. Two specific policies were discussed; namely the gender-neutral bathrooms which were adopted at the university in 2016 as well as the introduction of the prefix *Mx*, for LGBTQIA+ students who do not identify with the existing prefixes. Most of the students felt that both policies were a great initiative, however shared concerns regarding the legitimacy of the institution in introducing these policies and the loopholes in their implementation thus far.

4.5.1 Gender-neutral Bathroom Policy

In the excerpts that follow, students shared their perspectives on the university adopting gender-neutral bathrooms:

> *So like I also wasn't here in 2016 and I guess I kind of like a similar thing was happening at …*(another tertiary institution) *but for me so my partner is agender or non-binary whatever you wanna call it, so a woman not a man somewhere in between and also somewhere outside so understanding that, so I understand so obviously I can't experience it for myself but I understand how my partner feels going to a bathroom and like all the women in there are looking at them sideways like, "Why is this man or masculine inclined person in this bathroom?" So, for that reason I would, have to be like a big big big big big fan of the gender-neutral bathroom situation.*
>
> *The only problem I mean I haven't seen, okay so I'll say that I haven't seen the ones at Wits but I'm just thinking about the ones at **** (another tertiary institution) and it was like kind of like a big complaints of them being not well kept and like not as accessible. Like literally everywhere you go here you can find a woman's bathroom and a men's toilet. Where, sort of like there's 20 men's and women's toilets, you only find like three gender-neutral bathrooms. So, if you gonna commit to the gender-neutral bathroom then you need to do it properly. As in if there's are 20 cisgender toilets there needs to be 20 gender-neutral bathrooms. If you clean the other bathrooms every hour, you need to clean the gender-neutral you know. So, I appreciate the sentiment and it's good and I wouldn't want them to take them back in any way but I would want them to like fully to commit to what they're doing and to make sure that they're understanding what they're doing. By, don't say you putting gender-neutral bathrooms for the sake of putting gender-neutral bathrooms you know? Commit to it make sure that they're clean. Like, I don't know what sign they put on gender-neutral bathrooms, the woman with the skirt whatever the case may be but, commit to those small things so that nonbinary people or whoever would want to use the bathrooms like can see that this is a completely safe space for them and not have to like have anxiety every time they have to go into a bathroom and stuff like that, but above all it would be something that I definitely applaud more than anything. Actually, I'm not against it in anyway.* (Ayanda, Masters student)

Although Ayanda reported on her experience from another tertiary institution, she still shares some concerns regarding the gender-neutral bathrooms. She raised concerns about the implementation of the policy, availability, accessibility and commitment from the university in ensuring appropriate maintenance of the gender-neutral bathrooms.

In the excerpts that follow, students shared similar opinions regarding the gender-neutral bathrooms at the university:

> *Uhm I've seen I think two of them. I think there's one in, there's one in the Arts School and then one I think is it the Chamber of Mines? I don't know how but I saw one somewhere but I don't remember where. I think it was the Wits Arts Museum and I think was really cool and it was actually maybe like a month ago, but it was only last week at my ACTIVATE meeting that I found out that Wits actually implemented those bathrooms, how most of them are actually here on east campus and it was kinda like a, we had a little short discussion about how it possibly has to do with the sciences not believing kind of non-binary sexualities and identities and that might actually be something that has influenced the placements of these bathrooms. I think it's a nice thing, especially for people who don't feel comfortable going like in either of the bathrooms, but there's actually something I did find out that actually one of the gender-neutral bathrooms is actually a disabled bathroom so that's uhm kind of hindering on a person's accessibility to it. So, uhm I think if you have to impose on someone else's space then that that's pretty messed up instead of just building like a separate bathroom possibly and I don't know if the university has the money but the way we are paying fees, there's gotta be something there. But uhm, I think in general I do think the gender-neutral bathrooms are needed and they ease other people's experiences and possibly transitions. So, yeah.* (Babalwa, First year student)

Babalwa raised two important points, firstly, the placement of the bathrooms and secondly, the transformation of disability bathrooms into gender-neutral bathrooms. While she supports the adoption of the gender-neutral bathrooms, Babalwa is concerned that more gender-neutral bathrooms are located at the East Campus which is the campus that is viewed by many of the participants as the more 'open and queer' side of campus. Another important point that Babalwa raised, is how one of the gender-neutral bathrooms she saw, was previously a disability bathroom. She highlights that while having the gender-neutral bathrooms is

favourable, using the disability bathrooms also results in students with disabilities having less bathrooms or hinders the accessibility for them in some way.

In the excerpt below, Azola shared her experience:

> *I've seen one, literally one and even when I saw it, I was like I smiled about it. I was very happy to see gender-neutral bathrooms but like the reaction of people around me are like, "Okay so why is this necessary?" Like it wasn't understood and I was actually talking about this with some of my friends in queer spaces and they were like, there's actually been quite a few instances where, cause the toilets themselves were for disabled people and all they did was slap on gender neutral. So, in other words there was no actual care that went into creating spaces for genderqueer people or non-binary people. It wasn't a thing in terms of that I would say the intent was nice but from what I've heard there weren't any talks about it. It wasn't acknowledged why this was done. It was just, "Oh this is disabled? okay gender neutral" Jang understand? It's just like a 'here you go' type of vibe. So, for me it doesn't really matter that much because none of those toilets are where I am. They're not on campus for me, so it's useless for me.* (Azola, Second year student)

For Azola, she reported responses of 'people' who considered gender-neutral bathrooms to be unnecessary. It is unclear if Azola was referring to staff or fellow students, however regardless of who it was, the negative response illustrates a blatant ignorance towards the needs of LGBTIQA+ students. Azola agreed with Ayanda and Babalwa about the transformation of the disability bathrooms to gender-neutral bathrooms. Azola used the phrase '*all they did was slap on gender neutral*' indicating a general feeling of disappointment.

Azola further shared some of her challenges with the bathrooms at her campus and the negative responses from other students regarding the implementation of the gender-neutral bathrooms:

> *Like Commerce, like they all of them are binary. Like they, you will rarely find it on that side. Like Commerce side and even then, when you go there people look at it like "what the f*** is this?", you understand? there's no actual respect for the toilet. It's*

just that they're like "here, you can stop complaining now there's gender-neutral toilets" you understand? So, in terms of that I was just like, okay no matter where I go, I know I'm gonna be looked at when I go into a woman's toilet, you understand? Like that problem I've just accepted and it's just gonna be there. Then I even, like I said I pitch up my voice, I pitch it up every time I see someone there so that it won't, you won't feel uncomfortable being around me which is something I should never actually ever have to do. I don't want to be in a position where it's like, now I have to prove my gender whatever you know what I mean? Or my sex actually, but like so for me it's like it didn't better my life. Unless it's implemented everywhere and there's actual programs or some informational talks on it with people that are not gender neutral are there and people that are not gender-queer are there to hear this and actually then learn, then it's useless. (Azola, Second year student)

For Azola, using both the gender-neutral bathrooms and the female bathrooms leaves her with a feeling of discomfort. She described what she felt was disrespect for the gender-neutral bathrooms. Although Azola said she has accepted that she will always have onlookers when using the female bathrooms, she still pitches up her voice to make other users comfortable. While Azola may not have accepted this, it is unfair for her to be policed on how she expresses her gender identity.

4.5.2 Mx title Policy

The second policy discussed with participants was the introduction of the title *Mx,* as a way for the university to accommodate LGBTIQA+ students who do not identify with the other prefixes i.e., Mr, Mrs, Miss, Ms etc. In the following excerpts, the students shared their views and concerns regarding the implementation and reception of the policy from the university:

Exactly, exactly so I haven't thought through my thoughts on that on if I would like to use the prefix but I think for people who need it, for people who generally identify as non-binary or gender neutral or agender or all the other names that there are for that, Err for that I think like it's a big big big big big stride and it means a lot and I think it not only universities but in Public Services like I was saying, in hospitality, in food whatever the sense it's so important to move into a place where we address people by their gender neutral pronouns and prefixes or whatever the case may be

because can you imagine the exhausting cause I mean for you and I it might be useless but if you can think about that time if someone every time someone greeting they're like, "Hi Ma'am, Hi lady, Hi sis, Hi" you know whatever the case may be and it doesn't mean anything to you but if you thought about the fact that if you genuinely identifying as gender-neutral how often that would be a case of mis-gendering so because of like that like the prefix thing is a big big big big big thing but I also hope that the uhm…I know they obviously approved it theory but I hope that in like practicality and admin and paperwork that they follow through like in a meaningful way because it's all cute. (Ayanda, Master's student)

Ayanda shared conflicting views, whilst she supports the policy and understands the need for the policy, she had concerns about practicality and implementation of the policy. Although Ayanda had not decided on the use of the prefix for herself, she evidently is aware of the need that this policy addresses and how difficult it is for students who are constantly mis-gendered. Ayanda is apprehensive about the university's level of commitment. In the excerpt below, Ayanda further elaborated on her concern regarding the implementation of the policy and emphasizes the need for support from staff members at different levels and structures at the university:

Exactly, exactly, like if I go onto the Wits website today I want to see that prefix and then when I come see you, if I'm coming to see you for admin and I show my student card or whatever it is and it says Mx, you better call me they. If you call me Ma'am once, we gonna, we gonna catch hands because like you're not following through. Which also just talks to the fact that people need to be, the people on Admin side need to be educated on that, need to be sensitised or whatever you want to call it to that because it's no good that my student card says uhm yeah student cards have that and then when I come to you to get my parking disk, you call me ma'am cause that's just gonna to make me angry. So that's what I honestly mean by full commitment from like to the policy, to the Dean, to the Vice, to the students, to the lecturers, to the guys that do parking disks, the guys that do funding, to the guys that give out course material. Everyone must understand what that means and let's not change it just for the sake of life changing it and being progressive in that way, but otherwise… (applauds) *kudos, otherwise kudos (chuckles), I guess they did a good thing.* (Ayanda, Masters student)

Azola, another student, agreed with Ayanda in the excerpt below:

> *Yeah, yeah big time yeah like even with the I don't know if this is any one of your questions coming up but like that email about changing pronouns with Mx, that was great as well. It was very cute but the next, the literal next day I was in a lecture and the lecturer joked about it. Uhm, so someone raised their hand and he said, "Sir", this is a masculine presenting girl/female woman. Then he was like, "Oh sorry sir or madam, oh do you guys know you know that there's a third gender now? It's gender neutral" and everyone laughed like it was a joke and I'm just sitting there like this is f****** crazy. Changing the, okay you changing the pronouns and now what? That's not gonna make me coming out as genderqueer any easier. People are now gonna think of it as a joke because there was no talk about it. There was no "Okay students", there was no, none of, they didn't even sit down the lecturers. Since then I haven't heard a single change in pronouns, not one, so it was useless.* (Azola, Second year student)

Azola highlighted the importance of training and educating staff members on policies aimed at promoting inclusivity in the university. Azola disclosed a disturbing classroom incident, where a lecturer ridiculed the introduction of the *Mx* prefix. The lecturer's remark illustrated blatant disrespect and disregard for the need of the *Mx* prefix. Homophobic remarks from lecturers express deep feelings of hetero-sexism or heterosexual bias and this a form of discrimination (Sithole, 2015).

4.6 The Influence of Intersectionality

In response to the influence of intersectionality, participants had similar experiences when speaking about race, but varying responses in relation to class. Some of the participants described their experiences as very layered, highlighting that influence of overlapping social markers such as their race, gender identity, sexual orientation, class and background.

In the excerpt below, Ayanda highlighted her experience of blackness in the classroom space and what that meant for her:

> *I mean like I'm saying or like I had mentioned in the classroom incident right. Before it even becomes a queer thing it's very much a black thing existing in the classroom*

*and it affects me because I don't wanna say too much because first of all, I'm scared I'm gonna be wrong, like I don't want to be wrong in that particular way, to be wrong and black like imagine the humiliation of that, but over and above even if I want to say something there are existing voices, existing white voices that are already so loud that I'm just like, "Where would I even pitch in my opinion at that point in time?" And also I remember it wasn't a lecture but it was like some sort of Friday meeting as well and my supervisor was there and a bunch of other white women, psych people and like a black guy, a coloured guy and a black girl yeah, but mostly like white women or whatever the case may be and we were talking about like ********** so the students were there was talking about like their ******* or whatever the case may be and my research project speaks to… So, the other people were presenting and they were doing ******** (title of academic article) whatever and ********* (title of academic article) and whatever that and it's like alright hoorah hoorah hoorah. Then I was like I don't think anyone is going to care about me and my black women that are going through ******* (topic of Ayanda's research) like I don't think anyone is interested in, would be interested in my thing and what I would have to say in that space. So, we all had to present like our ideas but like I explained mine in the bare minimum way.* (Ayanda, Masters student)

Here, Ayanda did not feel like she belongs in the classroom space because of her racial identity. She alluded to an implicit expectation that as a black person, she should take up less space. There is also an anticipated anxiety of being wrong, Ayanda uses the phrase, '*to be wrong and black like imagine the humiliation of that'*, suggesting deep feelings of shame and embarrassment about blackness in a predominantly white space.

Another participant, Asanda, shared the influence of intersectionality on her lived experience:

That's my problem. Uhm, so, in most places before I came to Wits, they used to treat me as a foreigner because I look like a Somalian in most places. So, the thing is that was already hard for me. Like not even thinking about the gender or sexuality, just being a mixed race was hard. So, coming to Wits, I could understand like different kinds of people because I also met, uhm I met other mixed-race people. Then, being a female, this country, eish, it's rough. Yeah being a female just I don't know it attracts this concept of torture. So, being a female is more like a liability and telling people,

> *"Okay come torture me, come rape me". So, being black and female it's not comfortable, yeah sexuality ja. I've received too many threats in my life. So, I think all of them just have a bad and good impact in different areas. Yeah, if that makes sense.* (Asanda, First year student)

For Asanda, she was already struggling with discrimination based on her perceived ethnicity. For her, her gender identity is one that attracts danger. The intersection of her racial and gender identity amplifies this risk for harm and leaves her with a fear of being tortured. Asanda's experience echoes the notion that there is a heightened risk, that black African lesbian women are faced with because of their intersecting identities (Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017). For Asanda, being black and female feels like a 'liability'.

Another participant, Busi shared her experience:

> *I feel like it puts you down there (Busi points to the ground). There's a triangle and you are just down there, like already being female decreases your value in South Africa, now being black again further decreases you, now the fact that you gay, my god at the bottom of the list you know?* (Busi, Second year student)

Busi reported on the interconnected multiple layers of oppression in her lived experience as a black lesbian woman. She described how social markers arise, tied to a level of inferiority in society, leaving her feeling worthless and as Busi described '*at the bottom of the list'*. Any analysis that excludes the intersectional experience does not fully address the way in which women are subordinated (Crenshaw, 1989). There are complexities that lesbian women are subjected to when they negotiate their identities (Prado-Castro & Graham, 2017) and Busi's quote clearly illustrates that complexity.

One of the other participants, Babalwa shared her view in the excerpt below:

> *I think the best way to start this is to say that I've never consciously I guess like included my race within my like queer identity. And that really only started happening when I actually arrived in South Africa because race is such a, like it's in the air here. So, you like always conscious of it and anything you do is related to it, so my experience here, I feel like people see me as black, as bisexual, as a woman and all of*

this it's kind of puts pressure on me to fit that box in a way. To be conscious of my blackness and to do everything with that in mind like, "Am I doing the right thing for my race, Am I like pulling us back?" So, I feel like now it's always like a conscious thing for me and I don't know if that makes any sense. Yeah, it's a very new experience for me and it's affecting everything at the moment. Just like even with my art making, people expect me to have black subjects to talk about, black issues and I don't know how to do that. Uhm yeah and then uhm yeah just like some experiences maybe not necessarily on campus but like outside. There was this one time I was getting off at the Reavaya station and this black woman started speaking this language I didn't understand and I told her that I don't understand and she kind of made this snarky remark like, "Oh, and you're black" and I'm like, "Just because I'm black it doesn't mean I understand your language". It's just really frustrating because it happens so many times. Yeah, I'm black. We might be the same race but we're not necessarily the same culture. So, there's also like that as well. (Babalwa, First year student)

Here, Babalwa felt pressured and questioned herself, as if there was an unspoken expectation to be black in a particular way. For Babalwa, coming to South Africa, a country where race was and still is a contentious issue, she felt her racial identity was at the forefront of her experience. This left her with an uncertainty on how she navigates in spaces, particularly outside university.

While participants spoke extensively about the influence of race on their lived experiences, they were also very aware of the impact of class and how that coloured their experiences with an advantage or disadvantage. In the excerpts below Babalwa described the influence of class on their lived experience:

Can I really answer this question without ignoring the other side? Cause like, because I think I live a very I guess maybe upper middle-class kind of life. I think it's made me more comfortable in kind of living freely I think maybe someone who was of a lower class than me maybe it wouldn't be possible to express themselves in such a way because I think outward appearance, the way you dress just could also make you feel secure in your identity, so if you're not able to buy the clothes that you feel represent that, it could affect the way you feel and like for me it's been pretty helpful to have that like financial stability or whatever you call it. So, I think these factors have liked

helped my experience and (following few seconds inaudible), I think so. (Babalwa, First year student)

Babalwa was aware of her privilege and felt that her class influenced her ability to live a more comfortable and free life. She highlighted how her financial stability allows for identity expression, particularly with the clothes she wears. Babalwa was mindful that other students who do not share this privilege of financial stability may not be able to feel secure in their identities.

Similarly, Ayanda echoed Babalwa's response and shares the influence of class on her experience:

> *So, for example, I'm not on campus often but if I need to be on campus, I have my car so I'm mobile in that way. I want to see someone on campus but there's someone closer to home who is seeing me for I think it's R800 if you're a regular patient and R400 if you're a student or whatever the case may be. So, she's seeing me for R400 but for someone else R400 is still a lot. So, class is never ever ever ever ever ever ever lost on me. I know that I am privileged probably in ways that like even the fact that I don't have to come to campus for Wi-Fi. I have my Wi-Fi access at home or I can go to the coffee shop that's close to home. I can drive there, travelling, if my supervisor says I need an hour I can get in my car and like drive here. Safety, being based in the northern suburbs and having a car like existing as a black queer woman, I mean you can also argue that I'm not visibly queer so that keeps me safe in a particular way but also, I live in mostly the suburbs so my body in terms of like being in a particular area is never immediately at threat. So, class privilege is there 120 percent it never goes above or it probably actually does go about for me but like I'm very like cognizant of it as that being part of my black experience.* (Ayanda, Masters student)

Here, Ayanda described her financial advantage and what this means to her, regarding accessibility to mental health services, academic resources and safety. Ayanda is aware of other LGBTIQA+ students at the university who do not share her privilege. These students are reliant on services and resources at the university as they cannot afford to provide these by themselves. Furthermore, Ayanda also emphasises the privilege of not being 'visibly queer'. As a feminine-presenting woman, Ayanda feels safer and 'is never immediately at threat'. For masculine-presenting students, it is impossible not to be visible.

Azola, another participant, discussed what she described as a 'privileged' background and what that meant for her:

> *Coming from a privileged background because people are less… they tend to be less, they look down on me way less, they don't even look down on me actually. When they hear the way that I speak and my enunciation and stuff like that and then they ask me, "Oh where do you come from?" There's an automatic ounce of respect that I get. I do get that privilege immediately versus someone who's from Soshanguve or wherever from the townships and stuff. Like I'm looked as superior to them. Yeah definitely and I think even white people are more inclined to talk to me because of the way I speak. So, you can tell that I don't come necessarily from the township you understand? So ja, in terms of class, yeah, I definitely have a one up and also the way I dress, like some of my clothes, you understand like I can definitely get that yeah. In terms, what else did you ask?* (Azola, Second year student)

For Azola, her privilege allowed for less judgement because of where she comes from. She was aware of the importance of location and how that can either be an advantage or disadvantage. Azola is also mindful that this privilege is different for student, coming from township and who may not be as fluent in English as she is.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This section presents a discussion on the findings of the study in relation to the lived experiences of black lesbian and bisexual students at a South African urban based public university. I discuss the findings in relation to the themes presented in Chapter four, such as participants' general experiences, discrimination, orientation week, inclusive spaces and services as well as policies at the university. This discussion also draws on previous research.

5.1. General Experiences at the University

The participants' general experiences at the university were varied and this was similar to findings in other studies (Munyuki & Vincent, 2017; Nel et al., 2017). Three of the participants in this study reported negative experiences upon arrival at the university. The negative experiences included intrusive behaviour from fellow students, interacting with 'ignorant people', lack of visibility of fellow queer students and feelings of isolation. These negative experiences occurred as a result of participants' perceived sexual orientation and gender identity. This finding of ignorant and intrusive behaviour from fellow students is consistent with previous research (Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017; Sithole, 2015). However, in previous research, negative behaviour towards the participants was mainly attributed to societal views on homosexuality (Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2015; Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017; Sithole, 2015). To explain this intrusive gaze, a gap in student knowledge on the topic of SOGIe was identified. This gap in knowledge appeared to fuel some of the negative attitudes and behaviours towards sexual minorities.

For one of the participants in this study, her experience of ignorant attitudes and the struggle of finding herself as a misfit in an all-female only residence, affected her mental health, which resulted in her seeking psychotherapy. This finding is corroborated by Herek and Garnets (2007) who highlight that sexual minorities are at risk for psychological problems due to the "unique, chronic stressors as a result of their disadvantaged status in society" (p. 359-360). Previous research theorizes that hostile and unaccommodating campus environments can impact LGBTIQA+ students both personally and academically (Negy & Eisenman 2005; Woodford et al., 2012). However, in this study, participants' narratives did not reveal impacts on their academic performance.

Despite the negative experiences found in this present study, positive experiences were reported which were found in previous research as well (Munyuki & Vincent, 2017; Naidu &

Mutumbara, 2017; Nel et al., 2017; Sithole, 2015). One of the participants attributed their positive experience to an external factor of having grown up with an immediate family that was accepting of her sexual orientation. For her, this acceptance and familial support resulted in an easier adjustment to university life. Although this participant was subjected to discrimination, she found that having the support from family allowed her to navigate her sexual orientation in a more manageable way. This goes to show how important it is to examine risk and resilience intersectionally and across spaces as violence against women (and protection against gender-based violence) recycles itself between the private and public spaces from home, school, college, churches, and workplaces (Nduna & Tshona, 2020).

Furthermore, positive experiences in university were attributed to perceived gender identity and sexual orientation based on participants' gender expression. A feminine or presumably feminine presentation is aligned with cisgender-heteronormative identity and provided a form of camouflage that enabled participants to bypass prejudice and gaze. This finding is consistent with previous research which emphasises that a feminine presentation permits for reduced visibility and therefore less exposure to the threat of violence or homophobia (Prado-Castro & Graham, 2017). This form of camouflage also allows for a choice about living openly or not, as opposed to masculine-presenting women whose gender expression may be viewed as misaligned to a (cis)gender-heterosexual identity and who felt that assumptions and discrimination about their gender identity and sexual orientation were made simply based on their gender expression. Similarly, previous studies (Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017; Nduna & Jewkes, 2014) revealed that irrespective of the individual's sexual orientation, gender expression and non-conformity can lend itself to direct and indirect discrimination.

Although a feminine presentation provided a form of camouflage that enabled participants to bypass prejudice and gaze, negative aspects were also found in this study. Whilst the form of camouflage provided a form of protection for other participants, it also meant that participants have to hide parts of themselves. One of the participants who described herself as more 'girly' and therefore less visible as a lesbian woman, experienced vicarious prejudice and violence from her friends. In that conversation, the participant could not, and did not express how offended and judged she felt. Similarly to participants in another study, narratives revealed that lesbian women who identified as 'fem' or were more feminine-presenting, chose to be 'straight' in spaces where they felt unsafe (Prado-Castro & Graham, 2017). Whilst their gender expression may afford them the option to integrate in heterosexual spaces, it is also a form of silencing and policing sexuality.

5.2. Discrimination at the University

Experiences of discrimination was a common theme in this study, as participants described experiencing various forms of discrimination within and around the university. Similarly to findings in previous research (Kiguwa & Langa. 2017; Sithole, 2015; Tetreault, Fette, Meidlinger & Hope, 2013), feelings of anticipated anxiety and fear of harm or danger were vividly described by participants. Participants experienced direct and indirect exposure to harassment and violence in university. In this present study, direct exposure to harassment and violence included questioning and interrogation of one's sexual orientation, verbal remarks, discrimination from lecturers and attempted sexual assault. Examples of discrimination were consistent with previous research (Cornell, Ratele & Kessi, 2016; Kiguwa & Langa; Sithole, 2015), highlighting that LGBTIQA+ students experience both subtle and severe forms of discrimination.

For the masculine-presenting participants in this present study, heightened feelings of apprehension and discomfort were expressed. Gender expression further complicated participants' feelings of safety as participants believed that their perceived sexual orientation could attract unwanted or dangerous attention for them. These feelings were linked to a concern from participants of whether they 'looked' gay. This narrative of fear associated with perceived sexual orientation concurs with findings in previous research conducted in tertiary institutions that illustrates how gender expression and non-conformity in heteronormative spaces can result in discriminatory reactions and behaviour (Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017). This narrative of gender expression and non-conformity also relates to the stereotype of lesbian or bisexual women being different or deviant to the norm and therefore lending themselves to unfair discrimination (Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017).

Visibility is amplified for masculine-presenting women and this visibility has both positive and negative effects (Prado-Castro & Graham, 2017). One of the negative effects of visibility for masculine-presenting women, is their increased vulnerability as their perceived sexual orientation and gender identity exposes them to the threat of homophobic violence and discrimination (Prado-Castro & Graham, 2017). For masculine-presenting women, the choice of bypassing prejudice is not impossible. In this study, three of the participants were aware of their gender expression and shared concerns on how their masculine presentation lends itself to intrusive behaviour from fellow students. Whilst this intrusive behaviour is offensive and

unacceptable, this is common in the lives of LGBTIQA+ students in heteronormative spaces (Abaver & Cishe, 2018).

Participants in this study alluded to the discomfort and heightened risk of discrimination they are subjected to. This heightened discrimination was foregrounded on the intersectionality of their race and sexual orientation. This fits with the stereotypical notion that one cannot be black and queer as queerness is not considered an African concept (Matthews, Clemons & Avery, 2017). For black African women who identify as lesbian or bisexual, overlapping indices of discrimination exist. This discrimination is arguably heightened in African communities as some representations of African cultural traditions and religions view homosexuality to be sinful (Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017). One of the participants described an interminable anticipated fear and anxiety of being attacked because of being a black woman who does not conform to the gender binary. Although not fully articulated by all participants in the study, their narratives illustrated how their racial identity further complicated discrimination and judgement. For them, all social markers, namely racial identity, sexual orientation as well as gender identity compounded their experience of discrimination as black lesbian and bisexual women. Participant narratives illustrated the impact of South Africa's socio-political history and the role of race in their experiences of discrimination and violence (Boonzaier & Mkhize, 2018; Pinheiro & Harvey, 2019).

Three of the participants in this study directed their fear and anticipated anxiety of discrimination and homophobia towards men. Their narratives revealed that for them, they experienced discrimination from men and as a result anticipated it more from men or male students. Similarly, a study at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, which investigated experiences of lesbian women, found that for some of the participants, most of the discrimination towards the lesbian students emanated from male students (Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017). Although not explicitly expressed, the narratives from the masculine-presenting participants alluded to a concern that they are perceived as disrupting the gender binary and therefore attacked or interrogated for that transgression.

As in previous studies conducted in tertiary institutions (Abaver & Cishe, 2018; Evans & Broido, 2002; Sithole, 2015; Tetreault et al., 2013), participants in this study explicitly described vicarious experiences of prejudice and violence. Feelings of discomfort and internalized disapproval were expressed by participants as a result of the indirect exposure to

prejudice and violence. Although some participants had not experienced direct exposure to violence and harassment, they were aware of homophobic experiences of other LGBTIQA+ students. These vicarious experiences left the participants in this study with feelings of distress and anticipated anxiety for their own safety.

Consistent with previous research (Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2014; Msibi, 2012; Sithole, 2015), the five participants in this present study reported direct or indirect exposure to verbal discrimination. This was in the form of intrusive questioning, indirect communication of disapproval and homophobic remarks. Verbal discrimination has been identified in previous research as the most common form of discrimination (Ellis, 2008). Whist verbal discrimination may be overlooked on the account that it is not physical; in this present study, it was clear that participants experienced it as emotionally damaging. Verbal discrimination can impact negatively on one's psychological well-being. In an international study, Hiller, Turner and Mitchell (2005) demonstrated that verbal abuse doubled the possibility of self-harm in same-sex attracted youth. Locally, verbal discrimination is associated with internalized homophobia, negative self-perception as well as signs and symptoms of mental health difficulties (Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2017; Msibi, 2012).

5.3. The Humanities Faculty being 'safer and more accepting'

Consistent with previous research (Holland et al., 2013; Lesch et al., 2017), two participants in this study, one studying in the Humanities Faculty and the other in the Commerce Faculty, described the Humanities Faculty as more open and accepting to LGBTIQA+ students. Findings in this present study indicated that participants found a place of belonging in the Humanities Faculty which was not present for them in other faculties. This sense of belonging in the Humanities Faculty was attributed to the faculty having more open-minded individuals which resulted in a welcoming and tolerant environment.

Feelings of discomfort and unease were expressed in relation to other faculties such as Science, Engineering and Commerce. In previous research conducted at the University of Stellenbosch, the Arts and Humanities Faculty were experienced as more accepting, due to the visibility of queer students (Lesch et al., 2017). The increased visibility of queer students in the Arts and Humanities Faculty may be due to high number of students enrolled in the faculty. Research suggests that there are more students enrolled in Arts and Social Sciences

as opposed to other faculties. For example, student data at the University of the Witwatersrand shows that in the last seven years, over 25% of the student population were enrolled at the Humanities Faculty (The Analytics and Institutional Research Unit, 2018). Furthermore, the Arts and Social Sciences Faculty allows students from other faculties to take electives which may also give students from other faculties an experience in the faculty.

Whilst the Humanities Faculty is experienced in such a positive way by the participants in this study, this also creates a potential concern about other faculties and daily experiences of LGBTIQA+ students who do not study in the Humanities Faculty. In this present study, one of the participants who is enrolled at the Commerce Faculty described other faculties as having more narrow-minded individuals which resulted in an intolerant and prejudice environment. In previous research, participants describe navigating other faculties with their 'guard up' as they fear homophobic behaviour (Lesch et al., 2017).

Although participants in this study explicitly described their positive experiences at the Humanities Faculty, it is unclear what exactly contributes to this accepting and welcoming environment. Although previous research (Lesch et al., 2017) suggest that visibility of queer students contributes to an accepting and welcoming faculty, it may be plausible to assume that subject matter used in some of the courses in the Humanities Faculty include the topic of SOGIe. Therefore, both student and staff are more familiarized with LGBTIQA+ issues.

5.4. Visibility and Representation

Another common theme expressed in the findings of this present study was the lack of visibility and representation for LGBTIQA+ students. For participants in this study, visibility and representation was explained in various ways, including visibility of black queer staff members, visibility of queer student societies as well as representation of queer symbolism in university infrastructure.

Participants highlighted the importance of representation and how it relates to feeling seen and recognized as black students, particularly at a historically white tertiary institution. Although unspoken, the need for visibility of female staff members who are black and queer seemed to stem from a deep feeling of needing to be seen and affirmed. Feelings of acceptance, belonging and recognition were expressed when discussing the need of visibility and representation. Participant narratives in this study echoed those of students in the work

by Kessi and Cornell (2016) who emphasized the scarcity of black academics at the University of Cape Town and the importance of representation. However, in this study, it was not only the scarcity of black academics that was emphasized but the scarcity of black queer staff members. One of the participants suggested a policy to be implemented to address issues of representation in faculty staff.

The concept of race has, and continues to be a contentious issue, particularly in a country like South Africa and even more so in higher education institutions (Boonzaier & Mkhize, 2018). As black students in a historically white tertiary institution, participants in this study feel unseen and unrecognized and are seeking representation. One of the participants emphasized the importance of having *'someone in front of a classroom that represents me'* indicating the significance of representation for them. The lack of black representation in academia can reinforce black students' feelings of exclusion (Kessi & Cornell, 2016). For the participants in this study, the lack of representation of staff members invalidates their feeling of belonging to the institution.

One of the participant's narratives highlighted the lack of queer visibility in university infrastructure. This is described as symbolic exclusion in other research and it speaks of the lack of names, symbols and discourses that acknowledge and mirror the existence of a diverse student body (Bonzaaier & Mkhize, 2018). One of the participants suggested images on a wall, of people or things related to the LGBTIQA+ community, as a way of supporting and upholding queer identity in the institution.

5.5. LGBTIQA+ Student Societies

Another common theme presented in this study was an invitation from LGBTIQA+ student societies. These invitations were made during orientation week, which is the first week of university dedicated to welcoming first year students as well as other new students on campus. ACTIVATE and GALA were two of the LGBTIQA+ student societies mentioned by participants. These two student societies are indicative of the university's effort in working towards creating inclusive and supportive spaces for LGBTIQA+ students. In line with other research, participants in this present study described how these student societies felt safe and allowed for free expression of their sexual orientation and gender identities (Kiguwa & Langa, 2017).

For the participants who joined LGBTIQA+ student societies, these organisations played a vital role in the students' lives which is important to acknowledge. Whilst research (Hames, 2007; Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017) suggests that there is still a lot more work to be done in tertiary institutions about creating inclusive and supportive spaces, it is important to highlight that the existing student societies are indicative of a positive effort from the university. As in other research conducted from a previously white and privileged university, these student societies were experienced as supportive, informative and providing a safe space for LGBTIQA+ students to meet and engage with one another (Lesch et al., 2017).

One of the participant's narratives indicated that no information was provided during orientation week about LGBTIQA+ student societies. It is unclear if this discrepancy was due to the faculty the student studies in or if the orientation week facilitators allocated to her group were not provided with the same information during their training. It may be possible that some of the orientation week facilitators were not comfortable with issues related to SOGIe. Regardless of the reasons, information about LGBTIQA+ student societies, support services and events should be made available to all students. This information and support could also be designed for delivery through online platforms; these are gaining momentum as a result of the new norm of remote learning and working from home that was a forced option during the Covid-19 lockdown (Nduna & Tshona, 2020).

Furthermore, in a study conducted at the University of the Witwatersrand, Nkosi and Masson (2017) highlighted that the university launched a programme aimed at supporting LGBTIQA+ students. This programme was called Wits Safe Zones. Amongst other things, the goals of this programme included creating understanding and awareness of LGBTIQA+ issues as well as providing safety for these students. In this present study, only one participant mentioned Safe Zones, however without a full understanding of the programme aims and goals. Lack of awareness about Safe Zones further illustrates the concern about the lack of visibility and of LGBTIQA+ student societies and programmes.

5.6 Residences

Both positive and negative experiences emerged from participant narratives when discussing their experiences in student residence. Feelings of exclusion and concern about safety were explicitly articulated. This was also found in other research (Cornell et al., 2017; Kiguwa &

Langa, 2017; Matthyse, 2017; Sithole, 2015). Student residences should be spaces of safety for all students regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. The isolation, exclusion and violence that LGBTIQA+ students are subjected to in student residences needs to be addressed (Kiguwa & Langa, 2017). Similar to other research, the negative experiences of the participants in this study illustrate how the university residence system subscribes to heterosexual norms and in doing so implicitly perpetuates homophobia and discrimination (Cornell et al., 2016).

Participants also shared vicarious experiences of violence and intimidation based on other LGBTIQA+ students. This was also observed in previous research (Abaver & Cishe, 2018). A study conducted at Walter Sisulu University, investigating violence, abuse and discrimination against sexual minorities, illustrated that half of their participants were aware of bullying and verbal abuse against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex individuals in the university community (Abaver & Cishe, 2018). Although indirect, participants in this present study were left with deep feelings of anticipated anxiety and fear for their own safety. As in other research, indirect violence or homophobia negatively impacts one's psychological and emotional wellbeing (Abaver & Cishe, 2018; Roberts, Austin, Corliss, 2010). Experiences of discrimination and violence, both direct and indirect, towards LGBTIQA+ students have long lasting effects which can contribute to mental health related difficulties (Abaver & Cishe, 2018).

Although more negative experiences in student residences were reported, positive residence experiences were also shared. One of the participants felt supported and included at her student residence. This finding was similar to previous research, where LGBTIQA+ students experienced a sense of belonging in university residence life (Munyuki & Vincent, 2017). A sense of belonging and acceptance is key in university residence life since a residence acts as a home away from home for all students. It is important to note that in this present study, only one participant reported a positive experience living in student residence. The lack of positive experiences in student residences further validates the need for tertiary institutions to address homophobia and discrimination towards LGBTIQA+ students living in university residences.

5.7. University Policies

Two university policies were discussed with participants. These policies included the gender-neutral bathrooms for non-conforming students as well as the introduction of the *Mx* prefix,

for transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming students who so choose. Although participants were initially pleased and supportive of these two policies, there were several concerns regarding implementation and the university showing commitment only at the level of policy. In a study conducted at the University of Western Cape, investigating LGBTIQA+ raising awareness, underscored the importance of commitment from institutional officials to influence direct policy transformation (Matthyse, 2017). Participants in this study were also very supportive of the introduction of the *Mx* prefix, however they explicitly articulated their concerns. These concerns regarded the implementation of the policy and commitment from the university. Feelings of apprehension and uncertainty were expressed by participants. One of the participants shared a disturbing classroom incident where a lecturer made a negative remark regarding the introduction of the *Mx* prefix. This incident clearly demonstrates why participants would be concerned about commitment from the university. It is not enough for the university to only introduce policies. In order to work towards inclusivity for LGBTIQA+ students, there needs to be training and education on these policies for all staff and students.

Findings of this present study regarding the gender-neutral bathrooms highlighted constraints with availability, accessibility and appropriate maintenance of these facilities. The main concern was that participants found it difficult to locate gender-neutral bathrooms. Considering how accessible other bathroom facilities are in the university, this difficulty in finding gender-neutral bathrooms was interpreted as if gender-neutral bathrooms were deliberately hidden. Whilst the university has done something applaudable with making gender-neutral bathrooms available, the placement of these bathrooms is just as important and speaks volumes. Although unspoken, for some participants in this study, the hidden placement of these facilities may be construed as university management not being fully committed to this policy.

There was a concern that there appeared to be more gender-neutral facilities located on the east campus rather than on the west campus. East Campus is where the Humanities Faculty is located and west campus is known to house mainly the Science, Commerce, Law and Engineering faculties. However, according to the University of the Witwatersrand Transformation Office, there are presently thirty four gender-neutral bathrooms at the university, of which ten are located on east campus, fifteen are located on west campus and one each at the School of Education and the Faculty of Health Sciences respectively (19 April 2020). Although there are more facilities located on west campus, one could argue that participants were pleased with the placement of these facilities in the Humanities Faculty as

they were more visible than in other faculties. This increased visibility of facilities may be linked to the close proximity of the Humanities Faculty to the official university administration office in Solomon Mahlangu House.

Another concern regarding gender-neutral bathrooms, was the observation that these facilities were created by transforming some of the bathrooms which were previously allocated for students with disabilities. This raises a concern on the infringement of rights of students with disabilities to accommodate gender non-conforming students. Whilst it is possible that the university may have decided to transform some disability bathrooms due to financial reasons or lack of space, this may be construed as the university not making provision for the needs of LGBTIQA+ students. Based on the findings on this present study, it appears there was no communication from the university to address the transformation of disability bathrooms. This lack of communication leaves LGBTIQA+ students with their own assumptions. Moreover, there were opposing reactions to the gender-neutral bathrooms from the participants' heterosexual counterparts who questioned the necessity of these bathrooms.

5.8 The Influence of Intersectionality

The narratives about the influence of intersectionality found in this present study were similar to those found in previous research (Boonzaier & Mkhize, 2018; Canham, 2017; Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017). For the participants in this study, it was clear that their experiences at university were layered as they were influenced by the interconnections between their multiple social markers, such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation and nationality. As black, female, lesbian and bisexual students, their experiences were all imbricated with multiple layers of oppression in the form of racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, and other forms of inequality.

Similar to previous research, participants in this present study highlighted racial identity as visible social marker (Canham, 2017; Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017). Although unspoken, there was a clear association of blackness to being wrong or being bad and therefore not belonging in a tertiary institution, particularly a historically whites-only institution. These findings of not belonging are reminiscent of participants in Cornell and Kessi's study (2017) who expressed feelings of insecurity and demotivation in a racialized campus experience in Cape Town. In the present study, participant narratives were indicative of internalized feelings of shame and embarrassment. One of the participants alluded to a need to take up less space in a

classroom setting as she felt there were *'existing white voices that are already loud'*. This need to take up less space demonstrates a feeling of not belonging or being out of place, which is echoed in the experiences of participants in Bonzaaier & Mkhize's study (2018) of isolation, invisibility and feeling out of place as a black body at a historically whites-only institution.

Based on the narratives in this study, participants' experiences were permeated with feelings of internalized self-doubt, incompetency and inferiority. These feelings lead the participants in this study to isolate and silence themselves. In the work of Kessi and Cornell (2016), similar feelings of inadequacy, not belonging, self-doubt and confusion were expressed by participants. In response to those feelings and dynamics, participants adopted coping strategies of silencing themselves and not fully participating in university life. Although not explicitly articulated, it was clear from the narratives in this study that the experience of being in a tertiary institution impacted how participants navigated their experience of blackness. Similarly to participants in previous research, who articulated how arriving at a university "was marked by 'feeling black' for the first time" (Kessi & Cornell, 2016, p. 3).

Furthermore, narratives in this study illustrated how the intersection of race, gender and sexual orientation was linked to the concern of a heightened risk to violence or harm. Held (2015) demonstrated that comfort and safety are not simply feelings, but they are 'emotional states that are classed, racialized, gendered and sexualized' (p.40). Similarly, black women participants in this study described an inherent anticipated fear of discrimination and harm based on their gender identity. For them, this anticipated fear was further heightened by their racial identity and even more so by their sexual orientation. The theory of intersectionality demonstrates that gender is inextricable from race (Crenshaw, 1991). One of the participants referred to her experience of being a woman as a 'liability'; a call to be raped or tortured. This experience of 'liability' demonstrates the terror that is entwined into the experience of being a black woman. Previous research supported this finding of black queer women's expression of feelings of heightened risk regarding their safety (Canham, 2017; Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017).

The social marker of class was not lost on the participants in this present study. As in other studies (Canham, 2017), the lived experiences of participants in this study were marked by a class difference. Participants were explicitly vocal about their classed positions and how these were entangled with their sexual identities and in their experiences at university. A

participant who self-identified as living an ‘upper middle-class kind of life’ articulated the interconnectedness of class and identity expression. Her class position provided accessibility to anything she needed to express her identity. This was described to be in the form of clothing used to express her identity in the way she felt the most comfortable. The upper-middle and middle-class participants in this present study described a privilege of choice. A choice in the clothing they wore, a choice to seek support services externally and a choice of access to academic resources outside of university. This is not the case for the working-class participants who rely on support and resources from the university. Moreover, class was also linked to schooling and language. A ‘privileged background’ was related to a better schooling experience and a sense of mastery of the English language. For one of the participants in this study, her white peers perceived her mastery of the English language as an indicator of her background and class position. Feelings of superiority and respect were expressed.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This study sought to investigate the lived experiences of black lesbian and bisexual female students at a South African urban based public university. It was found that the experiences of black lesbian and bisexual female students in this study echoed those found in previous studies. In this study experiences of students found were generally homophobic and included intrusive behaviour from fellow students, lack of services for the queer community, lack of visible lecturer advocacy and, or support. Further to these, discrimination towards the students and as well as a heightened fear of discrimination from the masculine-presenting students were reported. Furthermore, it was found that the Humanities Faculty was experienced as more open and accepting of LGBTIQA+ students. More negative experiences than positive experiences were revealed regarding student residences. Findings in this present study demonstrated the prevalence of homophobia and violence in student residences.

Despite the negative experiences at the university, positive experiences were also reported. Two student societies aimed at creating inclusive and supportive spaces for LGBTIQA+ students were noted, namely ACTIVATE and GALA. These student societies were generally described in this present study as safe spaces that allowed for free expression of sexual orientation and gender identity. Moreover, two university policies were discussed, namely the *Mx* title and the introduction of gender-neutral bathrooms. Whilst students in this study supported both policies, concerns regarding implementation and commitment from university management were raised. Lastly, it was found that intersectionality influenced the experiences of students in this present study.

In relation to discrimination, it was found that students experienced both direct and indirect discrimination at the university. Direct forms of discrimination included intrusive questioning, verbal remarks from peers and lecturers, as well as an attempted sexual assault. The masculine-presenting students described a heightened fear of discrimination based on visibility of their perceived sexual orientation. This study revealed that in relation to gender expression, a more feminine presentation provided a form of camouflage that enabled students to bypass prejudice and gaze. Feelings of anticipated anxiety and fear of harassment and violence were explicitly described. More importantly, discrimination and violence towards LGBTIQA+ students was attributed to both obnoxious behaviour as well as a gap in knowledge on the topic of SOGIe. Furthermore, it was found that the intersectionality of race

and sexual orientation influenced students' feelings of safety. Black racial identity of both the aggressor and the target was seen to further complicate discrimination and homophobia.

In this present study, the Humanities Faculty was experienced as safer and more accepting of LGBTIQA+ students. Based on the narratives in this present study, it was unclear what specifically in the faculty contributed to these perceptions of an accepting environment, however previous research suggests visibility of queer students in Humanities and Arts (Lesch et al., 2017). It may be plausible to argue that the 'open and accepting' environment of the Humanities Faculty may also be attributed to the idea that some of the courses in the Humanities Faculty include the topic of SOGIe. Therefore, staff and students in the faculty are more familiar with LGBTIQA+ issues.

The study found that students felt that there was a lack of visibility and representation for LGBTIQA+ students. Visibility and representation were important to students as it was associated to feeling seen and recognized by and within the university. As black queer students at a historically white tertiary institution, the need for visibility and representation in staff members and symbolism in university infrastructure stemmed from a feeling of needing affirmation and recognition at the university. The lack of visibility and representation of both queer staff and symbolism was construed by students in this present study as a form of exclusion and denial of the existence of black queer bodies.

Furthermore, a common theme throughout the narratives of participants in this study was LGBTIQA+ student societies. ACTIVATE and GALA were the two main student societies that emerged in this study. These student societies were experienced as inclusive, safe and supportive as they felt safe for participants to express themselves and as well as engage with one another. These student societies also played a vital role in educating and supporting LGBTIQA+ students. There was one LGBTIQA+ student programme that majority of the students in this present study were unaware of called Safe Zones. This lack of awareness about other spaces and programs illustrates the concern for lack of LGBTIQA+ student societies or awareness thereof.

Moreover, more negative experiences in student residences emerged in this study. It was found that students were subjected to subtle and severe forms of homophobia and violence in student residences. These included discrimination, vicarious experiences of violence and intimidation of others as well as an attempted sexual assault. Feelings of exclusion, fear and

discomfort were expressed in relation to living in student residences. Findings of experiences in residences were in line with previous research (Cornell et al., 2016), illustrating how the university residence system subscribes to cisgender and heterosexual norms and in doing so, implicitly perpetuates homophobia and discrimination.

The reactions to the policies aimed at addressing the needs of LGBTIQA+ students were initially positive. The two policies discussed, included the gender-neutral bathrooms for non-confirming students as well as the introduction of the *Mx* title, for transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming students. Students in this study were initially pleased about these policies, however, later they raised concerns regarding implementation and commitment from university management. Although students supported the *Mx* prefix policy, students in this study were sceptical about whether commitment from the university would only be at the level of policy. Furthermore, concerns related to the gender-neutral bathrooms were related to availability, accessibility and appropriate maintenance of these facilities. It was found that gender-neutral bathrooms were difficult to locate throughout the university campus, which students construed as the university deliberately hiding these facilities. Students in this study also observed that some of the gender-neutral bathrooms were transformed from bathrooms which were previously allocated for students with disabilities. This further raised a concern on infringement on the rights of others in order to accommodate gender non-confirming students.

From the narratives in this study, it was clear that students' experiences at the university were influenced by the interconnections between their multiple social markers, such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation and nationality. This study revealed internalized feelings of shame and embarrassment associated with the students' black African racial identity which led to a need to take up less space. A strong feeling of being out of place was expressed. The narratives in this study also illustrated how the intersection of race, gender and sexual orientation were linked to the concern of a heightened risk to violence or harm. The social marker of class also emerged in the study. A higher-class position was linked to identity expression. Students in this present study were explicitly vocal about their classed positions and how these were entangled with their sexual identities and their experiences at university.

6.1 Limitations and Recommendations

Although the university where the study was conducted has existing policies aimed at creating inclusivity and supporting LGBTIQA+ students, participant experiences suggest that more work needs to be done to make sure campus spaces are experienced as LGBTQIA+ friendly. It is important to acknowledge the existing LGBTQIA+ student organizations and the vital role that they play in the lives of LGBTQIA+ students. The university should be commended in being progressive in creating inclusive and supportive spaces for LGBTIQA+ students. However, the university should prioritize on implementing safety measures for LGBTIQA+ students, particularly in student residences. It may also be beneficial for the existing LGBTQIA+ student organizations to have safety initiatives such as self-defence classes for LGBTQIA+ students as a way of empowering these students. There needs to be more visibility of LGBTIQA+ staff members and academics which may speak to a need for diversity in all structures. More research and activism on sexual minorities access to healthcare services is also needed.

Furthermore, a volunteer sample was used for this study and this raises a concern for the possibility of self-selection bias. It is possible that the participants who selected themselves had specific perspectives and viewpoints on the research and this may have shaped the narrative in a particular way. The study initially set out to investigate experiences of students who self-identified as lesbian or bisexual, however two of the participants identified as queer but still understood the aim of this current study. The researcher is aware that the findings may have been different had all participants identified as lesbian and bisexual. Future studies could be conducted with a larger sample, in more than one setting and include different sampling techniques. The findings of this present study should be interpreted with all these limitations in mind.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Participant Information Sheet

Psychology: School of Human & Community Development

University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag 3, Wits, 2050
Tell: 011 717 4503

Good Day

My name is Naledi Raba, a Masters student in Clinical Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. As part of my studies I have to undertake a research project, and I am investigating the experiences of black Lesbian and Bisexual (LB) female students. The aim of this research project is to explore the experiences of LB female students at a South African urban based tertiary institution.

I would like to invite you to take part in an individual interview. The interview will take place with myself and will take approximately 1- 1.5 hours to complete. I would also like to record the interview using a digital device. All audio files will be stored in a password protected computer. The researcher will submit anonymized data to the supervisor. Audio files will be destroyed after 12 months when research report has been examined.

Please note that there are no direct benefits or penalties from participating in this study, and there are no disadvantages or penalties for not participating. Your participation is voluntary and you have a right to withdraw at any time or not answer any questions if you do not want to. The interview will be completely confidential and anonymous as no identifying information will be required. In the case of you giving your name, in representing your participation, I will be using a pseudonym (false name) in my final research report. No other identifiable information will be required from you. Your name will be anonymized before transcribed data is submitted to my supervisor. To ensure confidentiality, my supervisor and I will be the only people who have access to the data. Collected data will be securely stored in a locked cupboard and my computer will be password protected.

The research report will be available online as all WITS Masters are stored at the Main Library and are also made available online. The anonymised results may also possibly be reported in conference presentations, journal articles, book chapters, social media and radio.

If you experience any distress or discomfort, we will stop the interview or resume another time. If you need some support or free counselling services following the interview, you can contact the OUT Well-being Community on 012 430 327 or the CCDU Unit on campus on 011 717 9140/32. Alternatively, you can also contact the following numbers for support:

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Programme - 011 717 1456/1462
Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (GALA) - 011 717 4239
OUT Wellbeing Community - 066 190 5812
South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) - 0800 12 13 14

Lifeline - 011 728 1331

Feel free to contact me or my supervisor on the details listed below if you have any questions afterwards about the research.

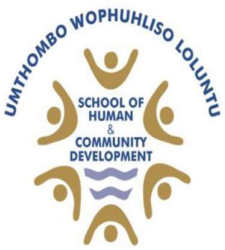
Yours sincerely,

Naledi Bianca Raba, rabanaledi@gmail.com , 073 603 6104

Supervisor details: Dr Mzikazi Nduna, mzikazi.nduna@witc.ac.za , 011 717 4168

Course Coordinator details: Dr Esther Price, esther.price@wits.ac.za, 011 717 4517

Appendix 2: Participant Consent Form



Psychology: School of Human & Community Development

University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag 3, Wits, 2050
Tell: 011 717 4503

Title of project: The experiences of black Lesbian and Bisexual female students at a South African urban university

Name of researcher: Naledi Raba

I ……. (name of participant) agree to participate in this research project exploring the experiences of black Lesbian and Bisexual female students at a South African urban based tertiary institution. The aims of the research have been thoroughly explained to me and I am certain what participating involves. I understand the following:

- I agree that my participation will remain anonymous and confidential.
- I agree my participation is voluntary and I can withdraw at any time.
- I agree that I may refrain from answering any questions.
- I agree that there are no benefits or penalties associated with this study.
- I agree that the interview may be audio recorded and am aware that audio recordings will be kept in a password protected computer and destroyed after 1 year when the research report has been examined.
- I agree that the researcher may use anonymous direct quotes in her research report.
- I agree that my anonymized data may be used for subsequent research projects.
- I am aware that only the researcher and the supervisor will have access to the data.
- I am aware that the results of the study will be submitted as a research report for the partial completion of the degree, Masters in Clinical Psychology.

Consent for interviewing:

…… (participant signature) …… (date)

Consent for recording:

…… (participant signature) …… (date)

Appendix 3: Interview Schedule

The aim of this research is to investigate and understand the experiences of black Lesbian, and Bisexual (LB) female students at a South African Urban University.

Introduction to the interview

Introduce yourself

Thank participants for their time,

Explain the research aims and all the ethical considerations.

The researcher will use the following questions to guide the semi structured interview:

Section 1: Experiences of Lesbian and Bisexual students

1. Perhaps we can start by telling me who you are (change real to pseudo name during transcription) and anything else that you would like to share about yourself to help me understand you and your experiences (now) at WITS.
    a. Probing question/s: Does your family know that you prefer to date other girls/women [or both men and women]? Who knows and why these person(s) and not others?
    b. Do your friends know that you prefer to date other girls/women?? Who knows and why these person(s) and not others?
    c. Are they supportive of your preference for dating other girls/women [or both men and women]?
    d. If not, and in addition to these people, who else knows and why?
    e. Where would you say you draw a lot of support? Where or from whom would you say you draw some support?

IF RACE NOT MENTIONED AT THIS STAGE: MOVE ON TO EXPLORE: IF MENTIONED ALREADY-PROBE

2. For how long have you been at WITS? And how has it been for you?

    a. Tell me about living as a black lesbian or bisexual student at the University of the Witwatersrand.
    b. Probing question/s: Are you living openly? Why/Why not?
3. Tell me about living openly as a black lesbian or female bisexual student at the University of the Witwatersrand. (*skip this question if the participant said they are not living openly in the question above*.)
4. Tell me about your experience of being a black lesbian or female bisexual student in the campus context at the University of the Witwatersrand?
    a. Is it easy or difficult? Tell me more about that.

IF NOT MENTIONED AT THIS STAGE: MOVE ON TO EXPLORE SPACES: IF ALREADY MENTIONED -PROBE

Section 2: Inclusive/Exclusive spaces within the tertiary institution

1. Tell me a little about your experience in accessing and navigating the different spaces within the University of the Witwatersrand as a black lesbian or female bisexual student.
    a. Probing question/s: Are there spaces where you feel you belong and are welcomed? Are there spaces where you feel you don't belong and aren't welcomed? Tell me more about these spaces.
2. Tell me about your experiences as a lesbian or female bisexual student in the classrooms at the University of the Witwatersrand.
3. Tell me about your experiences as a lesbian or bisexual student in the residences at the University of the Witwatersrand.
4. Tell me about your experiences as a lesbian or female bisexual student in accessing and using support services (e.g. health services, counselling services, academic support etc.) at the University of the Witwatersrand.
    a. Probing question/s: Which support services were easiest to access? Why do you think this is?
5. WITS adopted the gender-neutral bathrooms policy in 2016; are you aware of this? Have you seen these around; what does this mean for you and your friends?

Section C: Intersectionality of race and gender

1. How do you think your race and gender impact your experience as a black lesbian or female bisexual student at the University of the Witwatersrand?
2. Tell me about other categories of your identity (i.e. religion, social class, disability or any other category) that you think impact your experience as a black lesbian or female bisexual student at the University of the Witwatersrand.
    a. Probing question/s: Do these categories impact your experience positively or negatively? Please tell me more about this.

Section D: General Questions

1. I would like to know about student membership/association/affiliation to any societies that exists on campus: mention and say something about these
2. Do you have any recommendations on how the University of the Witwatersrand could improve your experience as a black lesbian or female bisexual students?

Thank you for your time. Do you have any questions that you would like to ask me or anything else that you would like to add?

Appendix 4: Non-Medical Ethical Clearance Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (SCHOOL OF HUMAN & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: MCLIN/18/010 IH**
PROJECT TITLE:	The experiences of black lesbian and bisexual female students at a South African urban university
INVESTIGATORS	Raba Naledi
DEPARTMENT	Psychology
DATE CONSIDERED	29 May 2018
DECISION OF COMMITTEE*	Approved

This ethical clearance is valid for 2 years and may be renewed upon application

DATE: 29 May 2018

CHAIRPERSON
(Dr Esther Price)

cc Supervisor:

Prof. Mzikazi Nduna
Psychology

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR (S)

To be completed in duplicate and **one copy** returned to the Secretary, Room 100015, 10th floor, Senate House, University.

I/we fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure, as approved, I/we undertake to submit a revised protocol to the Committee.

This ethical clearance will expire on 31 December 2020

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES