

# **Social and educational experiences of secondary school lesbian youth**

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**2014**

**Social and educational experiences of  
secondary school lesbian youth**

by

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

**MAGISTER EDUCATIONIS**

(Educational Psychology)

Department of Educational Psychology  
Faculty of Education  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

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**NOVEMBER 2014**

## *Dedication*

*I dedicate this research:*

*To my father*

*Mr Eugene Henry Du Pont, whose memorable hard work and  
dedication motivated me throughout my studies.*

*To my mother, Valerie Lillian Du Pont,  
and my brothers and sisters.*

*Most importantly to my husband Julien Brikkel  
and my precious children, Devon and Kaylin -  
thank you for always supporting me and for your incredible  
understanding, patience and unconditional love.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere appreciation goes to the following people for their support, guidance and contributions during my research journey:

- ❖ My heavenly Father, for wisdom, guidance of the Holy Spirit and for giving me strength and courage to complete this special journey.
- ❖ Prof. Carien Lubbe-De Beer, for her positive attitude throughout my research endeavours and for believing in my abilities as a researcher.
- ❖ Dr. William Louw, for his support, patience and assistance.
- ❖ My treasured friends, family and classmates, for their love, support and encouragement.
- ❖ Participants of my study and management and staff of the schools included in my study for their willingness to participate in the study and for their honesty in sharing their personal experiences.
- ❖ Mrs. Adrie Van Dyk, for her exceptional technical editing.

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## SUMMARY

The study contributes to existing, but limited research on the social and academic experiences of lesbian learners in South African secondary schools. A lesbian refers to a woman who is sexually attracted to the same gender as herself. The purpose of this study was to obtain an in-depth understanding of the positive and negative experiences of lesbian youth in South African secondary schools.

A qualitative research approach guided by the interpretivist paradigm was followed, as the focus was on the meaning that the individual participants awarded to their experiences and their world. A case study research design was used as it is regarded as a process of in-depth inquiry that generates detailed descriptions of a single unit or bounded system.

The findings of this study are in line with existing literature on the experiences of lesbian learners in secondary schools. As in the literature this study indicated that the lesbian learners included in this study are subjected to negative social and academic experiences such as; homophobic verbal, sexual and emotional harassment and abuse, as well as school disengagement. Their positive experiences included a decrease in homophobic harassment and abuse, an increased sense of self worth and confidence, increased visibility, academic achievement and resilience and lower levels of absenteeism, truancy and school dropouts.

It was interesting to note that most of the heterosexual learners' and teachers' at the schools included in this study's attitude towards the lesbian learners have changed for the better. Most of the heterosexual learners and teachers seemed to be supportive and accommodative of the lesbian learners even though they still found it difficult to accept their lesbian sexual orientation. Based on the outcome of this study, it is recommended that the learners and teachers at the schools included in this study, be sensitised and capacitated with regard to homosexuality, bisexuality and trans-sexuality.

### **Key concepts**

Sexuality

Adolescent/Youth

Secondary school

Sexual orientation

Experience

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## OPSOMMING

Die studie dra by tot die bestaande maar beperkte navorsing oor die sosiale en akademiese ervaring van lesbiese leerders in Suid-Afrikaanse sekondêre skole. Die term lesbiër word gebruik om te verwys na 'n vrou wat seksueel aangetrokke is tot dieselfde geslag as sy self. Die doel van hierdie studie was om 'n in-diepte begrip van die positiewe en negatiewe ervarings van lesbiese jeug in Suid-Afrikaanse sekondêre skole te verkry.

'n Kwalitatiewe navorsingsbenadering gelei deur 'n interpretivistiese paradigma was gevolg omdat die fokus van die studie gerig was op die betekenis wat die individuele deelnemers aan hul ervarings en hul wêreld toegeken het. 'n Gevallestudie navorsingsontwerp is gebruik omdat dit aan die navorser die geleentheid gebied het om die gevalle in diepte te ondersoek sodat gedetailleerde beskrywings van elke eenheid verwek kon word.

Die bevindinge van hierdie studie was in ooreenstemming met bestaande literatuur oor die ondervindinge van lesbiese leerders in sekondêre skole. Dit het daarop gedui dat die lesbiese leerders wat in hierdie studie ingesluit was, onderworpe is aan negatiewe sosiale en akademiese ervarings soos homofobiese verbale, seksuele en emosionele teistering en mishandeling sowel as skool ontkoppeling. Hul positiewe ervarings sluit 'n afname in homofobiese teistering en mishandeling, 'n verhoogde gevoel van eiewaarde en selfvertroue, verhoogde sigbaarheid, akademiese prestasie en veerkragtigheid en verlaagde vlakke van afwesigheid, stokkiesdraaiery en onvoltooide skoolloopbane in.

Dit was interessant om sien dat die meeste van die heteroseksuele leerders en onderwysers verbonde aan die skole ingesluit in hierdie studie se houding teenoor die lesbiese leerders ten goede verander het. Dit wou voorkom asof die meeste van die heteroseksuele leerders en onderwysers ondersteunend en tegemoetkomend was teenoor die lesbiese leerders; tog was dit duidelik dat hulle dit steeds moeilik vind om hierdie leerders se lesbiese seksuele oriëntasie te aanvaar. Na aanleiding van die bevinding gemaak tydens hierdie studie word daar aanbeveel dat die leerders en onderwysers verbonde aan die skole ingesluit in hierdie studie bemaatig word ten opsigte van homoseksualiteit, biseksualiteit en transseksualiteit.

### **Sleutelkonsepte**

Seksuakiteit

Seksuele oriëntasie

Adolesent

Jeugervaring

Sekondêre skool

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

In 1994, South Africa became a democratic country. The Constitution of South Africa includes democratic values for equality, human dignity, and freedom (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). It makes provision for the respect, protection and promotion of the rights of all people that live in Southern Africa. The values of equality, human dignity and freedom enshrined in the South African Constitution are transferred to the South African education system through the South African Schools Act of 1996 which reiterates that no learner should be discriminated against in terms of their sexual orientation. Research (Human Rights Watch, 2001; Butler, Alpaslan, Strümpher & Astbury, 2003, Msibi, 2012) however, indicates that discrimination based on the grounds of sexual orientation still exists in South African schools. Discrimination and victimization takes on the form of rejection, isolation, verbal abuse, humiliation, physical and sexual abuse and are considered as the most significant social challenges faced by lesbian learners in South African schools.

As an educator (1985-2008) I witnessed the harsh and cruel experiences lesbians had to endure at school. The lesbian learners seemed to be undermined and shunned by their heterosexual peers hence they formed their own friendship circles which provided them with a safe space and a sense of support. I observed some of them trying to participate in group discussions in class in an attempt to be heard and accepted by their heterosexual peers. Their attempts were however ignored, ridiculed or rejected by most of their heterosexual classmates, mostly because being lesbian was considered unnatural and non-Christian like. Most of the lesbian girls remained suppressed within their own groups' isolated from their heterosexual peers while others made themselves seen and heard by dressing and acting like boys. In my opinion, this dress code and behaviour compounded to their problems as it made them more visible causing an increase in homophobic discrimination against them.

I also witnessed the hurt lesbian girls experienced when losing friends after disclosing their sexual orientation. According to Hershberger and D'Augelli (1995 in Williams, Connolly, Pepler & Graig, 2004) a third of their lesbian and gay participants were fearful of losing a friend if they disclose their sexual orientation. The results of their research study revealed that their fear was not unfounded as half of the participants did lose friends after disclosing their sexual orientation. According to Williams, Connolly, Pepler and Graig (2004) social isolation



and not having supportive friends are some of the most challenging problems that lesbian youth have to deal with.

As an inclusion facilitator and counselor in service of the Department of Education (2010-2014) I had the privilege of supporting a lesbian and a gay learner who experienced emotional and behavioural difficulties caused by physical and verbal abuse inflicted on them by their peers. Studies conducted by Thurlow (2001) indicated that 93% of his participants which included lesbian, gay and bisexual youth were exposed to homophobic verbal abuse in school; name calling was at the top of the list. Thurlow (2001) states that homophobic verbal abuse is a major psychological stressor in the lives of young lesbian individuals for it compares to hate speech and is as harmful as any other.

Research (Besen, 2008) indicates that physical violence in the form of “Corrective Rape” is increasing at an alarming rate in Western Cape schools. According to Besen (2008) certain heterosexual males experience a lesbian same-sex sexual preference as unacceptable and a threat to their manhood. In order to punish lesbians for going against societal norms they are raped by men and boys from their own communities.

I, the researcher, am of opinion that lesbian learners in South African schools are experiencing homophobic discrimination and abuse because teachers and school management teams do not regard it as important enough to address. School authorities far too often ignore or conceal abusive acts committed against lesbian learners and often delay or withhold disciplinary action against the perpetrators of victimization as if it does not exist (Human Rights Watch, 2001; Besen, 2008). I am also of opinion that discriminatory acts against lesbian youth should be addressed with the urgency it deserves as research indicates that homophobic harassment and abuse leads to negative mental health as well as negative educational outcomes (Birkett, Espelage & Koenig, 2009; Espelage, Aragon & Birkett, 2008; Gruber & Fineran, 2008).

## **1.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

I selected the theories defined below as a framework to examine and contextualise the experiences of lesbian youth in South African secondary schools.

### **1.2.1 SYSTEMS THEORY**

Sterling and Davidoff (2000) indicate that schools can be regarded as open systems situated in a bigger system which includes the learners’ family, the community, society (South African government and the Department of Education’s legislation and policies on lesbianism) and the world. Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2002) describe a school as a system consisting of different smaller systems that are distinctive to the school system. They explain that these

systems and their respective elements are in continuous interaction; hence they continuously influence one another.

In this research study elements typically found in the secondary school system were explored in order to determine its contribution to the social and academic experiences and the mental health of South African lesbian youth. These elements include the behaviour and attitude of heterosexual teachers, learners, administrative staff and parents towards lesbian learners, the curriculum, school climate, religion and institutional policies. Individual character traits and coping strategies of the lesbian participants were explored to determine its influence on the school and its elements.

### **1.2.2 LESBIAN AND GAY PSYCHOLOGY**

Until the mid-1970's psychological research on lesbians and gays presented their sexuality as a type of psychopathology. Lesbians and gays were seen as products of a disturbed upbringing (Rosario, 1997, in Kitzinger, Coyle, Wilkinson & Milton, 1998). Since the mid-70's an important shift from the notion that homosexuality is a pathology to the notion that homosexuality is a division in the normal human spectrum of sexual behaviour occurred. In 1973, "Homosexuality" was removed from The American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. In 1975, policy indicating that mental health professionals are no longer allowed to regard or treat homosexuality as a mental illness was approved by the American Psychiatric Association (APA). Mental health professionals were urged to work towards eradicating the stigma of mental illness that was linked to homosexuality. In the 1980's the term "gay affirmative psychology" as used in the 1970's were replaced by the term "lesbian and gay psychology. The change in terminology occurred to indicate that this research area dedicated itself to the investigation of the lives of lesbians and gay men (Clarke, Ellis, Peel & Riggs, 2010). In 1984, the American Psychology Association (APA) approved the formation of division 44, a branch of psychology that was dedicated to the psychological study of lesbian and gay issues (Kitzinger et al., 1998). More recently terms such as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) have been used to signal the inclusion of issues concerning bisexual, transgender and questioning individuals in the field of lesbian and gay psychology (Clarke et al., 2010).

Clarke et al. (2010, p. 3) state that LGBTQ psychology is a microcosm of psychology that embraces multiple perspectives on who and what is researched as well as the theories and methodologies used to conduct research. They define LGBT psychology as a branch of psychology that is 1) affirmative of LGBTQ people and 2) concerned with the lives and experiences of LGBTQ people.

Coyle and Kitzinger, (2002) and Clarke et al. (2010) indicate that the main objective of lesbian and gay psychologists is to contest the prejudice and discrimination towards LGBTQ people. It is aimed at 1) eradicating heteronormativity in psychology and society; 2) promoting the psychological legitimacy of LGBTQ concerns and 3) advancing non-heterosexist, non-genderist and inclusive approaches to psychological research and practice (Clarke et al., 2010).

According to Kitzinger (1999) lesbian and gay psychology is rooted in positivist, individualist and essentialist approaches. It seeks to argue against heterosexist oppression by using positivist, individualist and essentialist ideas.

Kitzinger (1999) indicates that gay and lesbian psychology portrays itself as a story from the bad old days when homosexuals were considered as mentally unstable to the current perception of homosexuality as being within the normal range of human behaviour. Lesbian and gay psychology depicts lesbians and gay men as just as normal, just as healthy and just as valuable to society as heterosexual people. Kitzinger (1999) states that the greater part of contemporary psychological research on lesbian and gay issues use a positivistic epistemology – mostly in the form of quantitative or experimental studies.

Kitzinger (1999) explains that lesbian and gay psychology is firmly committed to an individualistic perspective as they regard social oppression as the cause of individual suffering. According to lesbian and gay psychology it is individuals who turn up in therapist consulting rooms or in wards of mental hospitals or in hospital emergency rooms; suffering from acutely painful personal problems associated with the social conditions of oppression.

Kitzinger (1999) explains that lesbian and gay psychology draws on the essentialist theory by assuming that sexual orientation is an innate state or “essence” which the individual either represses, discovers, denies or acknowledges. It is only a small amount of work within the field of lesbian and gay psychology that disputes this point of view by focusing on how lesbian and gay identities are constructed and negotiated in a social context (Kitzinger, 1995 in Kitzinger. 1999).

According to Kitzinger (1999), Coyle and Kitzinger (2002) and Clarke et al. (2010) topics studied by lesbian and gay psychologist include the establishment of gay, lesbian and bisexual identities, building healthy same sex relationships, anti-homosexual discrimination, coming out and identity development, lesbian and gay parenting, lifespan developmental issues, ethnic and cultural diversity among lesbians, flexibility and flux in sexual behaviours and mental and physical health issues.

In the broader spectrum of topics studied under lesbian and gay psychology this research study fits well under the umbrella of homophobia and anti-lesbian or anti-gay discrimination. This study focused on gaining an understanding of the discrimination endured and the support and acceptance received by lesbian learners in South African secondary schools. In addition the influence that homophobic bullying and support and acceptance respectively have on the mental health of LGBT learners were explored (Kitzinger et al., 1998). The inclusion of positivist, individualist and essentialist ideas in this study is exhibited by the notion that 1) positive change in terms of society's acceptance of homosexuality is slowly but surely happening; 2) the mental health issues experienced by the individual learner participants are individual problems caused by the participants' exposure to homophobic discrimination and rejection and 3) homosexuality can be defined as sexual orientation that is innate or acquired in early life.

Psychologists can contribute to the mental wellbeing of lesbian and gay individuals by preventing heterosexism and homophobia (Kitzinger et al., 1998). I intend to contribute to the wellbeing of LGBT youth by capacitating teachers in terms of LGBT aspects that is relevant to the school context. I, the researcher, am of opinion that increasing teachers understanding of LGBT youth will assist them in establishing positive school environments that is inclusive and safe for LGBT learners.

### **1.3 RATIONALE OF THE RESEARCH**

My desire to contribute to the development of existing gender sensitization programmes has motivated me to pursue the selected research topic. I am of opinion that programmes that can sensitize teachers and learners with regard to lesbianism will contribute to an increased sense of psychological wellbeing for lesbian learners in secondary schools. My reasoning is that an increase in the knowledge of lesbian youth and their experiences will subsequently lead to a decrease in homophobic harassment and abuse and an increase in the level of support and acceptance currently received by lesbians in South African schools.

I am also interested in determining the extent to which legislation that protects the rights, human dignity and freedom of all people living in South Africa are implemented to protect and promote the social, psychological and educational wellbeing of lesbians in South African schools. And last but not least I would like to contribute to the existing knowledge on the abovementioned area of study.

### **1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Research (Thurlow, 2001; Butler et al., 2003; Wells & Polders, 2005; Besen, 2008; McCormack, 2011, Msibi, 2012) indicates that lesbian learners in secondary schools are

experiencing physical, sexual and verbal abuse in secondary schools. Msibi (2012) and Butler (2008) found that homophobic verbal, physical and sexual abuse is used to maintain heterosexism in South African township schools.

According to Wells and Polders (2005) a research study conducted by <sup>1</sup>OUT LGBT-Wellbeing in collaboration with the Durban Lesbian and Gay Community and Health Centre revealed that 25% of the participants were physically assaulted while 19% of the participants were sexually harassed or raped during their secondary school years. The perpetrators were pupils, educators, principals and non-teaching members of the school staff.

Research (Rivers, 2000; Mikulsky, 2005; Espelage et al., 2008; McCormack, 2011) indicates that homosexual youth that have been exposed to homophobic abuse are more likely to have high levels of school disengagement and absenteeism. Seelman, Walls, Hazel and Wisneski (2012) state that a higher level of school engagement leads to higher levels of academic performance and success for LGBT youth.

## **1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVE OF THIS STUDY**

In the light of the challenges mentioned previously, this study will be directed by the following primary research question:

***What are the negative and the positive social and educational experiences that lesbian learners in South African secondary schools are exposed to?***

In order to answer the primary research question the following secondary research questions were formulated:

- What are the negative social and academic experiences of lesbian learners in South African secondary schools?
- What factors contribute to the negative social and academic experiences of lesbian learners in South African secondary schools?
- What impact does the negative social and academic experience of lesbian learners enrolled at South African secondary schools have on their mental health and psychological wellbeing?
- What are the positive social and academic experiences of lesbian learners enrolled in South African secondary schools?

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<sup>1</sup> OUT-Wellbeing is an organisation that provides direct health services to the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community including HIV testing, counselling, treatment and general lifestyle support. OUT has been in existence for 20 years and is dedicated to building healthy and empowered LGBT communities in South Africa and internationally while reducing heterosexism and homophobia in society. Retrieved from <http://www.out.org.za>

- What aspects contribute to the positive social and academic experiences of lesbian learners enrolled at South African public secondary schools?
- What can be done to support lesbian learners in South African secondary schools?

## **1.6 AIM OF THE STUDY**

Through this study the researcher aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the social and educational experiences of three South African lesbian secondary school learners enrolled in the public school system by:

- Exploring the positive and negative social and academic experiences of lesbian learners in South African secondary schools.
- Investigating the source of their negative as well as positive experiences.
- Delving into the academic and psychological consequences of their experiences.
- Formulating recommendations for effective support and inclusion of LGBT learners in ordinary secondary schools.

## **1.7 ASSUMPTIONS OF THE STUDY**

I approached this research with the following assumptions that I hope to find clarity on as I progress through the different phases of this study:

- My understanding of sexual orientation is that it is in some instances an inborn human trait that cannot be altered or changed and in others it is a deliberate choice.
- Homosexuality does not determine who you are and what you are capable of as a human being. It also does not determine your worth as a human being.
- Heterosexual prejudice stems from society's ignorance and lack of knowledge with regard to homosexuality. This prejudice is maintained by society's unwillingness to accept the things that they experience as unfamiliar and uncomfortable.
- Homosexuality will not enjoy the same acceptance as heterosexuality any time soon as society's attitude towards homosexuality is changing at a very slow pace.
- Sensitizing heterosexual educators and learners with regard to the etiology and nature of homosexuality as well as the rights of homosexual people as outlined in the South African Constitution of 1996, education policies and legislation will enhance the pace at which society's attitude towards homosexuality is changing.

## 1.8 CLARIFICATION OF KEY CONCEPTS

To ensure a clear understanding of the meaning of this study, core concepts that have been used in this study are defined below:

### 1.8.1 SEXUALITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION (INCLUSIVE OF LESBIANISM)

Friedman, Silvestre, Gold, Markovic, Savin-Williams, Huggins and Sell (2004) identified four elements used by adolescents to define sexual orientation. These elements include sexual attraction, cognitive attraction, physiological arousal and desire. According to Friedman et al. (2004) sexual attraction refers to the object of your attraction, cognitive attraction refers to the manner in which you think about the person that you are attracted to, physiological arousal refers to your physical reaction to that person you are attracted to and desire refers to your longing to be in a romantic relationship with that person, male or female.

Friedman et al. (2004, p. 309-310) state that sexual behaviour and self-identification which are elements that are frequently regarded as necessary for defining sexual orientation are not regarded as such by adolescents. Quotes from some of their participants that support their findings on the significance of sexual behaviour and self-identification as elements for defining sexual orientation include:

- *“I made a choice to sleep with no one but I still consider myself as bisexual. “*
- *“You can be female and have sex with another female and not identify yourself as a lesbian.*
- *“A friend of mine does not self-label as it can change depending on who she is dating.”*
- *“I don’t identify myself in terms of sexual identity. It is one part of my life not the whole part.”*

Johnson and O’Connor (2001, p. 154) explain that sexuality has different connotations. It may refer to an individual’s sexual orientation – whether they are gay, bisexual or straight. They state that it is also used to refer to an individual’s sexual behaviour (the specific sexual activities they engage in).

For the purpose of this study the terms sexuality and sexual orientation will be used interchangeably to refer to a man or a woman’s sexual attraction and desire to be romantically involved with a specific gender or both, causing them to be gay, lesbian, bisexual or straight.

The Oxford Dictionary defines the term lesbian as a *homosexual woman* (Oxford Dictionaries online, 2014). The Macmillan Dictionary defines the term lesbian as *woman who is sexually*

*attracted to other women* (Macmillan Dictionary Online, 2009-2014). Van den Bos (2006, p. 22) defines *adolescent homosexuality as same sex activity during the period of puberty*. He states that more or less 20% of boys and 3% of girls engage in homosexual behaviour before adolescence ends, this behaviour however does not predict an adult gay or lesbian sexual orientation.

Singh, Vidaurri, Zambarano and Dabbs (1999 in Walker, Golub, Bimbi & Parsons, 2012) indicate that lesbians can be classified as either butch, soft butch, butch/femme, femme or high femme. They state that these labels are traditionally determined by components such as mannerism, behavior and hair and clothing style. Levitt and Horne (2002); Levitt and Hiestand (2005); Rosario, Schrimshaw, Hunter and Levy-Warren (2009, in Walker et al., 2012) state that butch lesbians appear more masculine whereas femme lesbians appear more feminine. Soft butch lesbians appear masculine with some feminine qualities and butch/femme lesbians may present with the same amount of masculine and feminine characteristics. Walker, Golub, Bimbi and Parsons (2012) however warn that we need to be careful with these labels because they fail to take the large quantity, variability and complexity of the lesbian identity into account.

For the purpose of this study the term lesbian will be used to refer to females who experience same-sex sexual attractions and prefer same-sex romantic relationships.

### **1.8.2 YOUTH/ADOLESCENT**

The Free Online Dictionary defines the term adolescent as a person who has undergone puberty but who has not reached maturity. Van den Bos (2006, p. 1009) defines *youth/adolescents as young people in adolescence or slightly younger*. He describes adolescence as *a stage in human development that begins with puberty, between 10 to 12 years old, and ends with physiological maturity at approximately 19 years old*. Van den Bos (2006) explains that adolescence is characterised by major changes in terms of identity, sexual characteristics, body images, sexual interest, social roles, cognitive development and self-concept. The exact age span of adolescence varies from individual to individual.

Saunders (2003) defines adolescence as *the period between the onset of puberty and the cessation of physical growth; roughly from 11 to 19 years of age*. Saunders (2003) states that adolescence is characterized by efforts to adjust to unfamiliar body changes and the establishment of a personal and a sexual identity. Becoming comfortable with your body and accepting yourself for who you are, are important developmental tasks that need to be attained before one can move to the next stage of maturity.



For the purpose of this study I will be using the terms youth and adolescent interchangeably when referring to individuals between the beginning of puberty and the end of their physiological maturity. This decision is based on my preference to use these terms as the authors used it when I describe or comment on their point of views.

### **1.8.3 EXPERIENCE**

Corsini (2002, p. 351) defines *an experience as an event that is lived through, or undergone, as opposed to one that is imagined or thought about*. Random House Dictionary Online (2010) defines *experience as knowledge or practical wisdom gained from what one has observed, encountered or undergone*. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2006, p. 513) defines *experience as knowledge or events shared by all or particular members of society that influences the way they think and behave*. It also defines *an experience as an event that affects you in some way whether it is enjoyably, exciting, unusual, unforgettable or unpleasant*.

For the purpose of this study the term experience will be used to refer to the positive and the negative social and academic encounters of lesbian youth in secondary schools.

### **1.8.4 SECONDARY SCHOOL**

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2006, p. 1318) defines a secondary school as a school for young people between the ages of 11 and 18 years old. In the context of this study a secondary school refers to an institution that provides education from grade 8 to grade 12 (South African Schools Act, 1996).

## **1.9 EPISTEMOLOGICAL COMMITMENT AND PARADIGMATIC PERSPECTIVE**

### **1.9.1 AN INTERPRETIVIST EPISTEMOLOGY**

I based my understanding of reality and the manner in which I discovered new knowledge within a qualitative interpretive paradigm. According to the interpretivist paradigm an objective reality independent from the frame of reference of the researcher does not exist (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004). Hence the findings of this research study will be presented in terms of my understanding of the phenomenon I studied.

Working from a qualitative interpretive research paradigm made it possible for me to utilize research methodology that allowed me to 1) explore the participants' views on the phenomenon under study; 2) present the participants' understanding of reality in a non-judgmental manner; 3) accept each participant's interpretation of his/her experiences as real

and true within the time and context it appeared and 4) become an insider/player in the participants social setting during the period of investigation.

The previously mentioned was possible because as an interpretivist I believe that: 1) reality is dependent on what is perceived and created by the mind and influenced by what is observed (Henning et al., 2004); 2) reality cannot be perceived as a fixed single agreed upon interpretation because people's interpretations of what reality is changes over time and context (Merriam, 2002); 3) the researcher's interpretation of the participants' experiences is regarded as significant in what constitutes reality within the context of the study (Creswell et al., 2009); and 4) the researcher cannot be separated from what is being investigated, hence he/she becomes an insider/player in the participants' social settings during the period of investigation (Henning et al., 2004).

Qualitative interpretive research attempts to understand and represent the individual participants' (cases) perceptions of a phenomenon. Its aim is not to come up with universal laws and predictive generalisations regarding a phenomenon but to produce descriptive data that emphasise a deep, interpretive understanding of the phenomenon under study (Henning et al., 2004). In this research study I attempted to provide a voice to lesbian adolescents through which they could share their perceptions of their experiences in South African secondary schools.

### **1.9.2 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

In order to achieve the purpose of this study I relied on qualitative methods to select the research participants as well as to collect and analyse the data. During the process of selecting individuals to participate in this study I made use of purposive sampling techniques. I selected participants that could answer the research question due to certain characteristics possessed by them. I utilized semi-structured interviews as a primary qualitative data collection strategy. I also made use of document studies, observations and field notes to complement the data I obtained from the semi-structured interviews conducted.

Data analysis commenced soon after the semi-structured interviews were completed. I used qualitative data analysis techniques such as holistic analysis to create a descriptive and explanatory account of my participants' perceptions of their experiences as lesbian youth in secondary schools. I used the transcriptions of the interviews conducted with the participants, the essays written by the lesbian participants and my field notes to construct a descriptive and explanatory account of my participants' perceptions. I then moved to thematically analyse the content of the descriptions and explanations to identify significant patterns, themes and subthemes that I used to construct a framework in which I presented the essence of the data

collected (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delpont, 2005; Maree et al., 2010; Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

### **1.9.3 THE GUIDING THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THIS STUDY**

This study was guided by theory on lesbian and gay psychology as well as the systems theory. I chose to use systems theory as a theoretical framework because it allowed me to focus on gaining an understanding of the impact that the different elements of the school system has on the experiences and psychological wellbeing of lesbian learners. Within the context of this study I specifically focused on elements such as the attitudes of heterosexual learners and teachers towards the lesbian learners enrolled at the school, the school's institutional policies and procedures as well as the LGBT inclusivity of the curriculum content presented to the learners. My objective was to determine how the previously mentioned impacts on the social and academic experiences of the lesbian learners in the school and how the presence of the lesbian learners affects the elements listed above.

I also selected lesbian and gay psychology as a theoretical framework for guiding this study as it is my intention to contribute to counteracting the homophobic prejudice and discrimination that seems to exist in South African secondary schools. Working as counsellor and an inclusion facilitator at the Gauteng Department of Education has allowed me the opportunity to support gay and lesbian learners that are affected by homophobic abuse in primary as well as secondary schools. I would however like to become more involved in the development and implementation of programmes that are aimed at capacitating the teachers and learners with regard to LGBT issues that is relevant to the school context. I am of the opinion that I will contribute to the protection and promotion of the human rights of LGBT learners in school. Such programmes are currently being developed and presented by the Department of Education. Hence I hope to use the findings of this study to contribute to existing programmes used by district Tshwane South. I would also like to use the knowledge that I have gained through this research study to enhance the support that I have been providing to LGBT learners affected by homophobic prejudice.

I believe that my contribution to the prevention of homophobic prejudice in schools, however small it is, will be one step closer to establishing inclusive schools that are safe and accommodating of all learners.

### **1.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

In conducting this research study I will adhere to the research ethical guidelines as stipulated by the Ethical Committee of the Faculty of Education of the University of Pretoria

(<http://www.ais.up.ac.za/research/docs/code-ethics.pdf>.) and the Health Professions Council of South Africa (<http://www.hpcsa.co.za>).

I will specifically focus on the norms, values and ethical practices for psychotherapists and counselors. The principle of obtaining informed consent, the principle of anonymity and confidentiality and the principle of protecting the participants from harm are considered most significant. Detailed discussions on these principles follow in Chapter 3.

## **1.11 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS**

### **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE**

Chapter 1 will provide an outline of the research study which will include brief discussions on the researcher's motivation for undertaking the study, the primary and secondary objectives of the study and the selected research design and methods of participant selection, data collection and data analysis.

### **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

In Chapter 2 the literature relevant to the phenomenon under study and the experiences of lesbian youth in secondary schools will be reviewed. The theoretical framework in which this study is grounded will also be discussed in this chapter.

### **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

Chapter 3 will consist of a detailed discussion of the research design used as well as the methods employed to facilitate participant selection, data collection and data analysis in the study.

### **CHAPTER 4: THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS**

A detailed thematic discussion on the research findings and the interpretation thereof will be presented in Chapter 4.

### **CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

An integrated version of the collected data as well as the conclusions drawn and the recommendations made from the research findings will be presented in Chapter 5.

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## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

This literature review is intended to situate this research study within the broader field of research conducted in terms of the experiences of lesbian learners in secondary schools. Emphasis will be placed on the experiences of lesbian learners in South African secondary schools.

The first part of the chapter will be utilised to review literature on the negative social and academic experiences of lesbian learners in secondary schools and the second part of the chapter will be used to review literature on their positive social and academic experiences. Reference will be made to the impact these experiences have on their psychological wellbeing.

In addition the reader will be introduced to internationally practiced intervention strategies that contribute to the establishment of a school climate that supports diversity in terms of sexual orientation. Firstly I would like to review the meaning of the word lesbian and the possible causes of lesbianism.

##### 2.1.1 DEFINING LESBIANISM

Consensus with regard to defining the term “lesbian” has not been reached in the social sciences yet Darty and Potter (1984, in Eliason & Morgan, 1998) describe lesbians as *women who choose other women as their sexual and affectional partners, women whose self-concepts are independent of their relationships with men, women whose primary energies and loyalties flow toward other women*. Eliason and Morgan (1998) differentiate between politically and non-politically founded definitions of lesbianism. Lesbians whose self-definition is politically founded perceive themselves as feminist. Feminist are *people who support the belief that women should have the same rights as men* (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 2006). They are more involved in political activities such as ensuring that women have the same rights and opportunities as men (Eliason & Morgan, 1998). They regard lesbianism as a personal and political standpoint that has nothing to do with same-sex sexual attraction (Price, 2011). Lesbians who ground their self-definition in a non-political framework do so because of their same-sex sexual attraction (Eliason & Morgan, 1998).

Rothblum (2010) distinguishes between butch and femme lesbians; terms that sexual minority females use to identify and describe them. He explains that these terms are complex because some lesbians understand butch and femme to be core identities, equivalent in significance to gender, race or sexuality while others find it to be outdated and meaningless. Some lesbians regard themselves as androgynous<sup>2</sup> because they do not perceive themselves as either butch or femme.

In a study conducted by Swarr (2012) a participant who identifies as butch explained that she understands and accepts that she is a woman. She does however have a masculinity about her that generates a desire to look, act and dress like a man. She indicated that being a woman and being masculine are core components of her lesbian identity. According to Loulan (1990 in Pearcey, Docherty & Dabbs, 1995) butch lesbians have similar characteristics as heterosexual males. They are athletic, assertive, forceful, dominant, masculine, competitive and natural leaders with strong personalities. He describes femme lesbians as feminine, sympathetic, sensitive to the needs of others, compassionate, soft spoken, warm, tender, loving and gentle.

Ochse (2011) distinguishes between “primary” and “elective” lesbians. “Primary” lesbians perceive themselves as being born lesbian, while “elective” lesbians perceive their involvement in same sex relationships as a choice.

### **2.1.2 THE ETIOLOGY OF LESBIANISM**

The origin of homosexuality remains elusive. Whether it is caused by prenatal biological factors, postnatal environmental factors or a combination of the two continues to be debated in literature (Ashley, 2013). Savic, Garcia-Falgueras and Swaab (2010) and Hines (2011) are of opinion that homosexuality is mediated by a direct genetic and hormonal effect on the developing brain during pregnancy. Van den Aardweg (2011) asserts that the most acknowledged causes of homosexuality are psychosocial in nature. It includes gender non-conformity, same-sex peer isolation, an imbalance in parent-child interaction, an over influence of the opposite sex parent combined with an inadequate relationship with the same sex parent and emotional volatility (neuroticism).

Savic et al. (2010) and Le Vay (2011) specifically focus on the influence of sex hormones during the early prenatal and perinatal phases of pregnancy. Savic et al. (2010) explains that a direct action of sex hormones (testosterone) on the developing nerve cells of the brain leads to the development of a male brain while the absence thereof results in a feminine brain. Research (Langström, Rahman & Carlström, 2010; Savic, 2010; Hines, 2011; Bao & Swaab,

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<sup>2</sup> Androgynous refers to a) having the characteristics or nature of both male and female, or b) neither specifically feminine or masculine (Merriam-Webster online dictionary, 2014).

2011) indicates that sexual orientation<sup>3</sup> and gender identity<sup>4</sup> are programmed into the brain structures during the process of sexual differentiation and cannot be reversed.

Savic et al. (2010) indicates that the process of sexual differentiation of the brain and the process of genital differentiation takes place independently and at different stages of pregnancy which in some instances leads to a sexual orientation and gender identity that does not complement the physical gender of the individual.

Nordenstrom, Servin, Bohlin, Larsson and Wedell (2002, in Bao & Swaab, 2011) state that girls who were exposed to high levels of androgens (male hormones) in the womb are more likely to develop Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (CAH). CAH is a genetically-caused disorder in which the adrenal glands overproduce androgens (male hormones) early in life (Le Vay, 2011, p. 443). It alters sexual orientation in females which brings about personality features that are typically male, an interest in boys' toys and boys as playmates (Nordenstrom et al, 2002).

Research by Pattatucci and Hamer (1995) indicates that lesbianism is a long-standing sexual orientation that clusters in families. They state that the occurrence of lesbian orientation among sisters, daughters, nieces and cousins through a paternal uncle were elevated in the families included in their studies. In spite of existing evidence of familial clustering of lesbianism the cause of it remains hard to pin down. Different explanatory models which include genetic and environmental models have their own account for the elevated rates of lesbianism in certain families.

Le Vay (2011) explains that sexual orientation is not a segregated trait. It consists of a structured group of gender related traits and actions which includes personality traits, interests, cognitive abilities and physical traits. These traits and actions are shifted in a feminine direction in the case of gay men and in a masculine direction in the case of lesbians. He explains that these traits and behaviours are visible since childhood and is linked to adult sexual orientation.

Research (Rieger, Linsenmeier, Gygax & Bailey, 2008; Le Vay, 2011; Steensma, Van der Ende, Verhulst & Cohen Kettenis, 2013) state that adults who identify as homosexual reported more gender non-conforming behaviour as children than heterosexual individuals. They indicated that their gender non-conforming behaviour emerged in early childhood and persisted in spite of rejection and non-tolerance from their gender conforming peers and

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<sup>3</sup> Sexual orientation refers to a person's potential for responding with sexual arousal to persons of the opposite sex-i.e., heterosexual, same sex-i.e. homosexual, or both i.e., bisexual ( McGraw-Hill online dictionary, 2002)

<sup>4</sup> Gender identity refers to an individual's conviction of belonging to the male or female gender (Savic et al., 2010, p.41).

parents. This suggests that gender non-conformity in pre-homosexual children is not caused by social influences but by an inborn predisposition.

Gottschalk (2003) asserts that childhood gender non-conforming behaviour cannot be regarded as an inborn predisposition in all instances. Gottschalk (2003) states that gender non-conforming behaviour may occur because of various reasons such as the rejection of rigid gender roles and the restrictions attached to female gender roles. Girls may choose to act in a gender non-conforming manner because they desire to experience the freedom and excitement that boys experience. Gottschalk (2003) is of opinion that childhood gender non-conforming behaviour as well as lesbianism later in life can be conscious choices influenced by social and political resistance.

Roberts, Glymour and Koenen (2013) explain that childhood sexual abuse can also be associated with the development of a minority sexual orientation in adulthood. They propose three pathways through which this can happen: 1) boys that were sexually abused by men may grow up believing that they are gay; 2) girls that have been perpetrated by men may become opposed to entering into sexual relationships with men; and 3) survivors of sexual abuse may act in ways that are stigmatized by society as they may feel stigmatized themselves. Research by Wilson and Widom (2010) however revealed no connection between childhood physical abuse or neglect and adult same-sex sexual orientation.

Ashley (2013) asserts that even though studies on the causation of homosexuality are inconclusive, evidence exist that biological factors do play a role in the development of homosexuality. According to Långström, Carlström and Lichtenstein (2008) indicated that sexual preference is not only caused by heritable factors but also by individual specific environmental causes. Rahman (2005 in Långström et al., 2008, p. 79) suggests that such individual specific environmental factors may include prenatal exposure to sex hormones, progressive maternal immunization to sex-specific proteins, or neurodevelopmental instability.

## **2.2 THE NEGATIVE SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES OF LESBIAN LEARNERS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL**

Research (Coyle & Kritzinger, 2002; Athanases & Larrabee, 2003; Kosciw, Greytak & Diaz, 2009; Pendragon, 2010) reveals that lesbian learners experience verbal, physical, sexual and emotional abuse in secondary school. The most prominent forms of abuse experienced by lesbian learners in secondary schools are verbal abuse (name calling, teasing, being ridiculed in front of others, persistent negative feedback regarding their sexual orientation as well as demands made by their heterosexual and homosexual peers to reveal their sexual identity),



physical and sexual abuse (assault and rape inflicted upon them by some of their peers, teachers and members of the school administration) and emotional abuse (rejection, social exclusion and isolation).

Preliminary findings from the small amount of research studies conducted on the experiences of lesbian youth in South Africa suggest that South African schools are homophobic. Research by Bhana (2012) reveals that the experiences of lesbians in South African schools are laden with prejudice and oppression. Research by Butler et al. (2003) as well as Butler (2008) indicates that lesbian youth in South African schools are victimized and discriminated against; they are belittled, criticized, ridiculed, assaulted, raped and isolated on a daily basis.

National as well as international newspaper articles on the violence and intolerance experienced by lesbian youth in South African schools serves to support previous research on homophobic abuse conducted in South Africa. It indicates that homosexuality is still regarded as unacceptable in South African schools. The newspaper report of a school in Kwazulu Natal who expelled 27 learners for being involved in same sex relationships (South African school dormitory closes after lesbian kiss, 2010) as well as the newspaper report of the Oprah Winfrey school for disadvantaged girls at Henley on Klip, Vereeniging who expelled seven learners for trying to initiate sexual liaisons with other learners (Stuijt, 2009) are examples of incidences of discrimination against sexual minorities that exist in South African schools. The articles did not indicate transgressions against the school's code of conduct committed by the learners that could substantiate their expulsion.

Research by Espelage et al. (2008); Butler (2008); Kosciw et al. (2009); Llera and Katsireba (2010) and Russell et al. (2011) indicate that secondary schools are frequent locations of violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth. Secondary schools are described as sites that are generally unsafe for and unsupportive of LGBT youth with the classroom being the most homophobic location within the school context. Research (Rivers, 2000; Butler et al., 2003; Harris Interactive and Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education network, 2005) reveals that this situation is exacerbated by teachers who are not supportive of sexual minority youth, teachers who use homophobic language at school and teachers who fail to intervene when they witness acts of harassment or abuse against sexual minorities.

I, the researcher, am of opinion that learner and teacher bullying has become a dilemma in South African public schools with LGBT learners being an extremely accessible target. To address this challenge the South African Department of Education has come up with a School Safety Policy that was approved on the 25<sup>th</sup> of May 2012. South African public and special schools are required to implement the School Safety Policy and District Based Support Teams are required to monitor the implementation thereof. The purpose of the policy is to ensure safe

and secure learning environments for all learners as the South African Department of Education regards it as a precondition for effective teaching and learning (Department of Basic Education, Gauteng, 2012).

## **2.2.1 NEGATIVE SOCIAL EXPERIENCES**

### **2.2.1.1 Homophobic verbal harassment and abuse**

Research (Thurlow, 2001; Varjas, Dew, Marshall, Graybill, Singh, Meyers & Birckbichler, 2008) indicate that verbal homophobic abuse is the most prevalent form of abuse experienced by lesbian youth in secondary schools. Thurlow (2001) states that secondary school learners use words such as lezzo, lesbian, dyke and fanny-basher to refer to their lesbian peers. These words are regularly used in conjunction with other derogative words such as cunt, wanker, motherfucker and fucking. According to Francis and Msibi (2011) the most common English derogatory words used to refer to lesbians in South African secondary schools are “lesbian” and “bulldog”. Francis and Msibi (2011) state that the most common IsiZulu words used to refer to lesbians in South African secondary schools include *Isitabane*<sup>5</sup>, Uvezubuso and *Inkwili*<sup>6</sup>.

Thurlow (2001) asserts that the lighthearted manner in which these derogatory words are used by secondary school learners indicate that they have no concern for the disruptive consequences of their actions. Many of these pejoratives are malicious and aggressive in nature. The participants in Thurlow’s (2001) study explained that they did not see the use of derogatory words to refer to homosexuals as serious as it was not their intention to cause harm. In spite of the explanations given by the heterosexual learners, their disregard for the feelings of sexual minority groups came through strongly.

According to Francis and Msibi (2011) homophobic verbal abuse cements heterosexism and pathologises homosexuality. It silences sexual minority groups, resulting in marginalisation and the internalisation of homophobia. Homophobic verbal harassment/abuse leads to emotional health and self-esteem difficulties in lesbian individuals (Butler et al., 2003) as a lesbian sexual orientation are continuously constructed as something wrong, unsafe and shame worthy (Thurlow, 2001; Munoz-Plaza, Quinn & Rounds, 2002).

Teachers and school administrators often directly or indirectly participate in homophobic verbal abuse by allowing homophobic words and remarks to be used without reprimand (Wyss, 2004). According to Macgillivray (2004) and Mikulski (2005) schools contribute to the occurrence of homophobic verbal abuse if they allow the use of homophobic labels such

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<sup>5</sup> The IsiZulu word “Isitabane” is a direct reference to a gay or lesbian individual (Francis & Msibi, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> The IsiZulu words “Uvezubuso” and “Inkwile” is used to refer to a lesbian individual (Francis & Msibi, 2011).

as “dyke” to go unchecked while students who engage in racist name calling are disciplined. Macgillivray (2004) and Mikulski (2005) state that this form of selective punishment creates the impression that discrimination against LGBT learners is acceptable within the culture of a school. This in itself is a form of abuse.

### **2.2.1.2 Homophobic physical and sexual harassment and abuse**

A survey conducted by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) in 2003 indicates that over a third of the 887 American LGBT youth who participated in their survey experienced physical harassment because of their sexual orientation while more than a quarter indicated experiences of physical harassment due to their gender expression (Kosciw, 2004, in Hall, 2006). The study also revealed that half of the LGBT learners who had been harassed or battered did not report their victimization to their teachers, school management or parents. Fifty percent of the participants indicated that they felt uncomfortable talking about their experiences to teachers, parents or school counselors. A significant number of the participants did not know if an anti-homophobic bullying policy existed at their schools or not (Hall, 2006).

Research conducted by OUT LGBT Wellbeing in collaboration with the Durban Lesbian and Gay Community and Health Centre revealed that one in three of the South African lesbian and bisexual young women included in their study were physically assaulted at school. Nineteen percent of the participants included were sexually harassed or raped during their secondary school years. Wells and Polders (2005) state that the perpetrators are mostly other pupils, followed by educators, principals and other non-teaching members of a school’s staff. According to their perpetrators the intention of their actions is to cure them from homosexuality (Department of Education, 2008).

In South Africa lesbians in and out of school are humiliated, belittled, beaten and raped (corrective rape) by gangsters (*tsotsis*) and rapists (Department of Education, 2008; Swarr, 2012). According to Besen (2008)<sup>7</sup> “Corrective rape” in Western Cape schools is increasing at an alarming rate due to the Belief that such an act of violence is punishment enough to change lesbians into heterosexual women. Research by Msibi (2012) and Butler (2008) revealed that homophobic physical and sexual abuse is used to maintain heterosexism in South African township secondary schools.

Besen (2008) and Swarr (2012) indicate that South African men residing in townships experience the sexual preferences of lesbians, their unavailability to men and their sexual relationships with straight women as demeaning. Swarr (2012) indicates that these men

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<sup>7</sup> Corrective rape is a term used to refer to rape that is intended to be punitive, corrective or curative of lesbian tendencies (Swarr, 2012, p. 962).

perceive lesbians as females who deliberately challenge traditional gender roles by expressing themselves as masculine and by entering into same-sex relationships. As punishment for their behaviour lesbians are sexually assaulted and sometimes killed by men who are threatened by their existence (Swarr, 2012).

### **2.2.1.3 Social and emotional exclusion and abuse**

Research by Butler (2008) revealed that LGBT learners may experience rejection from peers as well family members. According to Butler (2008) feelings of rejection includes feelings of being ostracized, avoided, excluded and disregarded because you are different.

Research by Munoz-Plaza et al. (2002) indicates that LGBT learners experience cognitive, social and emotional exclusion in school because of their physical appearance and sexual orientation. Munoz-Plaza et al. (2002) state that the cognitive isolation of LGBT learners is caused by limited access to accurate information regarding their sexual orientation. Their social and emotional isolation is the consequence of constant negative messages from peers, school personnel and family members who make them think that their sexual orientation and their feelings are “bad” or “wrong” or “socially unacceptable”.

Research by Payne (2007) indicates that girls in American secondary schools are often not acknowledged for their accomplishments but rather for their physical appearance and their fluency in “boy talk”. It is the girls who seem less interested in their physical appearance or the opposite sex that are shunned and labeled as homosexuals and outsiders in the secondary school culture. Payne (2007) states that once someone is labeled as having a different sexual orientation than what is acceptable within a school’s culture they will be excluded, disconnected and isolated. Payne (2007) is of opinion that the exclusion and isolation of LGBT learners are exacerbated by their inability to form deep friendships with heterosexual girls because of a lack in common interest (Payne, 2007).

Research by Msibi (2012) indicates that heterosexual learners’ and educators’ fear of being infected by homosexuals<sup>8</sup> are used to maintain heterosexism in South African secondary schools. According to Msibi (2012) it is the teachers who instill this invalid fear of homosexuals in their learners. Such behaviour promotes the exclusion and isolation of LGBT learners as it makes it difficult for them to make friends with their heterosexual peers. Msibi (2012) also states that the fear of homophobic abuse prevents heterosexual learners from associating themselves with LGBT learners. According to Williams et al. (2004) social and emotional isolation is the most challenging problem faced by LGBT learners as it increases their risk of experiencing physical and mental health difficulties (Butler, 2008).

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<sup>8</sup> The word lesbian and homosexual are used interchangeably in this research study.

Research by Butler et al. (2003) reveals that in spite of the challenges lesbian youth experience in school some prefer to stay in mainstream settings. Butler et al. (2003) state that they try to “fit in as best as they can” even if that persistent feeling of having something wrong with them – a feeling fueled by rumours, gossiping, name-calling and exclusion – is always present. Some LGBT youth drop out of school for good because of the hatred and rejection experienced by them. Others return later or never leave at all for they choose to stay and create a space where they can flourish and be themselves (Blackburn & McCready, 2009).

## **2.2.2 NEGATIVE ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES**

### **2.2.2.1 Increased levels of absenteeism, truancy and school dropouts**

It is a common occurrence for homosexual youth to have higher levels of absenteeism (McCormack, 2011) and school dropouts than their peers (Mishna, Newman, Daley & Solomon, 2009). Homophobic abuse (especially because it is continuous in nature) is regarded as the main reason for school disengagement and absenteeism among LGBT youth (Rivers, 2000; Mikulsky, 2005; Espelage et al., 2008).

Research by Rivers (2000) indicates that homosexual learners more often than not pretend to be ill in order to skip school or classes to escape the anti-lesbian/gay harassment and abuse inflicted on them. Research by Grossman, Adam, Edwards, Alessi, Ardon and Howell (2009) revealed that LGBT youth who were exposed to hate crimes and hurtful gestures and remarks were more likely to drop out of school. Grossman et al. (2009) explain that those who chose to remain behind protected themselves by avoiding places such as bathrooms where they were exposed to possible danger or by keeping their sexual orientation or gender identity undisclosed.

Rivers (2000) asserts that the rate of absenteeism amongst sexual minority youth can only be reduced if the environment in which they learn is safe. Rivers (2000) is of opinion that school environments that are safe for sexual minority groups’ can be created if educational psychologist, social workers and teachers join hands to collaboratively drive initiatives that are against homophobic abuse in schools.

In South Africa however, there is a shortage of teachers and most of the public schools are overcrowded with 50-60 learners per class. Educational psychologist and social workers are not available to the schools that they are responsible for on a regular basis as they serve 45-60 schools per person. Hence the question: Are South African schools able to create environments that are safe for sexual minority groups without the necessary resources, overcrowding and a degree of teacher overburdening that makes it impossible for them to effectively perform their core function, which is teaching?

### **2.2.2.2 Lower levels of academic achievement**

Research (Murdock & Bolch, 2005; Mishna et al., 2009; Blackburn & McCreedy, 2009) indicates that homophobic abuse at school not only leads to high levels of absenteeism but results in grades of poorer quality and academic failure for many LGBT learners. Research by Robinson (2010) revealed that LGBT learners find it difficult to concentrate in class because they are unable to prevent harmful thoughts and emotions (caused by their negative experiences) from surfacing. Gruber and Fineran (2008) and McCormack, (2011) state that fewer LGBT learners enroll at further and higher education institutions because it is difficult for them to succeed academically if they do not feel safe or protected. Russell et al. (2011) indicate that this brings about life changing restrictions for LGBT learners as it lessens their opportunities for occupational and career development.

### **2.2.2.3 Invisibility and school disengagement**

LGBT youth often become invisible at school when they realize that their homosexual inclination and their romantic attractions are not promoted by what is regarded as customary within the school's culture. Some LGBT youth might find it difficult to fit in because they believe that something is wrong with them. Hence they withdraw from academic activities to the extent that they become invisible and disengaged from the learning process (Akerlof & Kranton, 2002). Their invisibility is worsened by homophobic abuse and marginalisation which is considered as two of the strongest predictors of school disengagement (Rivers, 2000; Murdock & Bolch, 2005).

Research by Grossman et al. (2009) revealed that American LGBT youth do not feel that they belong in their school communities. They feel disempowered by being excluded and marginalized for it leaves them with no control over how they are treated by their heterosexual peer. Furthermore there is very little that they can do to protect themselves. Research by Craig, Tucker and Wagner (2008) states that some lesbian learners prefer being invisible at school as it often protects them against victimization and discrimination.

Research by Seelman et al. (2012) affirms that positive intervention and support by school social workers, counselors and teachers leads to higher levels of school engagement and increased academic achievement among sexual minority youth. Seelman et al. (2012) state that the presence of gay-straight alliances in schools also contributes to higher levels of school engagement and academic performance for LGBT youth.

I, the researcher, am of opinion that ensuring equal and quality educational experiences for LGBT learners does not receive the attention it deserves in South African schools at present. The focus of South Africa's education system is currently absorbed by the need to improve

the educational experiences of previously disadvantaged learners who experience socio-economic, cognitive, behavioural and physical barriers to learning.

## **2.3 FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEGATIVE SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES OF LESBIAN LEARNERS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL**

### **2.3.1 HOMOPHOBIA AND HETEROSEXISM**

Herek (2004 in Smith, Oades & McCarthy, 2012, p.3) defines homophobia as *individual or social ignorance or fear of gay and lesbian people*. They indicate that homophobic actions may include prejudice, discrimination, harassment and acts of violence and hatred.

Research by Mishna et al. (2009) asserts that homophobia is a common occurrence in American schools. Institutional factors that contribute to homophobic abuse in American schools include the inadequate training of teachers with regard to LGBT issues, a shortage of equity based policies that protects sexual minorities and a failure to hold heterosexual teachers and learners accountable for any form of homophobic transgressions as indicated in their equity based policies.

Alden and Parker (2005 in Smith et al., 2012, p. 6) define *heterosexism as a belief system that posits the superiority of heterosexuality over homosexuality*. Payne (2007, p. 17) defines heterosexism as *a form of oppression which reproduces a civilization where some are advantaged over others. It places those who conform to heterosexist expectations of gender and sexuality at an advantage over those who do not*.

Wilkinson and Pearson (2009) state that heterosexuality is regarded as the norm in American society while other sexual orientations are regarded as “deviant”. Chesir-Teran (2003) maintains that heterosexism is sustained in American schools by subtle practices that increase the invisibility of LGBT learners. The absence of general harassment policies, specific anti-discrimination policies and inclusive programs in the midst of unconcealed antagonism towards LGBT learners all count as subtle practices of heterosexism in schools.

According to Chesir-Teran (2003) the occurrence of heterosexism and homophobia in schools can be addressed by means of inclusive programs that supports LGBT learners. Such programs include class discussions where homosexuality is talked about without prejudice, access to library books that address issues on sexual orientation and the establishment of gay straight student alliances at schools.

### **2.3.2 PEER PRESSURE**

According to McCormack (2011) peer pressure is seen as a major contributor to the prevalence of violence against lesbians in secondary schools. McCormack (2011) explains that youth in secondary schools are pressured to conform to what is considered appropriate gender roles. Gender non-conformance places them at risk of being victimized, excluded and isolated from the majority of the school population as it creates the impression of being homosexual.

McCormack (2011) indicates that heterosexual boys in American secondary schools protect themselves against victimisation and marginalisation by adapting an aggressive and homophobic code of masculinity. Heterosexual girls in American secondary schools protect themselves against victimisation and marginalisation by exhibiting their femininity through their dress code, make up and negative behaviour towards LGBT youth.

Such behaviour seems logical if one takes into account that, according to the American National Schools Climate Survey conducted in 2009, 90% of LGBT youth was victimized and isolated because of their sexual orientation and appearance – real or perceived (Paceley & Flynn, 2012).

### **2.3.3 SCHOOL CLIMATE**

Research by Pearson, Muller and Wilkinson (2007) indicates that there are schools that create negative environments in which homosexuality are stigmatized. Kosciw et al. (2009) study on American school climates and its impact on LGBT learners indicates that school environments in which LGBT learners are most accepted are urban schools with a larger student population and more college bound graduates. LGBT youth in large urban schools, where most of the learners are from low income families and racial minority groups, experience more tolerance and less homophobic abuse. Kosciw et al. (2009) state that in smaller American schools where racial and economic diversity lack, the levels of acceptance and tolerance for LGBT youth are lower while the levels of homophobic abuse and absenteeism of LGBT learners are higher.

Research by Butler et al. (2003) indicates that South African schools do not encourage homosexuality or acknowledge homosexual learners. According to Butler et al. (2003) their homosexual participants reported that they were made to feel that their sexuality is wrong and that it is something to be ashamed of.



### **2.3.4 RELIGION**

According to Kosciw, Palmer, Kull and Greytak (2013) the strongest positive encouragement for LGBT learners comes from supportive adults at school and a supportive curriculum as it predicts a less hostile school climate and increased sense of self-esteem amongst lesbian learners.

Research by Ream and Savin-Williams (2005) states that not all schools in England find it easy to establish a non-hostile school environment because they are pressurised by anti-gay conservative Christian organizations not to promote or teach values and views that regard homosexuality as acceptable. According to Ream and Savin-Williams (2005) conservative Catholic and evangelical groups are of opinion that homosexuality is caused by inadequate relationships with same-sex parents and that it is a form of psychopathology that can be changed through therapy or early intervention during childhood. They state that the imposition of such negative opinions on schools, parents and teachers encourages victimization of LGBT youth which in turn leads to increased levels of internalized homophobia and mental health difficulties.

In South Africa anti-gay sentiments that exist in society are rooted in a strong patriarchal Christian ethic that regards same-sex sexual encounters as sinful and wrong. Most South African teachers strongly disapprove of homosexuality because of their Christian religion. They perceive homosexuality as a sin that can only be cured through religious teaching (Msibi, 2012; Bhana, 2012).

According to Butler et al. (2008) and Msibi (2012) South African teachers encourage heterosexism which is an infringement on the rights of LGBT learners. They also use parental influence through their School Governing Bodies as a method of controlling the occurrence of homosexuality (Bhana, 2012).

### **2.3.5 INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES THAT DISREGARDS THE EXISTENCE OF LESBIANS LEARNERS**

Over the last two decades education policies across the world have changed to such an extent that diversity in terms of race, language, ethnicity, ability, disability and sexual orientation must be accommodated in all schools. South Africa is no exception (Department of Basic Education, 1996 & 2006). However, most secondary schools in South Africa do not accommodate homosexuality. Through their institutional norms, school culture and the complete lack of curriculum content regarding alternative lifestyles they allow heterosexuality to take priority over homosexuality (Bhana, 2012). The lack of gay and lesbian literature and information in school libraries, the absence of openly gay teachers and role models in most

schools exacerbates the fact that homosexuality is regarded as unacceptable (McCormack, 2011).

According to the South African Schools Act of 1996 and the White Paper 6 on inclusive education all schools shall serve the educational needs of their learners without discriminating against any one in any way (The Human Rights Watch, 2001, p. 36). Furthermore the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996 states that *the state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, **sexual orientation**, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth*. It also states *everyone has inherent dignity as well as the right to have their dignity protected and respected*. (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996).

In defense of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement for Life Orientation in the Senior and Further Education and Training phases it is important to mention that it does leave room for discussions on sexuality and sexual behavior (Department of Basic Education, 2011). This means that Life Orientation teachers are allowed to incorporate information on homosexuality in their classroom discussions. I, the researcher, am however of opinion that this may not be happening in most of South African schools because the teachers and the parents are not ready to enter into open discussions on homosexuality as yet.

### **2.3.6 LACK OF SUPPORT FROM EDUCATORS**

According to Rivers (2000) LGBT youth receive very little support from their educators. Rivers (2000) states that instead of supporting LGBT youth some teachers harass and abuse them because of their actual or perceived sexual identity. In a study conducted by Butler et al. (2003) the participants indicated that homophobic harassment and abuse experienced at the hands of teachers had a damaging effect on their lives. Being constantly humiliated made them feel vulnerable and afraid to be open about their sexuality. This is especially the case in schools where homosexuality is presented as abnormal in sex and religious education and where the use of homophobic language and behaviour is sanctioned and left unpunished (Rivers, 2000).

Research by Francis and Msibi (2011) indicates that supporting homosexuality can be detrimental to educators in some South African schools. In such schools teachers are reprimanded by their principals if they discuss homosexuality in their classes. Disciplinary hearings are conducted against such teachers. Furthermore, parents become furious if homosexuality is supported by the teachers. Parents go as far as entering a petition for the dismissal of a teacher if they believe that he/she supports sexual minorities because he/she is

homosexual. Research by Mishna et al. (2009) maintains that teachers are afraid that they will be punished by their administrations and the parents if they support homosexuality.

According to Butler et al. (2003) the teachers' lack of knowledge regarding homosexuality, their unwillingness to intervene in instances of homophobic abuse as well as their fear of losing their employment denies sexual minority's access to appropriate support and all-inclusive information on human sexuality and alternative lifestyles. Butler et al. (2003) state that South African schools failed to educate learners on homosexuality and they failed to provide an environment that is safe from homophobic harassment and abuse.

Despite the language of inclusivity and tolerance in post-apartheid South Africa, many South African institutions, including education, continue to reproduce patterns of heterosexism (Francis & Msibi, 2011) because very little is being done to capacitate heterosexual teachers, school administrators and learners to deal with heterosexist ways of thinking (Richardson, 2006).

### **2.3.7 INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS OF LESBIAN LEARNERS**

Research (Blackburn & McCready, 2009; Kosciw et al., 2009) revealed that LGBT youth who were non-white, of immigrant status, from poorer families and communities experienced more discrimination and victimization stemming from their social identities, non-standard English, non-Christian, and gender non-conforming behaviour. Kosciw et al. (2009) however indicate that gay and bisexual males are more likely to experience abuse and discrimination than lesbian and bisexual females.

## **2.4 THE IMPACT OF NEGATIVE SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING OF LESBIAN LEARNERS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL**

Research (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002; Wilkinson & Pearson (2009); Russell, 2011; Martin-Storey & Crosnoe, 2012) indicates that high levels of at-school-victimisation compromises the mental health of LGBT learners.

### **2.4.1 INTERNALISED HOMOPHOBIA**

Weinberg (1972 in Smith et al., 2012, p. 4) defines internalised homophobia *as a negative homosexual identity where LGBTQ individuals develop a "self-loathing" related to being a member of a sexual minority group*. Newcomb and Mustanski (2010) explain that internalized homophobia does not only include negative feelings and attitudes towards one's own sexual orientation; it also includes society's negative attitude towards homosexuality, discomfort to

disclose one's sexual orientation, disconnectedness in terms of other LGBT people and discomfort in pursuing same-sex sexual activity.

Research by Newcomb and Mustanski (2010) indicates that constant homophobic victimization advances the internalization of anti-homosexual comments and attitudes which in turn leads to mental health problems such as internal conflict, lowered self-regard, depression, substance abuse and suicide ideation or attempts.

#### **2.4.2 INTERNAL CONFLICT**

In a research study conducted by Munoz-Plaza et al. (2002) the participants indicated that they experienced feelings of uncertainty and denial as they went through the process of coming to acknowledge their sexual orientation. Admitting that they were homosexual was difficult and led to feelings of inner turmoil. In order to cope with their feelings of internal-conflict they tried to deny their sexual orientation by ignoring their feelings as much as possible. Munoz-Plaza et al. (2002) indicate that the internal conflict experienced by the participants was exacerbated by a lack of information on homosexuality.

Research by McMinn (2005 in Subhi & Geelan, 2012) indicates that homosexuals experience internal conflict if they attempt to embrace their Christianity as well as their homosexuality. Homosexuality is regarded as immoral and against Christian doctrine. According to Richards and Bergin (2000 in Subhi & Geelan, 2012) experiencing internal conflict is difficult and painful and leaves emotional damage even after it has been resolved.

#### **2.4.3 LOW SELF ESTEEM**

Research (Munoz-Plaza et al., 2002; Butler, 2008; Martin-Storey & Crosnoe, 2012; Kosciw, Palmer, Kull & Greytak, 2013) indicates that in-school-victimization/homophobic abuse decreases the self-esteem of LGBT learners. According to Butler (2008) a low self-esteem negatively impact on one's level of confidence which makes it difficult to socialize with others in order to gain social acceptance. Martin-Storey and Crosnoe (2012) indicate that low self-esteem is a determinant of depression.

#### **2.4.4 NEGATIVE MENTAL HEALTH: ANXIETY, DEPRESSION AND SUICIDAL IDEATION**

Research (Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar & Azrael, 2009; Russell et al., 2011; Bolton & Sareen, 2011) indicates that the occurrence of emotional distress in the form of anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicide attempts are significantly higher amongst LGBT youth than heterosexual youth. Lesbian youth however, are less likely than gay, bisexual and transgender youth to experience negative mental health issues as they display a higher level of positive adjustment to their school environment (Almeida et al., 2009 & Russell et al., 2011, Birkett et

al., 2009). However, research by D'Augelli, Hershberger and Pilkington (2001) indicates that if mental health difficulties are present, young lesbian and bisexual females exhibit a greater tendency to self-harming behaviour and suicide than gay and bisexual male youth.

Espelage et al. (2008) and Russell et al. (2011) state that continuous, longitudinal experience of homophobic abuse places LGBT youth at risk of experiencing higher levels of negative mental health. According to Hatzenbuehler (2011) a school environment that is less supportive of homosexuality increases the risk of suicidality amongst LGBT learners. D'Augelli, Grossman, Salter, Vasey, Starks and Sinclair (2005) indicate that high levels of earlier parental psychological abuse, more discouragement of childhood gender atypical behavior and having a family history of suicidality are also significant contributors to suicide attempts among LGBT youth.

D'Augelli et al. (2001) state that suicide attempts mostly occurred after LGBT youth became aware of their sexual attractions and before they disclosed their sexual orientation to their families and friends. Youths whose parents reacted with intolerance and rejection reported more suicide attempts than those whose parents were supportive and accepting.

#### **2.4.5 SUBSTANCE ABUSE**

Kowen and Davis (2006) explain that LGBT youth are at risk of substance abuse because of increased levels of emotional anxiety evoked by their sexual identity. Daniel, Bontempo and Anthony (2002) hold an opposing view. They are of opinion that LGBT youth turn towards substance abuse because of homophobic victimization at school. In a study conducted by them it was found that LGBT youth who reported higher levels of victimization at school reported higher levels of substance abuse.

Kowen and Davis (2006) state that sexual minority groups who are marginalized from mainstream school culture often find solace and a sense of belonging amongst older gay people in clubs. It is in these settings where they obtain easy access to alcohol and drugs, which in turn places them at risk of exploitation and abuse. According to Espelage et al. (2008) LGBT youth more often than not report high levels of alcohol and marijuana use.

### **2.5 THE POSITIVE SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES OF HOMOSEXUAL FEMALES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

During the 1980's and the 1990's LGBT youth in British schools experienced higher levels of homophobic harassment and abuse in school. They remained closeted because they feared the social segregation and the physical attacks that they had to endure if exposed. Even though certain homophobic inclinations still exist in schools today a significant decrease in the

occurrence of homophobic harassment and abuse is noticeable. Schools have become more positive towards sexual diversity hence the experiences of LGBT youth are much more positive. This significant change in attitude towards homosexual minorities has contributed to the increased visibility of LGBT youth in schools (McCormack, 2011). Msibi (2012) states that LGBT youth in secondary schools are no longer powerless, passive or hopeless. They reflect a greater sense of self-worth and confidence because they are proud of themselves and their abilities. LGBT youth experience higher levels of educational resilience. Educational resilience refers to an increased probability of educational success regardless of the difficulties and personal vulnerabilities experienced by a learner (Kosciw, 2004).

## **2.6 ASPECTS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE POSITIVE SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES OF LESBIAN YOUTH IN SECONDARY SCHOOL**

Research by Kosciw et al. (2013) state that supportive school staff, an inclusive curriculum, anti-homophobic bullying policies and Gay Straight Alliances (GSA)<sup>9</sup> act as environmental influences that contribute to a positive school experience for LGBT learners. Asakura (2010) indicates that environmental influences as well as personal characteristics mediate the risk of victimization to facilitate resilience<sup>10</sup> which in turn contributes to the positive school experience for LGBT learners.

### **2.6.1 TEACHER SUPPORT**

Research (Kosciw et al., 2013) indicates that supportive educators, who make means to intervene in order to ensure that the school environment is safer, are the strongest positive influence for LGBT youth. Kosciw et al. (2013) state that increased teacher support leads to a less hostile school climate, a decrease in victimization, greater self-esteem, higher levels of attendance and improved academic performance for LGBT learners.

Research (Kosciw, 2004; Gastic & Johnson, 2009; Msibi, 2012) indicate that teachers who are willing to act as guides and advisors to LGBT youth increase their educational resilience. Wang, Haertel and Walberg (1994, in Gastic & Johnson, 2009, p. 221) define educational resilience as *“the heightened likelihood of educational success despite vulnerabilities and adversities brought on by environmental conditions and experiences.”*

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<sup>9</sup> The acronym GSA is used to refer to Gay Straight Alliances. They are learner support groups who provide support to lesbian learners (Kosciw et al., 2013)

<sup>10</sup> Resilience refers to the ability to recover from illness, depression, adversity or the like. Buoyancy (Dictionary.com). Protective factors such as individual characteristics and environmental influences, may mediate risk and facilitate resilience, defined as the capacity to cope with the internal stresses of your vulnerabilities (Werner & Smith, 1982 in Asakura, 2010, p.362)

Gastic and Johnson (2009) state that teacher mentoring is more beneficial to lesbian youth than any other kind of informal mentoring. Lesbian learners who were mentored by their teachers showed a 78% higher tertiary participation rates than those who were mentored by other informal mentors. Teachers are in a position to create conditions that can help LGBT youth realize their full potential through positive affirmation, role modeling and respect.

### **2.6.2 PEER SUPPORT**

Platonic friendships with heterosexual learners as well as their relationships with their girlfriends form an important support system for lesbian learners as it helps them to cope with the negative peer and parental responses to their sexual orientation (Kowen & Davis, 2006). According to Robinson (2010) peer support is important as it acts as a shield against homophobic victimization and gives LGBT learners the strength to confront those who are prejudiced.

LGBT youth also find support from other LGBT learners at school. Being able to share stories with peers with the same sexual orientation at safety and security meetings, presentations, camps and homosexual summits help to reduce the isolation homosexual youth are confronted with in school. Sharing their stories allows them to experience a sense of collective empowerment and relief for they learn that they are not alone (Craig et al., 2008).

The establishment of Gay Straight Alliances (GSA) in schools provides support and a safe space for LGBT learners. It also affords them the opportunity to meet other LGBT learners as well as heterosexual learners who support them (Grossman et al., 2009). Asakura (2010, p. 364) defines a *“Gay Straight Alliance” as a student organisation and support group for sexual minorities and their allies that serves to provide support and a safe space for those who do not fit in the mainstream high school environment.*

A study conducted by Munoz-Plaza et al. (2002) indicates that school based LGBT support groups use the strengths, talents and skills of their members to tap into existing support networks that can assist them in developing their own networks as well as positive and effective coping strategies to support each other. LGBT support groups work towards sensitizing heterosexual teachers and learners (Grossman et al., 2009), improving school policies and interventions that ensure the safety of LGBT youth (Bochenek & Brown, 2001) and they provide LGBT learners with the opportunity to become leaders and activists (Russell, Muraco, Subramaniam & Laub, 2009) who are not afraid to stand up for their rights.

The involvement of LGBT learners in GSA's situated in schools leads to lower incidences of victimization (Kosciw et al., 2010 in Kosciw et al., 2013) and suicides (Asakura, 2010). It also leads to improved academic performance, improved relationships with others, a positive sense

of self and identity as well as a sense of physical and emotional safety at school (Asakura, 2010).

### **2.6.3 AN INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM AND ANTI-HOMOPHOBIC BULLYING POLICIES**

According to Kosciw et al. (2013) an LGBT inclusive curriculum contains the occurrence of at-school-homophobic victimisation and it increases the self-esteem of LGBT learners. The possibility exists that an LGBT inclusive curriculum may increase the level of LGBT learner participation in schoolwork as well as academic achievement.

The existence of anti-bullying policies that caters for the protection of LGBT learners in some schools is an indication that these schools acknowledge and support their LGBT learners. These policies contribute to the wellbeing of LGBT learners as it heightens their sense of self and belonging (Kosciw et al., 2013).

### **2.6.4 INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS**

Ebersöhn and Ellof (2002) state that personal or individual characteristics that promote resilience in children include problemsolving skills, a positive self-concept and feelings of self-worth, a sense of hope and future directed goals.

#### **2.6.4.1 Positive self-image, self-worth and hope**

Research by Robinson (2010) revealed that it is important for lesbian and gay (LG) youth to accept themselves and their LG status in order to cope with homophobic victimization and to experience physical and psychological wellbeing. Having a strong mindset, feeling proud, not being ashamed and being true to yourself is important. Research by Balsam (2003) indicates that viewing your sexual orientation and identity as a gift and a form of liberation in terms of societal norms awards you with the freedom to live according to your own desires.

Research by Msibi (2012) revealed that South African LGBT youth in the twenty first century portray a more positive self-image. Msibi (2012) is of opinion that the positive manner in which homosexual people is portrayed by the media is a contributing factor. Homosexual people are portrayed as intelligent, successful and wealthy. This facilitates the development of a positive self-image as well as hope for the future amongst LGBT youth.

#### **2.6.4.2 Problemsolving strategies**

Research by Scourfield, Roen and McDermott (2008) states that their participants used a variety of problemsolving strategies to cope with victimization and discrimination at school. Some of the participants indicated that their perception of their sexual orientation as



biologically based, increased their resilience. Some participants indicated that they obtained strength from standing firm against discrimination. They fought back when bullied hence reinforcing their sexual identity. However, the most common problemsolving strategy used by LGBT youth was to find a safe place and safe people to associate themselves with. For some this meant seeking membership in LGBT support organisations and for others this meant moving to a city that is more supportive of homosexual people.

According to Robinson (2010) some of the participants in his research study indicated that it is helpful to think about future life and career objectives as well as having a family of your own. Others indicated that following a positive lesbian or gay role model provides them with appropriate information and guidance as to how to respond to their sexuality in a positive manner.

## **2.7 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORTING LGBT YOUTH IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

Schools can no longer ignore the presence of LGBT youth hence institutional support for LGBT has become necessary. A school environment that is inclusive of and safe for LGBT learners can only be created if anti-homophobic school safety policies, backed by technical and legal resources, are implemented and if awareness regarding LGBT issues is raised so that the learners and teachers do not think it is morally wrong to have a different sexual orientation other than the norm (Grossman et al., 2009). By supporting LGBT learners, education professionals can minimize or even eradicate heterosexism. This will ensure the development of a positive self-image, improved mental health and equality in terms of education and career opportunities for LGBT learners (Munoz-Plaza et al., 2002).

### **2.7.1 ADDRESSING THE ATTITUDES OF SOUTH AFRICAN HETEROSEXUAL TEACHERS AND LEARNERS TOWARDS SEXUAL MINORITY LEARNERS**

The attitudes of heterosexual teachers and learners towards sexual minorities should be addressed and changed if necessary (Birkett et al., 2009). This can be done by including psychosocial courses on sexuality in all its diversity in pre- and in-service teacher training programmes (Butler et al., 2003). Teachers need to understand that all forms of oppression whether it is based on race, gender or other forms of identification are unacceptable and should be dealt with, with the same urgency (Francis & Msibi, 2011).

Msibi (2012 in Bhana, 2012) suggests that the Department of Education should implement intervention programmes that will educate teachers about the ways in which heterosexual dominance operates in schools as it will enable them to recognise the negative and harmful experiences of homosexual learners. These intervention programmes should address the fact

that very little attention is paid to the teaching of sexuality in schools. Teaching sexuality should allow the learners the opportunity to engage with sexuality issues that includes the rights of homosexual learners as well as homophobic violence. This will equip them with the knowledge and skills necessary to appropriately deal with sexual diversity. Butler et al. (2003) suggests that the implementation of psychosocial education must be sustained over time so that teachers and learners can learn to respect the rights of diverse people including sexual minorities.

In a research study conducted by Robinson (2010) some of the participants suggested that specific subjects such as English and Science are utilized to discuss LG issues; others indicated that it should be included across the curriculum. Douglas, Warwick, Kemp, Whitty and Aggleton (1999) suggest that schools build relationships with support services such as clinics and lesbian, gay and bisexual advice services and help lines in and around their community. These institutions can assist with awareness campaigns as well as the training and development of teachers.

### **2.7.2 SAFETY POLICIES OF SCHOOLS**

School administrators should not only focus on the prevention of bullying when developing school safety policies. They should also focus on the prevention of homophobic bullying as a separate entity. Anti-gay bullying/harassment policies direct teachers and learners in terms of behaviour that is regarded as homophobic bullying, its consequences and the procedures for intervening and reporting it.

Research by Kosciw et al. (2013) indicates that the implementation of anti-gay bullying/harassment policies are related to higher levels of self-esteem among LGBT learners as it makes them feel that they are acknowledged. Birkett et al. (2009) indicate that it is important to implement school policies that protect all learners, including sexual minorities as it contributes to a more positive school environment and improved psychological health for LGBT learners. According to Mikulsky (2005) a zero tolerance policy should be followed to eradicate homophobia in schools. Mikulsky (2005) states that if this does not materialise LGBT learners' rights to equal and quality education in an inclusive and safe environment will continue to be denied.

### **2.7.3 AN LGBT INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM**

The school curriculum should reflect a celebration of being different and diverse, therefore, educating learners on their human and civil rights and respect for those who identify themselves as different (e.g. homosexual) should be a fundamental part of all education undertakings (Butler et al., 2003). Hence curriculum adaptations and modifications should be

made to include homosexuality in the existing sexuality education program (Munoz-Plaza et al., 2002). Research by Kosciw et al. (2013) indicates that an LGBT inclusive curriculum, where LGBT youth are presented positively, contributes to lower levels of victimization and higher levels of academic progress for LGBT learners.

## 2.8 CONCLUSION

The study of relevant literature on the social and academic experiences of lesbian youth reveals that literature from South Africa are in many instances similar to that of western countries such as the United States of America and England. Literature revealed that lesbian learners in secondary schools are subjected to negative as well as positive social and academic experiences. Lesbian learners may experience negative social encounters in the form of homophobic verbal, emotional, physical and sexual harassment or abuse (Coyle & Kritzing, 2002; Athanases & Larrabee, 2003; Kosciw et al., 2009; Pendragon, 2010). Academically they may withdraw from the process of learning (Akerlof & Kranton, 2002) and exhibit high levels of absenteeism (McCormack, 2011) which lead to poor academic performance, failure (Murdock & Bolch, 2005; Mishna et al., 2009; Blackburn & McCready, 2009) and eventually school dropouts (Mishna et al., 2009).

On the other hand literature also revealed a change in the attitude of school management teams as well as heterosexual teachers and learners towards LGBT learners over the last two decades (McCormack, 2011). The attitude of school management teams, heterosexual teachers and learners towards homosexuality has become more positive and it has led to an increase in positive experiences for LGBT learners. McCormack (2011) indicates that this momentous change in attitude towards homosexual minorities has led to a decrease in homophobic harassment and abuse and an increase in the visibility of LGBT youth in schools. Furthermore, LGBT learners currently at school are experiencing more support from their educators (Kosciw et al., 2013), other LGBT learners as well as heterosexual learners who support them through gay straight alliances (Grossman et al., 2009). School environments are safer and more inclusive of LGBT learners because of anti-homophobic policies and LGBT inclusive curriculums. Literature reveals that those LGBT learners who are acknowledged and protected within their school environment experience higher levels of educational resilience (Kosciw et al., 2013) and a greater sense of self-worth and confidence (Msibi, 2012). LGBT learners who experience high levels of continuous, longitudinal victimization and discrimination are subjected to an increased risk of negative mental health (Espelage et al., 2008; Russell et al., 2011) and suicidality (Hatzenbuehler, 2011).

Literature reveals that since the years after the Second World War many countries have moved away from separate education systems towards educating all learners in regular classes

despite their disabilities and other support needs. This process is known as inclusive education and was endorsed by the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) as a manner in which discrimination could be combated cost-effectively in developing countries. In order to align South Africa's educational practices with that of the rest of the world and to realize the countries constitutional values of equality, education as a basic right, and freedom from discrimination inclusive education was implemented in South Africa too.

Literature, however, reveals that the experiences of lesbian learners in South African schools are loaded with injustice and discrimination (Bhana, 2012) and that lesbian youth in South African schools are confronted with humiliation, assault, isolation and sexual abuse on a daily basis (Butler, 2008). Hence, I, the researcher, am of opinion that most South African schools are not functioning as inclusive schools because they are still discriminating against LGBT learners by subtly excluding them from the curriculum and by not providing them with the necessary support. South Africa's efforts to create healthy schools that are safe and inclusive of all learners are currently too focused on addressing poor socio-economic status, language differences, lack of parental involvement, cognitive, physical and sensory challenges as barriers to learning. I regard heterosexism and homophobia as barriers to learning too. Unfortunately it does not receive the necessary recognition and consideration it deserves. Francis and Msibi (2011) state that patterns of heterosexism are constantly recreated in South African schools because the teachers and school management teams are not adequately equipped to heterosexist thinking and behaviour (Richardson, 2006).

Chapter 3 presents a detailed explanation of the research methods to be used to capture empirical data. This explanation will include the research strategies to be adopted, sample selection and data collection and analysis techniques. An explanation will also be given as to how the researcher managed the research project.

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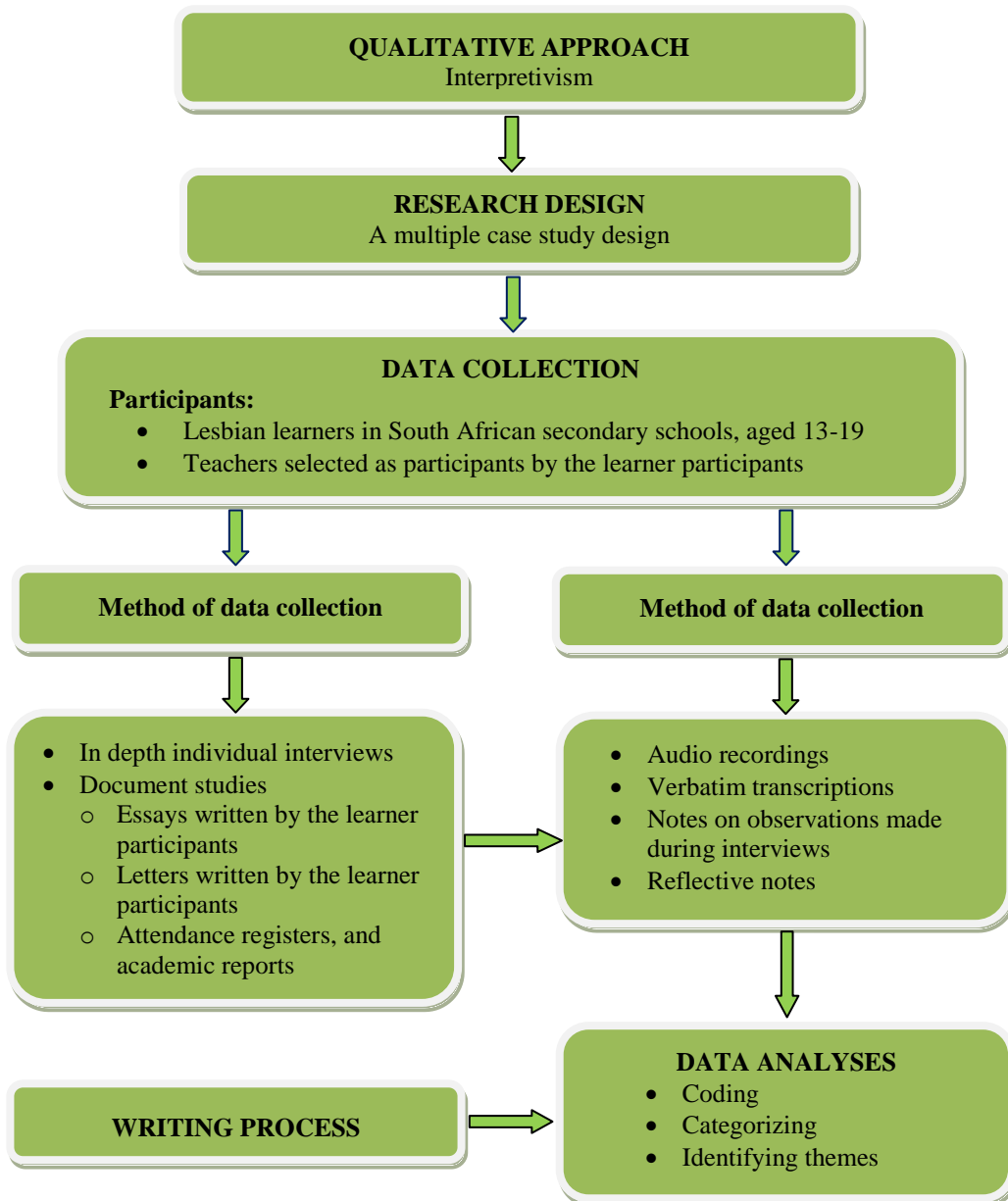
## CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter three is a discussion of the research design and methodology employed in this study. According to Willig (2008) the terms method and methodology refers to two different aspects of research. A methodology refers to a general approach to studying research topics whereas methods refer to research techniques. Henning et al. (2004, p. 2) defines methodology as “a coherent group of methods that complements one another and that have a “goodness of fit” to deliver data and findings that will reflect the research question and suit the research purpose.” Hence particular data collection methods, analysing techniques and interpretation procedures that I utilised to accomplish the study’s objectives are discussed. The selected research design and methodology was used to achieve the following:

- To explore and obtain an in-depth understanding of the negative social and educational experiences of lesbian youth in South African secondary schools.
- To explore and obtain an in-depth understanding of the positive social and educational experiences of lesbian youth in South African secondary schools.
- To obtain an in-depth understanding of the impact their experiences have on their psychological wellbeing.

Figure 3.1 provides a summary of the research process that I followed in this study. It includes my research approach, the process I followed in selecting the participants, collecting, analysing and interpreting the data as well as the methods that I used to document the data. The various aspects of the process will be discussed in the paragraphs that follow.



**Figure 3.1: Summary of the research process**

## **3.2 EPISTEMOLOGICAL COMMITMENT AND PARADIGMATIC PERSPECTIVE**

### **3.2.1 METATHEORETICAL PARADIGM**

Due to the fact that the interpretivist understanding of the world and reality, the manner in which people make meaning and the manner in which knowledge is obtained concurs with my own as a researcher, I chose to situate this research study within an interpretivist metatheoretical paradigm. Interpretivists are of opinion that:

- There are different interpretations of reality which is dependent on the time and context in which it was made (Biggam, 2008).

- People are consciously involved in making meaning of their circumstances and experiences. They have the ability to form perceptions, make decision as well as judgements that are based on their observations (Möller, Higgs & Deacan, 2003, Henning et al., 2004).
- People's perceptions of their circumstances and experiences are true for them as they live it on a daily basis (Creswell et al., 2009).
- Knowledge is not constructed through observation only but also through people's perceptions and descriptions of their experiences which is based on their values, beliefs and their manner of making meaning (Henning et al., 2004).

Furthermore the aim of interpretivist research is consistent with the intention of this research study as it is aimed at attaining an in-depth understanding of the educational and social experiences of self-identified lesbian learners in South African secondary schools.

### **3.2.2 METHODOLOGICAL PARADIGM**

This research study is primarily qualitative in nature as it focuses on understanding the individual participants' perceptions of their experiences in secondary school. Qualitative researchers are interested in the meaning participants give to their world and their experiences. Its objective is to describe and explain the experiences of the participants in their naturally occurring environments (Willig, 2008; Biggam, 2008).

According to De Vos et al. (2005) there are different paradigmatic frameworks from which qualitative research can be conducted. De Vos et al. (2005) describe a paradigm as a frame of reference for looking at and understanding reality. He states that this frame of reference is based on how the researcher observes the world and reality, his way of thinking about the manner in which the world functions (the researcher's epistemology) and the researchers understanding of how knowledge is attained (the researcher's ontology) (Creswell et al., 2009).

### **3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

In order to explore, describe and explain what lesbian learners in South African secondary schools are experiencing I chose to follow a case study design. A case study design can be described as a product or a process of in-depth enquiry which generates detailed descriptions of a single unit or a bounded system (Stake, 2000). Henning et al. (2004) and Willig (2008) indicate that single units or bounded systems refers to an individual, multiple individuals, a school, an incident, a program, an event, a situation or a similar experience.

From the possible bounded systems available I found the use of the multiple case study design most appropriate because I intended to interview three lesbian learners from two different schools and three teachers selected by the learner participants. Babbie and Mouton (2001) define a multiple case study design as a *design where more than one individual (case) - who are similar in terms of the participatory requirements - are requested to provide information on a specific phenomenon.*

Using a multiple case study design held ample advantages for this research study. It allowed me, the researcher, to 1) enter the research field prepared with knowledge of applicable literature prior to conducting the field research, 2) use multiple data sources as well as multiple methods of data collection and analysis 3) study personal documents made available to me by the lesbian participants, and 4) give a voice to the otherwise silent lesbian learners, their parents and teachers (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Merriam, 2002).

The case study design complemented the nature of the study because the perspectives of multiple stakeholders were required (lesbian youth and their teachers to answer the research question. It complemented the interpretive epistemology of the study as well because I, the researcher, answered my research question by making meaning of the participants' interpretations of their realities. Interpretivist researchers assume that reality can only be understood through the meaning people give to their experiences and situations (Biggam, 2008).

The case study research design did however have its limitations. A common criticism that exists with regard to the use of case study design is that the data generated through it cannot be generalised from one or a small number of cases to a whole population (Stark & Torrance, 2005; Creswell, 2009). Creswell (2009) defends the value of the case study by stating that the purpose of a case study design is to obtain an in-depth understanding of a specific case; not to generalise to other cases or the population as a whole. I therefore refrained from generalise the findings of this study in any way. I studied each case included in this study in its own right, I regarded each case as unique in its own importance and I did not view it as samples for a different or bigger study (Payne & Payne, 2004).

### **3.4 SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS**

I selected three self-identified lesbian learners from two different public secondary schools and three teachers selected by the learners to participate in this research study.



### 3.4.1 PURPOSEFUL SAMPLING: CRITERION, SNOWBALL SAMPLING AND COINCIDENTAL SAMPLING

I employed purposeful sampling strategies such as criterion and snowball sampling to select the participants. Henning et al. (2004) explains that purposeful sampling techniques are designed to assist the researcher in finding research participants that fit the criteria of a desirable participant. **Criterion sampling** was used to design participatory requirements which I based on my newly found knowledge and understanding of the research topic. I used these requirements as a guide to select participants that I could learn the most from in terms of the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 1998, p. 61; Creswell, 2009). The requirements that the participants had to meet are as follows:

The learner participants had to:

- Be self-identified lesbians between the ages of 13 and 19.
- Attend school within the Pretoria region.
- Be willing to voluntarily participate in the study.
- Be able to communicate efficiently in either English or Afrikaans.

The selected teachers had to:

- Be teachers that the participants trusted.
- Be willing to voluntarily participate in the study.

Armed with knowing exactly what kind of participant I wished to include in my research study I set out to find individuals that could assist me in answering the research question. **Snowball sampling** allowed me to search for individuals that could provide relevant information pertaining to the topic under study by means of predetermined participatory criteria (Patton, 2001).

I have to mention that I was under the impression that finding research participants is easy. Due to the sensitivity of the issue at hand my assumption turned out to be incorrect. Using snowball sampling to search for desirable research participants turned out to be the most tedious exercise I was exposed to during the research process. Six of the nine schools I visited seeking their assistance declined because they believed that the level of legal risk involved in such a project was too high. The three learners from the three schools that indicated that they were interested in participating disappeared after the introductory meeting I conducted with them. This meant that I had to start all over again.

I then decided to swallow my pride and ask for the assistance of a teacher who self-identifies as lesbian. I took a chance in asking for her assistance not knowing what her response would

be. Luckily her response was positive as she agreed to assist me in identifying and orientating the learner participants and their parents. I requested her assistance because she is 25 years old therefore the possibility that she knew lesbians that were still in secondary school was high. Her presence during the orientation of the learner participants helped me to establish a sense of trust and a good working relationship with them as they regard her as their mentor. Her presence during my initial meetings with the parents assisted me in gaining the confidence and trust of the learner participants' parents. According to Patton (2001) this form of sampling is called **opportunistic, coincidental or emergent sampling** as the researcher took advantage of the unexpected to reach a preset goal.

I selected the learner participants based on the fact that they met the participatory requirements. The learner participants were all self-identified lesbians between the ages of 13 and 19. They understood and spoke English well because their language of learning and teaching is English. Their parents/guardians and their teachers were eager to participate in the study because they were aware of what the lesbian learners were experiencing at school. I was happy too because I finally met research partners that could assist me in obtaining rich information that I could use to answer my research question (Henning et al., 2004).

### **3.4.2 PROCEDURE**

I started the sampling process by conducting orientation meetings with the principals and the school based support team (SBST)<sup>11</sup> coordinators of the nine schools identified as schools that would be able to assist me finding research participants. These schools were identified as possible research sites based on information obtained from the learning support educators who serves them.

The objective of the orientation meeting with the principals was to 1) request permission to include a self-identified lesbian learner and a teacher from their schools in the research study; and 2) to orientate the principal and the SBST coordinator with regards to the nature and the purpose of the research study, the role of the learners and teacher participants, voluntary participation, confidentiality, the possible risks that the participants might be exposed to during the research process and the ethical aspects that I had to adhere to during the process of research. I shared the same information with the lesbian learners identified by the three schools who indicated that they were interested in participating. Unfortunately these learners chose not to continue after the orientation meeting and withdrew from the research study prematurely.

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<sup>11</sup> The acronym SBST/ILST refers to a school based support team whose function is 1) to support learners experiencing barriers to learning and 2) to support teachers in providing appropriate support to learners experiencing barriers to learning (Guidelines for Full-service/Inclusive school 2010)

After a month of searching for lesbian secondary school learners, without any success, I met the lesbian teacher mentioned previously. My meeting with her as well as my experience with the school principals led me to believe that a change in strategy was necessary. At this point in time I was absolutely sure that starting the selection process by approaching the principals first should not have been my point of departure.

My point of departure shifted, I now knew that I had to approach the learners and their parents first if I wanted to succeed in finding research participants. With the assistance of the lesbian teacher I arranged and conducted an orientation meeting with the five lesbian learners she identified. Three of them committed themselves to voluntarily participate in the study upon which I met with their parents to orientate them and to ask for their permission to include their daughters in my research study. Their parents granted permission for them to be included in my research study. Meeting new people through snowball and incidental sampling will be the moments that I remember as the best moments I experienced on my research journey.

I then met with the principals of the learner participants' schools and the teachers selected by them. I orientated the principals and the selected teachers in the same way I did with the previous nine schools and obtained their consent. The parents, learners, principals and teachers were requested to sign a letter of informed consent after indicating that they were willing to voluntarily participate in the research study.

I included the teachers as participants because I consider them to be valuable sources of information in terms of the learner participants' experiences at school. I consider the time that I spend with the learner participants, their parents and their teachers as a blessing for they opened my eyes to a world that was unknown to me. I would be forever grateful to them for granting me the opportunity to become part of their lives even if it was only for a short period of time.

Examples of the letters addressed to the principals, parents, teachers and learners, explaining the nature and purpose of the research study are included in Appendix D. Examples of the informed consent forms signed by the research participants are included in Appendix E.

**Table 3.1: Description of Participants**

Participants	Vulnerability status	Institutional affiliation	Reason for participation
Three self-identified lesbian secondary school learners.	The participants may be at risk because of their sexual orientation. The participants are between the ages of 13 and 19. Parental consent was obtained for all the participants.	The participants are enrolled at two different public secondary schools in Pretoria.	The participants are suited to describe their experiences at school. The participants are suited to describe the impact their experiences have on their emotional wellbeing.

Participants	Vulnerability status	Institutional affiliation	Reason for participation
Three secondary school teachers selected by the learner participants.	These teachers were selected by the learners because they are part of their support structure at school.	The selected secondary school teachers are employed at the learner participants' schools.	<p>The selected teachers are suited to provide important information on the experiences of the lesbian learners enrolled at their schools.</p> <p>The selected teachers are suited to provide insight into the challenges faced by the lesbian learners enrolled at their schools. They are also suited to give insight into the successes experienced by the lesbian learners enrolled at their schools.</p> <p>The selected teachers are suited to provide information on their role in supporting the lesbian learners at school.</p>

### 3.5 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

The data collected was obtained from semi-structured interviews, document studies and observations. According to Merriam (2002) these data collection strategies are considered as the three traditional sources for data collection in qualitative research.

I started the process of data collection by establishing a relationship of trust between the learner participants and myself (Cohen et al., 2002). I utilized the orientation meetings that I conducted with the learner participants, their parents and their teachers to 1) introduce myself; 2) create an opportunity in which we could get to know each other; and 3) explain the nature and the purpose of the research study. I am of opinion that my visits to the learner participants homes, the inclusion of their teachers and the assistance I received from my lesbian colleague made an undeniable contribution to the establishment of a relationship of trust and unconditional acceptance between me, the learners and their parents. The second meeting I had with the learner participants took the form of a picnic which allowed us the opportunity to spend a whole day together. On this day we (the lesbian teacher, the learner participants and I) learned more about each other in terms of our likes, dislikes, culture, lifestyle and sexual orientation. It provided us with time that was necessary to become comfortable and safe in each other's company. Having the participants feel safe and accepted in my presence was important to me hence I made every effort to show them that I am willing to enter their world without any prejudice or judgement. I believe that I finally earned their trust when I accepted their invitation to the annual lesbian award ceremony organised by the Lesbian Organisation of Gauteng. The evening was different, interesting and fun.

All my encounters with the participants, especially the learner participants, were facilitated in such a way that I could get to know them and keep them safe from harm at the same time. Below follows a description of the methods that I used to collect the data:

### **3.5.1 PRIMARY DATA COLLECTION METHOD**

Due to the high level of sensitivity of this research study I collected all the data myself.

#### **3.5.1.1 Semi-structured interviews**

I selected semi-structured interviews as my principal mode of data collection. De Vos et al. (2005, p. 292) define semi-structured interviews as interviews that are organised around particular areas of interest, while still allowing considerable flexibility in scope and depth.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six participants, three self-identified lesbian learners and three teachers selected by the learner participants. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001) the use of multiple sources leads to a rich description of the phenomena under study.

The multiple meetings that I had with the learner participants, their parents and their teachers were time consuming yet rewarding as it contributed to the establishment of a relationship of trust and respect between me and the participants. Gaining the participants' trust and respect helped me to set the participants at ease as the topic under study was sensitive. Sharing their stories with me sometimes evoked feelings of sadness, frustration and anger as issues such as fear, rejection, self-acceptance, rape, substance abuse and poverty are issues most people do not find easy to share. Taking the participants through this journey was not easy but I would not have done it any other way as it gave me the opportunity to make new friends and it gave me the insight that led to a change in the way I view the lesbian community.

I audio recorded all the interviews with the permission of the participants. The audio recordings were transcribed for closer analysis and interpretation after each interview. (De Vos et al., 2005). I chose to transcribe all the information obtained myself to protect the participants' privacy and confidentiality. See Appendix B for a collection of semi-structured interview schedules and Appendix F transcripts of the interviews conducted with the learner participants and their teachers.

The use of the semi-structured interview as a data collection strategy was most suitable as it offered me the opportunity to have in-depth discussions with the participants. Its flexibility allowed me to venture into unexpected avenues or new lines of enquiry that emerged during the interviews, e.g. the participant's childhood, their relationships with their fathers as well as difficulties they experienced in establishing romantic relationships (De Vos et al., 2005). It

also allowed me to gain a sense of structure as I could determine and divide the questions that I wanted to ask into the themes that I wanted to address. Keeping the questions to the learners and the teachers more or less the same produced a comprehensive and comparable set of data that could be coded and tabularized. At the end of the data collection process I made use of descriptive statistics to examine the comparisons and differences between the data obtained from the three different case studies (De Vos et al., 2005).

### **3.5.2 SECONDARY DATA COLLECTION**

In addition to the semi-structured interviews conducted with the participants, I studied the written work of the learner participants as well as formal documents provided to me by their schools. I also kept a research journal in which I recorded my field notes and reflections on my observations and experiences during the process of data collection (Gray, 2009; De Vos et al., 2005). Below follows a more detailed description of the secondary data collection methods that I used:

#### **3.5.2.1 Document studies**

De Vos et al. (2005, p. 316) describe personal documents as “personal accounts of a participant’s (author’s) environment as well as his/her perceptions and interpretations of his/her own life and the world around him.” Unfortunately none of the learner participants has ever recorded their experiences, feelings or thoughts in the form of diary entries, essays or poetry. To give them an opportunity to put their thoughts and feelings in writing I decided to have them write an essay in which they described their experiences at school. I also asked them to write a letter to a trusted friend asking for advice on how to address a particular situation they are confronted with at school.

This process was facilitated over a period of two days after school at a venue chosen by the learner participants. I explained the nature of descriptive essays, friendly letters and the writing of poetry and I provided them with topics that served as a guideline for their writing. Examples of the written activity the learner participants had to complete and their completed written work is included in Appendix G.

The preparation, collection and analysis of personal documents were done prior to the commencement of the interviews to obtain a sense of what to expect in terms of the experiential history, English language ability, emotional status and background of the learner participants. All documents were copied, organised, labelled and filed according to date, author and purpose to help with the analysis and to facilitate the easy return of the documents (Rule & Vaughn, 2011).

### **3.5.2.2 Participatory observations**

Patton (2002) states that observational data is used to describe research situations, activities, participants as well as the participants' perceptions of the activities. I specifically used participatory observation to learn more about the venues the learner participants chose for us to work in, the participants' sense of self-confidence (especially when surrounded by heterosexuals), their sense of self-acceptance and their feelings towards heterosexuals and gay men. I did this by observing 1) the surroundings and people present at the venues of their choice; 2) their body language, facial expressions and tone of voice when responding to questions and activities and 3) their responses to my actions. In order to help me remember every experience I had with them, I recorded my observations in my field notes after each meeting (Maree, 2010).

### **3.5.2.3 Field notes and reflective journal**

Shaw (2010) describes a reflective journal as a journal that is kept by the researcher throughout the process of research. Information such as the initial research idea, data gathering activities and observations as well as the researcher's reflective notes are recorded in such a journal. In my field notes I included information on dates, places and types of activities as well as observations made in terms of the non-verbal behaviour of the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). I also reflected on the quality and effectivity of each data collection activity as well as my own experiences, thoughts and feelings throughout the research process. The field notes came in useful as it helped me to reflect on the details of my journey and the choices that I made throughout the research process (De Vos et al., 2005). Extracts from my field and reflective notes are included in Appendix H.

### **3.5.2.4 Field visits**

I conducted 36 field visits which included 12 introductory and orientation meetings with selected schools' principals and their SBST coordinators, nine introductory and orientation meetings with possible learner, parent and teacher participants, one field excursion, two meetings to facilitate written work done by learner participants, six semi-structured interviews with the learner and teacher participants and six member checking meetings with the learner and teacher participants. The process of data collection is shown in table 3.2 below.

**Table 3.2: Field Visits**

DATE	ACTIVITY	PURPOSE	DURATION	OUTCOME OF VISITS
<b>FIELD VISITS: DAY 1-9 (RELATIONSHIP BUILDING)</b>				
2-30/09/2013	<p>Introduction and orientation meetings were conducted with the principals and SBST coordinators of nine secondary schools in Tshwane South district.</p> <p>Research material: Proposal, letter from GDE granting me permission to conduct research in the schools in Pretoria, letters of request, informed consent forms and research proposal.</p>	<p>To:</p> <p>Request permission to conduct research at their schools.</p> <p>Explain the nature and purpose of the research study, the role of the participants, the potential risks, the limits to confidentiality involved and voluntary participation.</p> <p>Request the assistance of SBST coordinator in terms of the identification of learner participants.</p> <p>Request permission to gain access to official documents such as academic report cards, class registers and incident reports if a learner from their school is to participate in the research study.</p> <p>Discuss the data collection schedule.</p>	1 hour per school visit.	<p>Three principals indicated that they are willing to grant me the opportunity to meet with the self-identified lesbian learners enrolled at their schools. They also gave me permission to interview the teachers selected by the learners who will be participating in the research study. They had one condition only and that was that I obtain the permission of the parents before commencing with the research study.</p> <p>Six of the schools that I asked for assistance did not allow me to interview their learners or teachers. These schools were either unaware of any self-identified lesbian learners enrolled at their school or they were concerned about the legal implications that such a request might have for the school.</p>
<b>FIELD VISIT : DAY 12 (RELATIONSHIP BUILDING)</b>				
08/10/2013	<p>An introductory and orientation meeting was conducted with a lesbian educator who indicated that she would assist me in meeting self-identified lesbian learners who might be willing to participate in the research study.</p> <p>Research material: Permission from Gauteng Department of Education to conduct research in schools in Pretoria, letters of request, informed consent</p>	<p>To:</p> <p>Explain the nature and purpose of the research study, the role of the participants, the potential risks, the limits to confidentiality involved and voluntary participation.</p> <p>Request her assistance in terms of the identification of possible learner participants.</p> <p>Request her assistance in terms of introducing me to possible learner participants and their parents.</p> <p>Request her assistance in terms of building a relationship with the</p>	1 hour.	<p>The outcome of this meeting was positive. The teacher agreed to assist me in meeting and orientating the possible learner participants. She regarded her assistance as a contribution to helping heterosexual teachers, parents and learners understand what lesbians in South African secondary schools are experiencing.</p>



DATE	ACTIVITY	PURPOSE	DURATION	OUTCOME OF VISITS
	forms and research proposal.	possible learner participants.		
<b>FIELD VISIT : DAY 13 (RELATIONSHIP BUILDING)</b>				
09/10/2013	<p>A group introductory and orientation meeting was conducted with five possible learner participants identified by a lesbian educator I met while training their staff.</p> <p>Research material: Permission from Gauteng Department of Education to conduct research in schools in Pretoria, letters of request and informed consent forms.</p>	<p>To:</p> <p>Meet the five possible learner participants.</p> <p>Explain the nature and purpose of the research study, the role of the participants, the potential risks, the limits to confidentiality involved and voluntary participation.</p> <p>Request their participation.</p> <p>Obtain informed consent/assent.</p> <p>Discuss the data collection schedule.</p>	1½ hours	<p>All five identified learners (grade 10 and 11 learners) indicated that they were willing to voluntarily participate in the research study and signed the assent/consent form. They all wanted to make a contribution in helping their educators and peers understand what they are experiencing at school.</p> <p>In the end only three of them committed to participating in the research study.</p>
<b>FIELD VISIT : DAY 14-16 ( RELATIONSHIP BUILDING)</b>				
10/10/2013 11/10/2013	<p>Introductory and orientation meetings were conducted with the parents/guardians of the three learners who indicated their interest in participating in the research study.</p> <p>Meeting with the guardian of learner participant A.</p> <p>Meeting with the parent of learner participant B, who is also the guardian of learner participant C.</p> <p>Research material: Permission from Gauteng Department of Education to conduct research in schools in Pretoria, letters of request and informed consent forms.</p>	<p>To:</p> <p>Meet the parents of the learner participants.</p> <p>Obtain informed consent from the parent in order to include their daughters in the research study.</p> <p>Request the participation of the parents in the research study.</p> <p>Explain the nature, purpose and objectives of the research study.</p> <p>Discuss the data collection schedule.</p> <p>Discuss the role of the parents in the research study.</p> <p>Obtain informed consent.</p>	1-1½ hours per meeting.	<p>The learner participants' parents/guardians indicated that they are happy to have their daughters participate in the study. They also indicated that they are willing to share information on their daughters' experiences at school even though it may be limited. Consent forms were signed by all the parent/guardians.</p>
<b>FIELD VISIT: DAY 17 (RELATIONSHIP BUILDING)</b>				
19/10/2013	Second meeting with learner participants - field excursion.	To allow us the opportunity to get to know each other.	8 hours	A relationship of trust and mutual respect was established.

DATE	ACTIVITY	PURPOSE	DURATION	OUTCOME OF VISITS
<b>FIELD VISIT: DAY 18-19 (DATA COLLECTION ACTIVITY 1)</b>				
23-24/10/2013	<p>Third and fourth meetings with learner participants- preparation of written pieces.</p> <p>Research material: Activity on creative writing-see annexure H.</p>	<p>To: Facilitate written work activity. The learner participants were requested to write an essay, a letter or a poem in which they described their experiences in secondary school.</p> <p>Conduct participatory observation.</p> <p>To write field notes and journal reflections on observations made.</p>	<p>2 hours (day 18)</p> <p>1hour and 30 minutes (day 19)</p>	<p>Each learner participant produced an essay in which she described her experiences at school. Each learner participant wrote a letter to a friend asking for advice on how to address a difficult situation that she was confronted with at school.</p>
<b>FIELD VISITS: DAY 20-23 (DATA COLLECTION ACTIVITY 2)</b>				
05/11/2013 06/11/2013 12/11/2013	<p>Fifth meeting with learner participant A.</p> <p>Fifth meeting with learner participant B.</p> <p>Fifth meeting with learner participant C.</p>	<p>To conduct a semi-structured interview with each learner participant.</p>	<p>2-2½ hours per interview.</p>	<p>The learner participant was surprisingly comfortable with sharing their experiences in secondary school with me. Some of the questions did evoke some degree of emotion as issues such as rape, rejection by their peers and parents as well as poverty were difficult to share.</p>
<b>FIELD VISIT: DAY 26-28 &amp; 30 (DATA COLLECTION ACTIVITY 4)</b>				
18/06/ 2014 22/07/2014	<p>Meeting with principal and selected teachers of learner participant A and B.</p> <p>Meeting with principal and selected teacher of learner participant C.</p> <p>Research material: Permission from Gauteng Department of Education to conduct research in schools in Pretoria, letters of request, informed consent forms and research proposal.</p>	<p>To: Meet the principal of the school at which learner participants A and B is attending.</p> <p>Explain the nature and purpose of the research study, the role of the participants, the potential risks, the limits to confidentiality involved and voluntary participation.</p> <p>Request the principal's permission to include teachers from his school in the research study.</p> <p>To ask the teachers selected by learner participants A and B to participate in the research study.</p>	<p>1½ hours (Meeting with principal - ½ an hour, meeting with teachers - 1 hour)</p>	<p>After informing the principal about the nature and purpose of the research study he gave permission for me to speak to the teachers selected by learner participants A and B.</p> <p>After explaining the nature and purpose of the research study, the role of the participants, the potential risks, the limits to confidentiality involved and voluntary participation both teachers indicated that they are willing to voluntarily participate in an interview regarding the experiences of lesbian learners at their school.</p>

DATE	ACTIVITY	PURPOSE	DURATION	OUTCOME OF VISITS
		<p>Discuss the role of the educators in the research study.</p> <p>Discuss the data collection schedule.</p> <p>Obtain informed consent from the principal and educators of learner participants A and B to participate in the research study.</p>		The principal as well as the teachers felt that it is important for heterosexual teachers and learners to understand what it means to be lesbian.
<b>FIELD VISIT: DAY 29-31 (DATA COLLECTION ACTIVITY 5)</b>				
03/09/2014	An interview was conducted with the teacher participant A selected by learner participant A.	To conduct semi-structured interviews regarding the experiences of lesbian learners in secondary school.	(6-8 hours) 2-2½ hours per educator.	
06/08/2014	An interview was conducted with the teacher participant B selected by learner participant B.			
13/08/2014	An interview was conducted with the teacher participant C selected by learner participant C.  Research material: semi-structured interview developed to conduct interviews with the teachers of participants A-C.			
<b>FIELD VISIT : DAY 32-34 (MEMBER CHECKING)</b>				
4/09/2014	Third meeting with teacher participants selected by learner participants B and C.	To verify and validate the accuracy of the data collected in data collection activity 5.	2 hours (1 hour per teacher)	
7/09/2014	Third meeting with teacher participants selected by learner participant A.  Research material: transcribed teacher interviews.		1 hour	

## **3.6 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

The objective of data collection and analysis in qualitative studies is to build a coherent interpretation of the phenomena under study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). In order to reach this objective I made use of the following steps:

### **3.6.1 STEP 1: ORGANISING THE DATA**

Throughout the process of data collection I ensured that all field notes and transcriptions were completed and that all the gaps in the data were filled (De Vos et al., 2005) by clarifying unclear information obtained during the interviews telephonically.

I organised and managed the data obtained by labelling the learner participants' written work, the transcriptions obtained from semi-structured interviews, the personal and official documents and my field notes according to data type, date, time and place where the data was collected (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). I also ensured that my field notes as well as my reflective notes on my experiences and thoughts during the process of data collection and analysis were completed and recorded in my journal on a regular basis (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). It is only at the end of my journey through the process of data collection and analysis that I realised the importance of my field and reflective notes. Without these notes I would not have been able to provide an audit trail that explained my progression from raw material to the integrated interpretation presented (Shaw, 2010 in Forrester, 2013). I kept the data that I collected safe by 1) copying the recordings of the interviews conducted on a CD, 2) making copies of the original documents collected and 3) making copies of the transcriptions of the interviews conducted. These copies were helpful as I could cut and paste the information obtained according to the themes I identified in the literature, the written work of the learners and the interviews that I conducted. To keep my original documents, the CD and the transcriptions of interviews conducted safe, I kept them in a safe place at home (De Vos et al., 2005).

### **3.6.2 STEP 2: IMMERSION IN THE DATA**

I familiarised myself with the data by going through the transcripts more than once (De Vos et al., 2005). I made descriptive (summary) and interpretive notes indicating my understanding and interpretation of the data in the column provided for it on the transcripts. An example of these notes is included as Appendix C. Reflective notes on interesting aspects that emerged from the data were recorded in my reflective journal (Shaw, 2010 in Forrester, 2013). Extracts from my reflective journal is included as Appendix H.

### **3.6.3 STEP 3: GENERATING THEMES**

Biggam (2010) states that designing data collection tools according to the themes and subthemes that occur in literature previously written on the subject under study, makes the collection and the analysis of the data much easier. Hence I decided to cluster the questions included in the semi-structured interviews according to the themes and sub-themes I identified in the literature. I analysed the data accordingly and I included new themes and subthemes as it emerged during the interviews.

### **3.6.4 STEP 4: CODING THE DATA**

I made use of headings identified in the literature review and colour to code the thematic categories included in the semi-structured interviews and transcripts. I chose to code the themes as described above because I wanted to determine whether the experiences of the lesbian learners included in my study correlates with existing theory on this subject (Biggam, 2010).

### **3.6.5 STEP 5: TESTING EMERGENT UNDERSTANDING**

Before I could test my emergent understanding of the data obtained I had to analyse each case study individually. This was done by making use of the same process of analysis for each case. I chose to analyse each case individually because I followed a multiple case study design where each case has its own participants. After this process was completed I compared and integrated the data obtained (Shaw, 2010 in Forrester, 2013). Some of the information obtained from the participants overlapped and some of it was totally different. I tested whether or not the research findings were able to answer the question concerning the phenomenon under study (De Vos et al., 2005) by correlating the data obtained with the predetermined headings under which it was categorised.

### **3.6.6 STEP 6: SEARCHING FOR ALTERNATIVE UNDERSTANDINGS**

I critically studied the themes and patterns that occurred to explain why they occurred. The objective of this exercise was to demonstrate that the explanation offered for identifying specific themes was the most credible (De Vos et al., 2005).

### **3.6.7 STEP 7: WRITING A REPORT FOR PRESENTING THE STUDY**

Finally I created an integrated narrative account of what the participants said, their reflections on their experiences and the researcher's interpretation thereof. The researcher tried to present an account that adequately represented the lesbian participants' experiences in the secondary schools selected for this research study (Shaw, 2010 in Forrester, 2013). Extracts of the

integrated narrative accounts compiled as it grew throughout the study are included in Appendix F.

### **3.7 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY**

According to Maree (2010) it is important to assess the validity and the reliability of the data analysis, findings and conclusions if the results are to be meaningful to others. I used credibility, dependability, transferability and conformability as criteria for assessing and validating the trustworthiness of this study. A more detailed discussion of the criteria used follows below:

#### **3.7.1 CREDIBILITY/TRUSTWORTHINESS**

The trustworthiness of a research study is concerned with whether or not the findings and conclusions made by the researcher are acceptable to others (e.g. the research participants, peer researchers and the academics in the field of psychology (Maree, 2010).

Bryman (2004) explains that in order to ensure that the research study is acceptable to others it is important to assess and confirm the findings and conclusions made by the researcher. Stipulating that research studies be assessed and confirmed, guarantees that the research studies are open for evaluation by research participants, peer researchers and academics in the field of psychology. It also ensures that research studies are conducted according to good practice.

In order to enhance the credibility of the research study I verified and validated the data collected by providing copies of the transcriptions and draft report to participants requesting oral and written feedback on the accuracy of the content-member checking (Creswell et al., 2009). Bryman (2008) states that checking the findings obtained from a research study with the case study participants enhance the validity of the study.

The following triangulation methods were also used to enhance the credibility or internal validity of the findings I made:

#### **➤ Triangulation of data collection methods**

I used different data collection methods (e.g. semi-structured interviews, personal and formal documents obtained from the participants and participatory observations) to confirm the consistency of my findings. Patton (2001) states that studies where only one method of data collection was used were more vulnerable to error than studies where multiple methods of data collection were used.

### ➤ **Triangulation of data sources**

By taking the opinions and perspectives of all the participants in each case study into account I increased the possibility of obtaining an in-depth understanding of the experiences of lesbian learners in South African secondary schools. Self-identified lesbian learners and teachers selected by the learner participants were requested to participate.

Furthermore, I used existing literature as reference to verify whether the findings I made were consistent with or different from existing research (Hartley, 2004). In addition guidance with regard to conducting the research process and interpreting the data was provided by my research supervisor.

#### **3.7.2 TRANSFERABILITY**

According to Babbie and Mouton (2001) and Bryman (2004) transferability refers to the possibility of applying the findings of a particular study to other contexts. According to Willig (2008, p. 87) “the cases in a multiple case study do not constitute a representative sample in the same way a participants’ survey or experiment represent a particular population.” Willig (2008) explains that because of this, the findings of case study research can never be directly applied to other unexplored cases. It can however be used to refine theory giving rise to explanations that can potentially be applied to new cases. Merriam (1998) and Pitney (2004) defend the value of case study research by explaining that the objective of case study research is to gain an in-depth understanding of phenomena, not to find out what is generally true of many. I needed to understand each lesbian participant’s experience of life in a South African secondary school hence I decided to analyse each case individually before comparing and integrating the findings. I remained mindful not to generalise the findings and conclusions obtained from my work.

#### **3.7.3 DEPENDABILITY**

According to Payne and Payne (2004) dependability refers to whether or not the findings of a study are applicable. In order to ensure that the research findings of the study were applicable I audio-taped and transcribed all the interviews conducted with the participants verbatim. Maree (2010) advises that it is pertinent that the decisions the researcher makes throughout the research process as well as how he/she arrived at his/her interpretation are transparent and available for others to see. Therefore I made use of a reflective journal in which all field notes about every phase in the research process were recorded. I also obtained the assistance of a colleague who is familiar with conducting research to act as an auditing peer who offered continuous assistance in ensuring that proper procedures were followed during and after the

research process. An extract from my research journal indicating my sense of decision making is included in Appendix H

### **3.7.4 CONFORMABILITY**

Bryman (2004) states that conformability refers to the degree in which the researcher allows his values to influence the research findings. Bryman (2004) indicates that conformability means that although complete objectivity is not possible, the researcher must make it his/her priority to refrain from allowing his/her values to influence the findings of the study. I strived to reach a high level of conformability by remaining neutral and objective under all circumstances. I also provided a draft of the research report to the participants to comment on and confirm the accuracy of the findings (Maree, 2010).

## **3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

In conducting the study, I adhered to the research ethical guidelines as stipulated by the Ethical Committee of the Faculty of Education of the University of Pretoria (<http://www.ais.up.ac.za/research/docs/code-ethics.pdf>.) and the Health Professions Council of South Africa (<http://www.hpcsa.co.za>). My conduct during the research study was guided by the following values-respect for persons, respect for knowledge, and respect for democratic values and human rights as envisaged by the South African Constitution. The following ethical principles were taken into consideration.

### **3.8.1 THE PRINCIPLES OF INFORMED CONSENT AND VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

Allan (2008) states that the researcher must ensure that the research participants are fully informed about the nature, purpose, potential risks and limits to confidentiality involved before data collection commences. According to Allan (2008) and Maree et al. (2010) the researcher is required to inform the participants (prior to the commencement of the research) that they are free to participate or decline from participation and that they can withdraw from the research at any given time.

Hence I drew up a letter addressed to the participants in which I explained the previously mentioned aspects. I conducted preliminary discussions with them in person and on separate occasions to ensure that their consent was based on full and open information on the nature and purpose of the study as well as the potential risks and limits to confidentiality involved (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). I also informed the participants that they are not obligated to participate and that if they decide to participate, but change their minds later, they could withdraw their participation at any time. Individuals who voluntarily showed interest and



willingness to participate in the study were requested to sign a consent form in which the research protocol to be followed by the researcher was highlighted (Creswell et al., 2009).

### **3.8.2 PRIVACY, CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY**

The code of ethics is adamant that precautions must be taken to protect the identity of the research participants and the research locations. To protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants I explained to the participants that their personal information will be camouflaged under the protection of armour of anonymity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). I kept all information obtained from the participants private and pseudonyms instead of the schools' or the participants' names were used in the final report of the study (Maree et al., 2010). At the end of the research process all names and addresses were removed from interview transcripts and replaced by identification numbers (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). The researcher ensured that all the participants' personal documents were returned and that all field notes, tape recorded material and transcripts were secured according to the requirements of the Ethical Committee of the Faculty of Education of the University of Pretoria (<http://www.ais.up.ac.za/research/docs/code-ethics.pdf>.) and the Health Professions Council of South Africa (<http://www.hpcsa.co.za>).

### **3.8.3 THE PRINCIPLE OF TRUST**

In order to maintain the trust of the participants I kept the participants informed about any changes I made to the research project (Human-Vogel, 2007). By collaboratively working with their parents, teachers and their mentor I strived to gain the trust of the learner participants as I needed them to feel comfortable and safe in my presence. I refrained from exploiting the trust of my participants for personal gain or benefit by deceiving them or by betraying their confidence in me (Mouton, 2001). Furthermore, I ensured that the data I used was accurate by means of member checking and by refraining from the use of fabrications, fraudulent materials or omissions of any kind (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

### **3.8.4 THE PRINCIPLE OF SAFETY IN PARTICIPATION**

This principle requires that the researcher ensures that the participants are never placed in situations where they could be harmed or embarrassed because of insensitive research practices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). To protect the participants from harm all interviews were conducted after school at a place that was safe and comfortable for both the participant and myself. The learner participants chose to have their interviews conducted at a safe place close to home, their parents chose to be interviewed at home and their teachers chose to be interviewed at school. No information regarding the data obtained from the participants or their schools was disclosed to anyone but my supervisor (Human-Vogel, 2007). My

colleague/peer researcher who provided assistance to me and my supervisor, was requested to sign an agreement of confidentiality.

Because the physical and emotional safety of the participants was important to me, I strived to keep them safe and to remain honest, respectful, trustworthy, empathetic and supportive throughout the research process. I also provided the participants with my supervisor's as well as my own contact details if there were to be any concerns, uncertainties or dissatisfactions as to how the research was conducted.

### **3.9 THE LIMITATIONS AND BENEFITS OF THE STUDY**

Due to the fact that I, the researcher, was solely responsible for the collection and analysis of data the possibility for researcher bias in the findings and conclusions is possible. I did however use member checking as a strategy to ensure the credibility of the study and to eradicate possible researcher bias.

A delimitation of case studies as design is that the findings cannot be generalised to the greater South African population. The findings can however expand on existing theory and give rise to explanations that can potentially be used in a qualitative study that includes participants from schools all over South Africa. These findings will also be made available to the Education and Operations Support unit (EOS) at the Gauteng Department of Education, Tshwane South District who is responsible for ensuring the safety of all learners in school through the development and implementation of preventative programs in terms of drug abuse, teenage pregnancy and bullying.

### **3.10 CONCLUSION**

This chapter described the methodological approach of my study. It provided a more detailed description of the selected research approach and design as well as the chosen methods of data collection and analysis. The results of the data analysis and the categorization of themes will be presented in chapter 4.

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## CHAPTER 4

### PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH RESULTS

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reports the outcomes of my enquiry by presenting data that emerged during the thematic analysis. I present the data according to predetermined themes and subthemes as discovered in literature. Unedited quotations from the research transcripts are included as descriptive data to enhance the discussion of the themes.

#### 4.2 RESULTS OF THEMATIC ANALYSIS

I chose to present the results obtained from thematic analysis under six predetermined themes containing two to seven subthemes each. The content of these themes embodies the perceptions of the learners and teachers included in this study. The chapter is therefore structured according to the predetermined six main themes, their subthemes and data categories.

- The negative social and academic experiences of lesbian learners in secondary school
- The aspects that contribute to the negative social and academic experiences of lesbian learners in secondary school
- The psychological difficulties experienced by lesbian learners in secondary school and the effect it has on their psychological wellbeing
- The positive social and academic experiences of lesbian learners in secondary school
- Factors that contribute to the positive social and academic experiences of lesbian learners in secondary school
- Recommendations made by learner and teacher participants

Table 4.1 below provides an outline of the different themes and the data sources where data regarding the said perceptions was extrapolated.

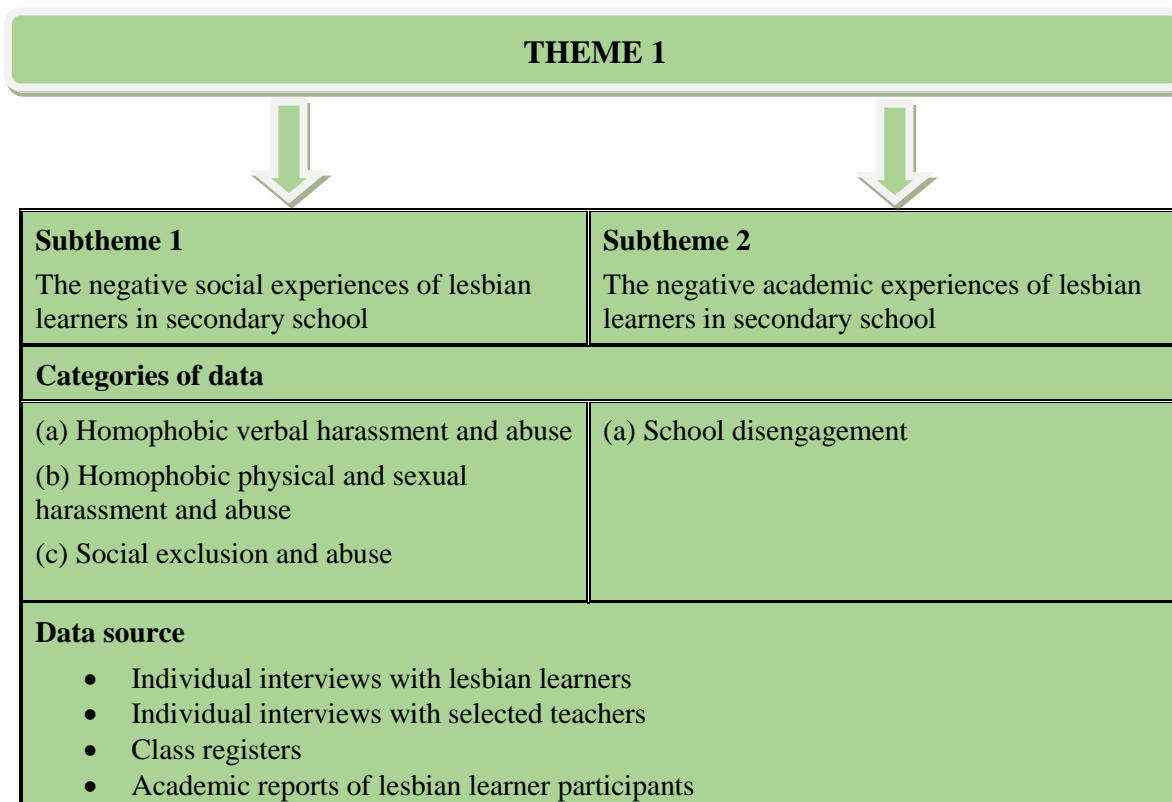
**Table 4.1: Visual presentation of themes and data sources**

Themes	Data sources									Observations
	Individual interview	Individual interview	Individual interview	Individual interview	Individual interview	Individual interview	Document studies	Class registers	Academic reports	
Theme 1	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Theme 2	√	√	√	√	√	√	√			√
Theme 3	√	√	√	√	√	√	√			√
Theme 4	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√	√
Theme 5	√	√	√	√	√	√	√			√
Theme 6	√	√	√	√	√	√				√

**4.2.1 THEME 1: THE NEGATIVE SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES OF LESBIAN LEARNERS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL**

Theme 1 as summarized in the table below presents the learner participants’ view on their negative social and academic experiences at school. The negative social experiences of the lesbian learners included in this study are discussed:

**Table 4.2: Theme 1 – Summary**



#### 4.2.1.1 The negative social experiences of lesbian learners in secondary school

##### (a) Homophobic verbal harassment and abuse

In accordance with previous research (Coyle & Kritzing, 2002; Athanases & Larrabee, 2003; Kosciw et al., 2009; Pendragon, 2010) the data that emerged from this study revealed that homophobic verbal harassment occurred most prominent in the schools included in this study. In contribution to current literature on this topic this research study revealed that there is a difference in the manner in which the learners and the teachers in the schools included in this study inflicts homophobic verbal harassment and abuse on the lesbian learners.

In agreement with various researchers (Coyle & Kritzing, 2002; Athanases & Larrabee, 2003; Kosciw et al., 2009; Pendragon, 2010) the lesbian learner participants reported that some of their **teachers** use constant reprimands to change, interrogation, insults, humiliation, sarcasm and name calling when referring or addressing them in terms of their sexual orientation. I provide supporting data from the research transcripts that demonstrates the previously mentioned:

##### *Constant reprimands to change*

*“Why are you behaving like that, why are you wearing boys clothes. I explained to her this is the way I am, I can’t change it. She did not understand. She asked for my father’s numbers and called him. She told him that she wants to take me to church so that the pastor prays for me and then one day I will change.”* (Learner participant C, lines 90-97. This was said in response to a teacher interrogating learner participant C regarding her lesbian sexual orientation).

##### *Interrogation and insults*

*“They kept on asking me questions. Some were very difficult to answer because they will ask me if I know my father. So I will say: “yes, I can’t describe him if he arrives.” Then she said” “ It is because you do not have a father that is why you wear trousers you are trying to make yourself a man when you are not a man.” So it was hurtful.”* (Learner participant C, lines 263-277).

*“When they want to talk to us they will just take us aside asking us if we are boys or what?”* (Learner participant A, lines 136-140).

##### *Humiliation*

*“It was serious, so it hurt me because the teachers do not know what I am going through.”* (Learner participant C, lines 259-260).

*“Yes, they laughed at me as if it was a joke. To me it was not a joke it was so painful.”* (Learner participant C, lines 276-277. This was said in response to what a teacher said about the cause of her sexual orientation).

*“Only tears came out in front of them but I did not say anything only tears came out.”* (Learner participant C, lines 279-281).

### ***Sarcasm***

*“Should I say thank you mam or thank you mister? So I will say: “mam, call me whatever you want I do not care”, and I will walk away and go sit down.”* (Learner participant C, lines 517-520)

### ***Name calling***

*“They call me names like mona mosate in Tswana. So that is not right?”* (Learner participant C, lines 295-297).

*“Some call me transi (transsexual) and some call me gay (a male homosexual).”* (Learner participant C, lines 305-306).

According to Francis and Msibi (2011) the most prominent derogatory names used to refer to lesbians in South African schools are Isitabane, Uvesubuso and Inkwili. In this research study it became apparent that the **teachers** included in this study, who do use derogatory words to refer to their lesbian learners, use words such as mona mosate (man-women), transi (transsexual) and gay (a male homosexual). The data obtained reflects the possibility that these teachers have never been reprimanded in terms of their unprofessional conduct.

As far as the **heterosexual learners** enrolled at the schools included in this study are concerned, the study revealed that they mostly use name calling, cursing, threats, blackmail and humiliation to persecute their lesbian counterparts. The lesbian learner participants reported that homophobic verbal harassment and abuse is mostly inflicted on them by the older boys in grade 10 and 11. I now provide supporting data which demonstrates the previously mentioned:

### ***Name calling***

*“Most of my other friends and classmates and people around the school they do tease us. When they see us they call us with names like Isitabane (women who wants to be men). They think we do not worship God because we are lesbians and all that. Even when we go on the pavement, maybe to go buy lunch at school, they will call us illuminatè (Devil worshipper/ Satanist).”* (Learner participant C, lines 169-176).

*“It continues almost everyday someone is saying something?” (Learner participant C, lines 186-187).*

*“Some boys they call me stabane when they are angry with me. If we exchange words they will start saying things like you are a stabane”. (Learner participant A, lines 171-173).*

### ***Cursing***

*“Ja, they swear at us. (Learner participant B, line 181)*

*“They use vulgar words and all that and they make sure that when they say that to you everyone can hear so that everyone can laugh at you.” (Learner participant B, lines 222-224).*

### ***Threats***

*“They will tell me that they will rape me and they will change me the way I am. After they have raped me and then tomorrow I will come wearing a skirt and stuff.” (Learner participant C, lines 340-348).*

*“No. I think it is very dangerous because some of the boys they tell me one they if I catch you, you will never be a lesbian again. Then I say to them I will never make a mistake of coming to your toilet.” (Learner participant A, lines 377-381).*

### ***Blackmail***

*“Let me say at school when we are entering the school gate the teacher who check the uniform waits at the gate. And maybe she forget to look at us like we just pass. The other boys will say you guys passed by mistake why did the teacher not see that you are wearing trousers while you are expected to wear skirts. At break they want us to buy them lunch or they will tell the teacher. They used to do those things. But I did not buy them lunch because I just told them the law of the school says this.” (Learner participant B, lines 390-398).*

### ***Humiliation***

*“In school I participate but when it comes to LO they go to this topic of sex and they will talk about different topics about sex. How people have sex and when they describe maybe give an example some will the class learners will say see Karabo they do anal sex and what not.” (Learner participant C, lines 1217-1224)*

*“It is hard when something like this happens, like people will stare at you the whole day and ask you questions.” (Learner participant C, lines 1226-1228)*

Most of these incidences were however never reported to the teachers or the principal. The lesbian learner participants reported that they believe that even though they do try and report such incidences it will be dismissed because any complaint linked to lesbianism are regarded as not worth listening to:

*LPB: “No I didn’t because I was afraid. Because I know that most of the teachers at school they don’t accept this thing of lesbianism.” (Learner participant B, lines 190-192).*

*Interviewer: Have you ever told the principal what these boys are saying?*

*LPA: No I didn’t. I can’t he will tell me why don’t wear a skirt and all that stuff. (Learner participant C, lines 379-380).*

The teachers included in this study confirmed that the lesbian learners do not report incidences of homophobic verbal abuse to them or their principals. According to the teachers the reason why such incidences are not reported is either 1) because homophobic harassment and abuse do not occur in their schools; or 2) the lesbian learners are hiding their negative experiences from them. Supporting data extracted from research transcripts that demonstrates the teachers’ lack of information with regard to the homophobic verbal abuse at their schools follows below:

*“But as for learner participant A and her friends here at school they have never been harassed or abused, unless maybe they hiding it and they don’t want to disclose it.” (Teacher participant A, lines 102-106).*

*“Ja, but in most cases they keep quiet. They die inside. They don’t speak it out.” (Teacher participant C, lines 116-120)*

Research by Macgillivray (2004) and Mikulski (2005) indicated that schools who do not address homophobic harassment contribute to homophobic harassment because they create the impression that discrimination against lesbian learners is acceptable. The lesbian learners are of opinion that the lack of understanding of lesbianism, the unwillingness of some heterosexual learners and teacher to change their behaviour, and a lack of safety measures specially designed to protect LGBT learners also contributes to homophobic harassment and abuse at school. Below follows data extracted from research transcripts that demonstrates the learners’ lack of understanding of lesbianism and their unwillingness to change their behaviour:

*“They think we do not worship God because we are lesbians and all that.” (Learner participant B, lines 173-175).*



*“Even though I explain to them they still do the same thing?” (Learner participant B, lines 207-208).*

**(b) Homophobic physical and sexual harassment and abuse**

Research by Wells and Polders (2005) indicated that the individuals who sexually violated the lesbian learners included in their study were mostly other pupils, followed by educators, principals and other members of the school staff. Research conducted by the Department of Education in 2008 indicated that the sexually violated lesbian learners’ perpetrators stated that they raped them to cure them from lesbianism.

The findings in this research study correlates with the above-mentioned as learner participant A and C reported that some of the older boys at school touch them inappropriately and they threaten to rape them in order to change their sexual orientation. Learner participant B indicated that she has never been sexually harassed or abused at school. It could be because learner participant B is bigger and taller than the average girl. None of the learner participants reported incidences of physical harassment or abuse at school. Below follows data extracted from the research transcripts that demonstrates learner participant A and C’s experience of sexual harassment at school:

*“Some will touch our buds and take advantage of us. Like they will come and tell us that they love us. When we tell them that we don’t love them they’ll tell us that they will rape us so I think they are serious.” (Learner participant C, lines 484-489).*

*“They will tell me that they will rape me and they will change me the way I am. After they have raped me and then tomorrow I will come wearing a skirt and stuff.” (Learner participant C, lines 340-348).*

*“No. I think it is very dangerous because some of the boys they tell me one day if I catch you, you will never be a lesbian again. Then I say to them I will never make a mistake of coming to your toilet.” (Learner participant A, lines 377-381).*

The teacher participants reported that none of the lesbian learners at their schools has ever reported incidences of homophobic sexual or physical harassment and abuse to them or their principals. They are of opinion that homophobic physical or sexual harassment do not occur at their schools:

*“No, I think as for the lesbians in this school the boys take them as boys. They look at them as boys not as girls. So there is no harassment at all.” (Teacher participant B, lines 142-145).*

*“It may happen that somebody has been beaten in society but here at school it has never happened. Maybe name calling because if you are not with these learners they will just do as they like but in the presence of educators they don’t do that.” (Teacher participant C, lines 540-546).*

In accordance with research conducted by Moscow (2004) the lesbian learner participants in this study indicated that they are afraid to report their experiences of physical and sexual harassment to their teachers and principals.

In spite of not reporting these incidences learner participant C indicated that she views the inappropriate touching and threats made by the older boys at school as a serious matter that should be addressed by her school’s principal. Data extracted from research transcripts that demonstrate her concern follows below:

*“I think they are serious because maybe like today they will tell me the same thing, tomorrow they will tell me the same thing.” (Learner participant C, lines 479-481).*

**Interviewer:** *Don’t you think this is a matter that the principle must know about?*

**LPC:** *“I think it is because it will be protective? Because if boys tell us they will rape us it is a dangerous thing.” (Learner participant C, lines 492-494).*

### **(c) Social exclusion and emotional abuse**

Research conducted by Butler (2008) revealed that LGBT learners may experience exclusion, isolation and rejection by their peers. In correlation with Butler (2008) research, this study revealed that the lesbian participants do experience rejection from some of their heterosexual peers at school. Learner participant C described her experience of rejection and exclusion as follows:

*“Some learners act strange. They just don’t accept me the way I am. They’ll when they see us they’ll look us down like face to face and when you pass they will spread rumours about us. So that for me is a negative experience. I do not like that. So at class*

*I would not feel free. It is difficult, a little bit difficult.” (Learner participant C, lines 328-336).*

In accordance with the study conducted by Payne (2008) the lesbian learner participants reported that they do interact with the heterosexual girls at school but they do not wish to become close friends with them because they do not share the same interest. Data extracted from research transcripts that demonstrates the difference in interest between lesbian and heterosexual girls follows below:

**Interviewer:** *“Do you have many girl friends at school?”*

**LPA:** *“I just have five friends, one gay and four lesbians.”* (Learner participant A, line 402)

**Interviewer:** *“Do you have close female friends at school?”*

**LPA:** *“No, not close friends but I do talk to them and share some stuff.”* (Learner participant A, lines 408-409).

**Interviewer:** *“Why don’t you want to be close friends with straight girls?”*

**LPA:** *“They talk too much and they get into trouble.”* (Learner participant A, lines 416).

**Interviewer:** *“Why don’t you like girls as friends?”*

**LPC:** *“I can’t understand their language, the way they talk. Their topics are annoying.”* (Learner participant C, lines 638-639).

**LPC:** *“They will speak about the clothes by calling its names and I will not understand what kind of clothes is that. I wear boy’s clothes. So if boys talk about Nike I understand. “Ok sharp are you going to buy negatava or active or that.”* (Learner participant C, lines 651-656).

They also reported that some of the lesbian learners prefer to be isolated from their heterosexual peers because they are afraid of them, this was however not indicated in the research that I consulted and may be a topic for further research:

*“You know sometimes they exclude themselves those other lesbians. They are afraid. They do not want to mix with other children. You see they don’t want to talk to them and see how they are. They just bully and they don’t want to learn from other learners how they take the situation. They are just rude to other children.”* (Learner participant A, lines 650-657).

Even though the lesbian learners reported that they did not feel emotionally excluded from their peers they did report that they feel excluded from sport and cultural activities offered by their schools. I provide data extracted from research transcripts to support the above mentioned:

**Interviewer:** *“What do you do at school besides just schooling?”*

**LPA:** *“Nothing, because we want to start girls football but it is difficult because the teachers don’t take girls football seriously.”* (Learner participant B, lines 462-466).

*“Yes at school this soccer girl’s thing they do not take it seriously. They only take boys sport and all that kind of sports seriously. Last year I played soccer and then out of the blue there were no soccer anymore. I play chess but it is so difficult because it is not exciting.”* (Learner participant C, lines 701-706).

*“Ja, most of the things when we want to do it they will just tell us the outfit of the chicks they have to wear skirts and boys have to wear trousers. Obviously I will say I want to wear the uniform of the boys because I don’t want to wear a skirt. And they will be you are a girl you have to wear what the girls wear. Then I say I will wear like the boys and queue with them and the chicks will stand with their skirts. But then they will just say no.”* (Learner participant B, lines 338-345).

According to the teacher participants their schools have never excluded any learner from participating in sport or cultural activities offered by their schools. They indicated that they are aware that the lesbian learners would like to play soccer but the number of girls interested in soccer do not justify having soccer for girls as a sporting code. Supporting data extracted from the research transcripts demonstrates the teachers input on the social exclusion of lesbian learners at their schools:

*“There has never been an incident where they said they were never considered to be part of parcel of a particular sporting code.”* (Teacher participant A, lines 236-238)

*“Haai, here at school we include everyone. Those who are willing to participate will participate. They are free to choose any activity to participate in.”* (Teacher participant C, lines 259-262).

*“No but we have a teacher who once tried that is Mr. GHI, its the sports master who had a group of girls playing soccer but the number I know are small. You can’t even have 11 or 12 of them.”* (Teacher participant A, lines 275-279).

From the data that emerged in the abovementioned subthemes it is evident that the teacher participants are either genuinely unaware or ignorant of the lesbian learners’ experiences of homophobic harassment and abuse at school.

#### **4.2.1.2 The negative academic experiences of lesbian learners in secondary school**

##### **(a) School disengagement**

The learner participants from school A and B reported that they regard themselves as engaged in terms of their academics and disengaged in terms of sport and cultural activities offered by their schools. They believe that their teachers consciously exclude them from participating in sport and cultural activities using dress code and logistics as an excuse. This makes them

unhappy because they feel that they are not really part of their school, hence they come to school just to learn and then they go home. Lesbian learner participant B described her feelings of disengagement as follows:

*“No I just am part of the school because I am a learner at that school. I am a learner, I just go to school and study, spend time with my friends break time and then it is after school and then I go home. I am not enjoying that school that much.”* (Learner participant B, lines 457-460).

This finding is in accordance with research conducted by Grossman et al. (2009) who indicated that LGBT youth that are marginalized and excluded feel that they do not belong in their school communities.

In relation to research conducted by Murdock and Bolch (2005) the data obtained in this subtheme indicated that exposure to homophobic harassment and abuse exacerbates the lesbian learners’ level of school disengagement. Below follows data extracted from the research transcripts that confirms that homophobic harassment and abuse can contribute to feelings of school disengagement:

***Interviewer:** “How do these experiences make you feel, this boys threatening you and people calling you names?”*

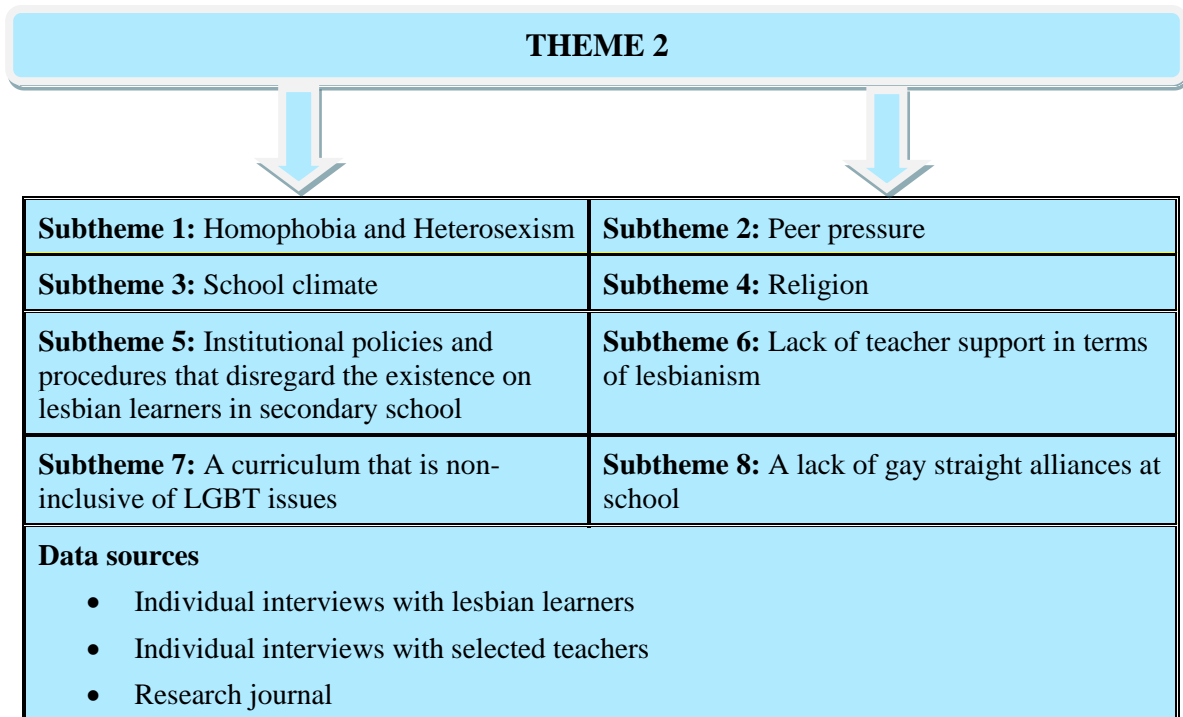
***LPC:** “It makes me feel like I have been damaged inside. It makes me feel unwanted in the world. It makes me feel like I am an outsider I don’t belong here. Ja it’s so hard.”* (Learner participant C, lines 409-413).

From the data that emerged in this subtheme it can be asserted that including and supporting the lesbian learners academically only is not enough to make them feel a sense of connectedness to their schools.

#### **4.2.2 THEME 2: THE ASPECTS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEGATIVE SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES OF LESBIAN LEARNERS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL**

Theme 2 as summarized in the table below presents the lesbian learner participants’ perception of the factors that contributes to their negative social and academic experiences at school.

**Table 4.3: Theme 2 – Summary**



#### **4.2.2.1 Homophobia and Heterosexism**

In this subtheme the lesbian learner participants’ school experience of homophobia and heterosexism are discussed.

From the data that transpired in this subtheme it is evident that homophobia and heterosexism do occur in the schools included in this study. Herek (2004 in Smith et al., 2012, p. 3) defines homophobic actions as acts of prejudice, discrimination, harassment, violence and hatred. Supporting data extracted from the research transcripts that demonstrate the learner participants’ experience of homophobia as defined by McCarthy et al. (2012, p.3) follows below:

*“Other street girls came to me and said damn this gay thing sucks.” (Learner participant B, lines 799-800).*

*“Some learners act strange. They just don’t accept me the way I am. They’ll when they see us they’ll look us down like face to face and when you pass they will spread rumours about us. So that for me is a negative experience. I do not like that. So at class I would not feel free. It is difficult, a little bit difficult.” (Learner participant C, lines 328-336).*

*“It does exist. People can say that it does not happen but you can see it when others distance themselves from that group.” (Teacher participant C, lines 485-493). (Teacher participants C’s comment on the presence of homophobia at his school.)*

In accordance to research done by Kosciw et al. (2009) the lesbian learner participants reported that the gay learners experience the wrath of homophobia more frequently and more intense than them. They stated that:

*“Most of the male teachers will be like hey you are gay we don’t like that you are a disgrace to us guys.”* (Learner participant B, lines 806-807).

*“Girls and boys accept lesbians but some when it comes to gays they like say that a man can’t sleep with a man. They will say that they will beat him until he changes. They hate gays, I don’t know why.”* (Learner participant C, lines 1057-1059).

Payne (2007, p.17) defines heterosexism as *a form of oppression which reproduces a civilization where some are advantaged over others. It places those who conform to heterosexist expectations of gender and sexuality at an advantage over those who do not.* Below follows an extract from research data that demonstrates that heterosexual learners are at an advantage when it comes to inclusion in certain sport and cultural activities offered by their schools:

*Yes at school this soccer girl’s thing they do not take it seriously. They only take boys sport and all that kind of sports seriously. Last year I played soccer and then out of the blue there were no soccer anymore. I play chess but it is so difficult because it is not exciting.* (Learner participant C, Lines 701-707).

*“We can’t join the school choir because I am really a good singer. In class I sing. When my classmates hear me they will say wow you have such a wonderful voice. In church it is difficult. I love singing, I love drawing, and I love writing. They say God gave you a gift but they do not want to allow us gays and lesbian to use it because when you are in front people will see you are a girl and you have to wear girl clothes. They say it is the law”* (Learner participant C, lines 740-750).

From the data that emerged in this subtheme is evident that the presence of homophobia and heterosexism is undeniable in the schools included in this study.

#### **4.2.2.2 Peer pressure**

In this subtheme the lesbian learner participants’ view on their experiences of peer pressure at school is explained.

The data that emerged in this subtheme is in accordance with research done by McCormack (2011) who explained that adolescents in secondary schools do experience pressure to conform to societal gender norms. Learner participant A and C reported that they do experience pressure from their peers to conform to societal gender norms. They explained that

they feel pressurized to conform to societal gender norms when some of the older boys threaten to rape them and when some of the girls tell them that they are disgusting and that their behaviour is disgraceful and un-Christian like. Below follows supporting data extracted from the research transcripts that demonstrate the learner participants' experience of peer pressure to conform:

*"Some of the boys they tell me one day if I catch you, you will never be a lesbian again."* (Learner participant A, lines 378-379).

*"Why you are doing this. Look at yourself you are so beautiful."* (Learner participant C, lines 591-593).

*"Do you know that what you doing is a sin. Then I will admit that yes it is a sin but everybody is living with a sin."* (Learner participant C, lines 597-600).

*"Then she will come again asking the same questions. She is kind of snob so she will scream:" How can you, ha!"* (Learner participant C, lines 614-617).

*"She is putting more peer pressure on me but I am trying to avoid her."* (Learner participant C, lines 907-910).

*"I think they think that we are going to influence them."* (Learner participant B, line 301).

The teacher participants are however of opinion that the lesbian learners do not experience peer pressure to conform to societal gender norms at school. The teacher participants reported the following:

*"For instance I teach learner participant A she is the only one who is lesbian in that class and she is friends with everybody. Everybody loves learner participant A and she is so free in class."* (Teacher participant A, lines 293-300).

*"The lesbians that we have here cannot be pressurized because they don't want to change, they behave more like boys."* (Teacher participant C, lines 275-277).

*"No it is not the girls. It is the boys that were saying that about them. They want them to change so that they can be their girlfriends not to be lesbian."* (Teacher participant B, lines 389-393).

In accordance with research conducted by McCormack (2011) this research study found that heterosexual girls wanting to make friends with lesbians are pressurized at school not to. A fear of becoming homosexual and being victimized and isolated from the rest of the school population prevents most heterosexual girls from associating with the lesbian girls. Below follows data extracted from the research transcripts that demonstrates the pressure experienced by heterosexual girls wanting to be friends with the lesbian girls:



*“I have a straight friend who always hangs out with us. Her other straight friends they would be to her like you also going to be a lesbian because you hanging out with this lesbians. I tell her just to never mind them. That will not happen.” (Learner participant B, lines 295-298).*

From the data obtained through this study it is evident that peer pressure impacts negatively on the establishment and maintenance of friendships between lesbian and straight girls.

#### **4.2.2.3 School climate**

In this subtheme the lesbian learner participants’ perception of the impact that school climate has on their experiences is presented.

In accordance with research done by Pearson et al. (2007) this study revealed that the lesbian learners included in this study experience more tolerance and less homophobic abuse because they are enrolled at an urban school with a large learner population where most of the learners are from low income families.

Research conducted by (Grossman et al., 2009) indicates that lesbian learners experience less homophobic harassment and abuse in schools where the environment is safe and where the school discipline is intact. Learner participant A enrolled at school A experienced less homophobic harassment and abuse than learner participants B and C enrolled at school B. Learner participant A reported that she has good teachers who work hard to ensure the learners do well academically and that they are safe at school. She explained that maintaining a high level of discipline and academic performance is important to her school’s principal and staff. Learner participant B reported that discipline is a challenge at her school. Learner participant B used the words crazy, naughty, corrupt, doing all these crazy things and mostly poor to describe the learners at her school. She indicated that there are rules and disciplinary structures in place but the learners fail to comply. Learner participant C explained that the safety and discipline is however improving. I present the following extracts from the research transcripts to demonstrate the learner and teacher participants’ perception of the atmosphere at their schools:

##### ***Learner participant A’s description of conditions at school A***

*School A is a good school. They good educators. We spent a lot of time learning. It is a nice environment. You won’t find a lot of papers lying around. It is fine not with many broken windows.” (Learner participant A, lines 761-763).*

*“The teachers are just concerned about our behaviour. You know there are a lot of learners smoking that side at the back of the school. The male teachers do not allow that*

*so they make sure there is no learner who comes to school with dagga or cigarettes.”* (Learner participant A, lines 784-790).

*“They said if they find someone fighting we are going to get expelled for seven days. You will come back the day you are called back to school. Since then they are not fighting, they are afraid to fight.”* (Learner participant A, lines 792-798).

#### ***Teacher participant A description of the conditions at school A***

*“We have rules and regulations, we have a code of conduct but there is this relaxed culture that is so accommodative of everybody at this school.”* (Teacher participant A, lines 661-665).

#### ***Learner participant B and C’s description of the conditions at school B***

*“Let me put it this way most of the learners who go to that school are crazy, naughty, corrupt, doing all this crazy things. Let me say that they said all the corrupt learners go to school B and all the good learners go to school X. They break the windows and the toilets. The ground where the guys’ play soccer it used to be like this but know it’s like that.”* (Learner participant B, lines 534-540).

***Interviewer:*** *“Isn’t there any discipline and structure in your school?”*

***LPB:*** *“There is, but there is learners who do not listen.”* (Learner participant B, lines 543).

*“Some teachers are strict. Some are in class everyday but they will just sit there not working. They “What’s up” in class. They will say today I am sick or today I am tired and play on her phone.”* (Learner participant C, lines 960-965).

*“They would not allow anyone to like fight in school. If ever they steal stuff you report it at the office. They will come and search everything. They’ll bring police to school. If any boys has guns and weapons that are dangerous, the smoking stuff.”* (Learner participant C, lines 930-934).

#### ***Teacher participant B and C’s description of conditions at school B***

*“It is a multicultural school. All the diversities are here. We accept all the cultures and the beliefs of the learners.”* (Teacher participant B, lines 84-87).

*“Ja, you know at this school we only practice Christianity so everybody is just bunched together we don’t discriminate against anybody.”* (Teacher participant C lines 266-269).

Teacher participants B and C however confirmed that they do experience challenges in terms of discipline by stating the following:

*“Well the level of discipline depends on the misconduct that the learners have .There are very few such cases especially these big boys they don’t even stay in class you have to run after them. Even the level of problems that we have is not something to report home about. It is only the truancy that is a problem.”* (Teacher participant C, lines 412-420).

*“Fortunately most of the lesbians at school are behaving very well unlike the normal learners.”* (Teacher participant B, lines 524-526).

*“There a lot of late coming and truancy between periods?”* (Teacher participant B, lines 516-517).

#### **4.2.2.4 Religion**

This subtheme explains the lesbian learner participants’ perception of the impact that religion has on their school experiences.

In correlation with the research conducted by Msibi (2012) and Bhana (2012) this research study revealed that the teachers included in this study do not condone homosexuality because they perceive it as sinful and un-Christian like, an abomination that can only be cured through prayer and religious teaching. The data revealed that the teachers’ who persistently rebuke the lesbian learners in terms of their sexual orientation are motivated by their staunch religious believes and convictions as well as their fear that the lesbian learners will influence the heterosexual learners.

The learner participants reported that despite of the fact that the Christian teachers tirelessly rebuke them for being lesbian, they still regard them as good teachers who do their best to support them academically even though they refuse to condone, accept or support their lesbian sexual orientation. The lesbian learners explained the following:

*“Most of the teachers are Christians you see. They are against lesbian things. They don’t. When it comes to church they believe that God did not want lesbian things. They always tell us about the Bible. We should go to church.”* (Learner participant A, lines 819-824).

*“Ja, most of them they are not ok with it, maybe in Life Orientation period when they were talking about sexual relationships they only mentioned things of girls and boys and all that. Then the teachers asked are there any gays and lesbians in this class and I’d be like yes mam and this other boy he is gay. He is also my friend. The teacher will be like you guys will have to stop that it is not ok. It is the way of the Satanist. Even my maths teacher.”* (Learner participant B, lines 416-423).

*“They are Christians and they tell me about Jesus and the bible. They say it is a sin, Satanism. I have evil things inside of me so I tell them I know I live with a sin every body lives with a sin.”* (Learner participant C, lines 880-888).

From the data that emerged in this subtheme it can be asserted that the teachers do not regard their constant negative feedback with regard to the lesbian learners’ sexual orientation as homophobic harassment or abuse. The teachers reported that their schools are Christian schools that do not discriminate against the lesbian learners because of their sexual orientation. Teacher participant A stated that if there was discrimination at her school it would be motivated by the different levels at which the learners and teachers practice their faith and not homophobia. The following data extracted from research transcripts demonstrates the above mentioned:

*“But now there are those who make a very huge claim about their Christianity and that is where the problem lies. Only to find that someone somehow falls short of compassion. We do not embrace those around us. Not necessarily that we discriminate against people that are different from us but simply if a person does not go to church with you and a person does not pray the way you pray then you regard that person as less Christian than you. That is the only thing but as for lesbians they are treated just like any other person. If there was discrimination it would be discrimination on the basis of our level of belief or faith. It is a very controversial subject.”* (Teacher participant A, lines 630-646).

Teacher participant C reported that there are teachers whose religion does not allow them to condone lesbianism but they tolerate it because they cannot change it:

*“Even this morning, every morning we have a small prayer, Today we read Leviticus saying something about changing of sexual orientation, a man being with a man, tattoos etc. in the morning they read us that verse so you can see that some of the educators their religion does not allow that.”* (Teacher participant C, lines 785-792).

*“They tolerate it because it is something that you cannot change. You can preach about it but it will not change.”* (Teacher participant C, lines 798-800).

#### **4.2.2.5 Institutional policies and procedures that disregard the existence of lesbian learners**

In this subtheme I present the learner participants’ perceptions of the impact that certain school policies and procedures have on their experiences at school.

In correlation with research done by Bhana (2012) this study revealed that certain institutional policies and procedures allow heterosexuality to take priority over homosexuality. The lesbian

learners included in this study reported that institutional policy such as the policy on the provision of bathroom facilities and the policy on dress code for learners, impacts negatively on their school experiences. They indicated that these policies cause distress and it places them at risk of being sexually violated. In the supporting data provided below it is evident that the needs of the heterosexual learners in terms of bathroom facilities are catered for while those of the lesbian learners are not regarded as important enough to address:

*“When I go to the toilet and I find many girls, they will say: “Ha, there is a boy in the toilet”. Then they start running away. Then they say: “go away.” (LPA, lines 367-370).*

*“No, I can’t use the boys’ bathroom. I think it is very dangerous because some of the boys they tell me one day if I catch you, you will never be a lesbian again. Then I say to them I will never make a mistake of coming to your toilet.” (Learner participant A, lines 377-381).*

*“When I walk in girls will say: “oh there is a boy in the bathroom!” and then they start running. Why are they running can’t they see I have breasts. Some know us but some don’t and they will scream boys in our bathroom and they will run.” (Learner participant C, lines 503-511).*

Teacher participant B indicated that not providing separate bathroom facilities for their lesbian learners is affecting all the learners in a negative manner. She expressed her sentiments on the provision of bathroom facilities for learners as follows:

*“You know outside some of the learners know that they are lesbians. They are not ladies they are men. So what is going to happen if they go to the same toilet as the girls? Do you think morally they will be ok with that one, the girls’ toilet while the other learners regard them as men? Do you think they will be ok with that?” (Teacher participant B, lines 180-188).*

The data obtained under this subtheme also revealed that school B has not adapted their policy on the dress code for learners to accommodate the lesbian learners even though these learners have been schooling there since 2012. The lesbian learner participant from school B reported that this policy force them to disregard the school’s code of conduct in terms of this rule. They then have to face the consequences of their transgressions whenever the uniform committee feels like addressing them on this issue. Below follows data extracted from research transcripts that demonstrate the impact that school B’s policy on dress code has on the experiences of their lesbian learners:

*“Like this other teacher her name is Mrs. X, like when we were line upping as lesbians we were wearing trousers. She told us that if tomorrow we don’t come with skirts she will*

*just take the girls netball skirts and give it to us to wear. We just didn't listen to her.”*  
(Learner participant B, lines 520-525).

Teacher participants A and C however perceive their schools institutional policies as non-discriminatory and applicable to all learners:

*“We have rules and what that person is gay or straight, lesbian or on lesbian they still have to adhere to the school rules and regulations and as it is our school rules are not discriminatory. Whatever we practice is accommodative an inclusive of all children irrespective of their sexual orientation , biological make up , disabilities, no everybody is treated the same, That is the gospel the school preaches you know. And it is there in black in white. There is no learner who is going to take advantage of another learner simply because he is gay or lesbian. No bullying. Each and every learner who is found to be guilty of that faces punishment.”* (Teacher participant A, lines 591-608).

*“Our code of conduct does not specify this for that one and this for another. It is the same for everybody. It does not discriminate against anyone it is an umbrella that is for everyone.”* (Teacher participant C, lines 399-404).

As far as safety policies are concerned the teacher participants reported that their schools do not have specific clauses written into their safety policies to protect lesbian learners against homophobic harassment and abuse:

*“O no, we don't have the one that is specifically aligned to the lesbian learners.”*  
(Teacher participant A, lines 807-808).

*“We accommodate them but it is only that we don't have something that is written, like the safety policy or the HIV policy to protect them.”* (Teacher participant C, lines 225-229).

In correlation with what was reported previously, research by Chesir-Teran (2003) indicated that a lack of anti-homophobic harassment policies, specific anti-discrimination policies and inclusive programs all contribute to subtle practices of heterosexism in school.

#### **4.2.2.6 Lack of teacher support in terms of lesbianism**

In this subtheme the lesbian learner participants' perceptions on the lack of teacher support in terms of their sexual orientation are discussed.

In accordance with research done by Butler et al. (2003) the data obtained in this subtheme indicates that the teachers lack of knowledge and understanding of lesbianism as well as their staunch religious convictions prevents them from providing appropriate support to their

lesbian learners. It also prevents them from providing appropriate education on human sexuality and alternative lifestyles to their heterosexual learners.

The learner participants reported that they would never ask their teachers for support in terms of their lesbian sexual orientation. They reported that their teachers are discriminatory and non-supportive of their lesbian sexual orientation because they do not understand what lesbianism is and because they are blinded by their religion. Data extracted from the research transcripts that demonstrates the learner participant's perception of their teachers' attitude towards lesbianism follows below:

*Interviewer: "What about lesbianism. Can you speak to anyone about it?"*

*LPA: "No, they won't listen to you. They will say you are crazy. We just forgiving you. We will pray for you and you will see what a nice women you are. No, they won't listen to you." (Learner participant A, lines 955-960).*

*Interviewer: "Do you think your school is supportive of gay and lesbian learners?"*

*LPB: "No, I don't think so because most of them, maybe two teachers understand, but others are against it too much. Even the learners." (Learner participant B, lines 600-602).*

*Interviewer: "Why do you think they are against lesbianism?"*

*LPB: "When we go they gossip about us, they discriminate against us, they tease us. It's like they just group themselves and said this ones we treat them this way." (Learner participant B, lines 604-606).*

*"I will try this teacher maybe I can speak to her about anything. Then you tell her "I came to you because I trust you enough" then like you tell her. When at break time she is sitting with her other colleague they will just have a talk about it and then it will be all over." (Learner participant C, lines 891-895).*

*"I am accepting their beliefs but I don't think I can stand in and talk to them about that and become their leader, no. That one I can't." (Teacher participant B, lines 887-890).*

In accordance with research done by Francis and Msibi (2011) the data that emerged from this subtheme affirms that in spite of the policy on Inclusive Education (White paper 6) which all South African educators teaching in South African schools have to adhere to, there are still schools that continue to promote heterosexism. The reason for this situation is twofold: 1) the teachers do not regard homophobic harassment and abuse as a barrier to learning and 2) most of the teachers have not been sensitized or capacitated appropriately in terms of sexuality and

sexual orientation and the impact of homophobic harassment on the mental health of LGBT learners (Richardson, 2006).

#### 4.2.2.7 A curriculum that is non-inclusive of LGBT issues

This subtheme presents the learner participants view on the impact that a lack of information on homosexuality and trans-sexuality in the South African curriculum (CAPS)<sup>12</sup> has on their school experiences.

In accordance with research conducted by Bhana (2012) the data that transpired in this subtheme revealed a lack of curriculum content with regard to alternative lifestyles. The teacher participants reported that homosexuality is not included in either the Life Orientation or the Natural Sciences curriculum:

*Interviewer: “Are you afraid of discussing it in class?”*

*TPB: “No, so far it did not appear in the lessons.”*

*Interviewer: “Are you saying that it is not covered in the curriculum?”*

*TPB: “So far, it is not in the curriculum.” (Teacher participant B, lines 830-835).*

*It should be include in Life Sciences where it belongs. Life Sciences must tell us why lesbians and gays are the way they are. (Teacher participant C, lines 472-475)*

The learner participants however reported that their Life Orientation teachers do incorporate content on sexual orientation into their discussions. The learner participants are however of opinion that the manner in which the content on sexual orientation is dealt with during such discussions impacts negatively on their school experiences. They describe the content as unplanned, humiliating and discriminating. Below follows data extracted from the research transcripts that demonstrate the lesbian learner participants’ experiences of classroom discussions on lesbianism:

*“No because the other time when I was in this other life orientation teacher’s class she was teaching us about peer pressure. She’d be lets put this topic aside and talk about this. Yesterday I was watching “cutting edge”. This other lesbian went to surgery and removed certain organs. Other people were not sure if this is a guy or a girl and they raped that girl and the teacher said don’t ever try to be someone who you are not. God did not create you like that and she was just talking negatively about lesbian people. Then she called me and Michael and told us to change.” (Learner participant B, lines 901-912).*

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<sup>12</sup> CAPS: Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement



*“She was serious she was not joking. I just listened to her and left.”* (Learner participant B, lines 914-915).

#### **4.2.2.8 Lack of gay straight alliances at school**

In this subtheme the lack of Gay Straight Alliances at the schools included in this study are discussed.

The teacher participants reported that their schools do not have formally established Gay Straight Alliances. They indicated that they regard the informally established friendship groups formed by the LGBT learners as support groups:

*“Yes we can regard that as a support group because those are the people who understand them. They sit with them, they eat laugh and do everything together.”* (Teacher participant A, lines 756-759). (This was said in reference to the gay, lesbian and straight learners who spend their breaks together as friends)

*“Informally and it just happened spontaneously. Even if it is during break you will never find the lesbian alone and on their own you will find them with others laughing etc. you can see they are free.”* (Teacher participant A, lines 762-766).

Bochenek and Brown (2001) state that Gay Straight Alliances work towards ensuring that school policies and procedures are improved in order to accommodate the lesbian learners. Learner participants B and C reported that they have been enrolled at school B since 2012 and they still experience challenges caused by their school’s policy on dress code for learners. It is thus evident that the lack a GSA at school B contributes to the slow pace at which school policies and procedures are changing to accommodate the LGBT learners.

According to Grossman (2009) Gay Straight Alliances work towards sensitizing their peers and teachers in terms of sexual orientation. It can thus be assumed that the lack of formal LGBT support groups in the schools included in this study contributes to the lack of knowledge on lesbianism among heterosexual learners and teachers.

Research by Russell et al. (2009) state that being part of a GSA provides LGBT learners with the opportunity to learn how to become leaders and future activist. From the data obtained in this subtheme it is evident that the lesbian learners included in this study have a need to learn about leadership and activism. Learner participant C for example reported that she would like to picket at the school in order to sensitize the learners and teachers at her school with regards to lesbianism:

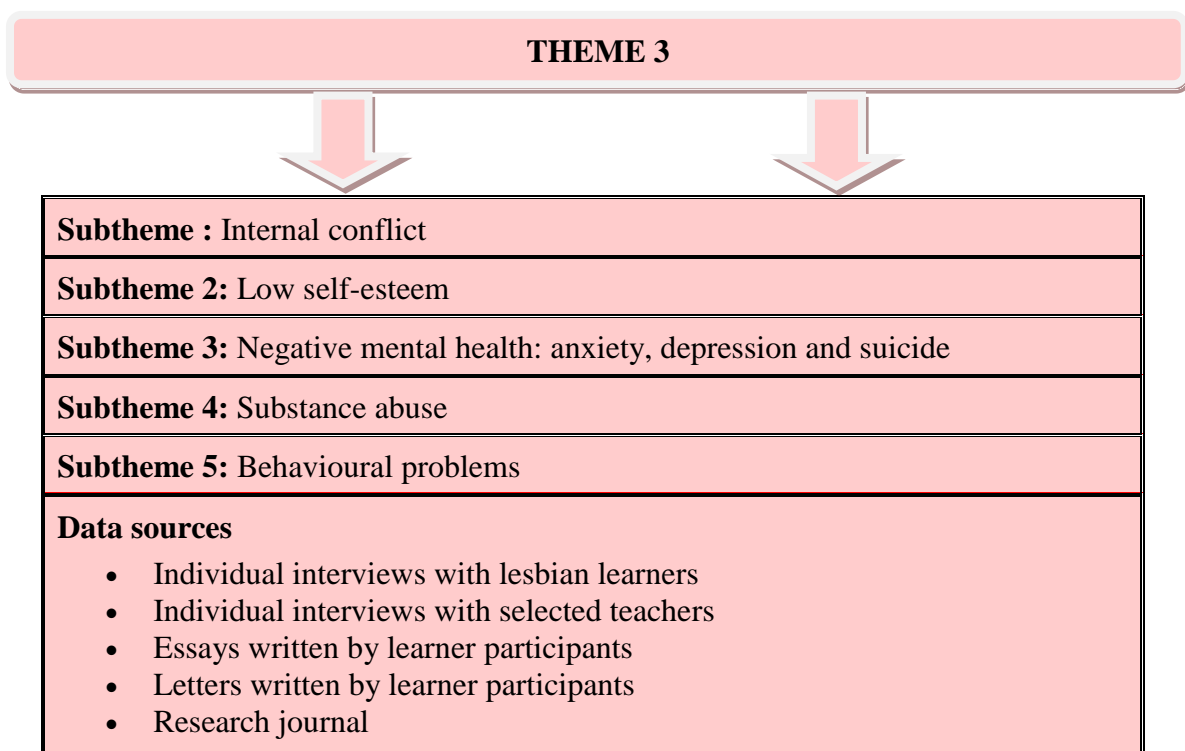
*Interviewer: “Tell me about the strike you would like to conduct.”*

*LPC: “I will ask the lesbians to stand up and go to school. Then I will ask them to accept us even though you can’t accept us we will do it even though you don’t want it. We will wear trousers, we will talk like boys because it is what we have inside and it is what we grew up with from born.” (Learner participant C, lines 1234-1240).*

#### 4.2.3 THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DIFFICULTIES EXPERIENCED BY LESBIAN LEARNERS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL AND ITS EFFECT ON THEIR PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING

Theme 3 as summarized in the table below, present the mental health difficulties experienced by lesbian learners in secondary school and its effect on their psychological wellbeing.

**Table 4.4: Theme 3 – Summary**



Research (Bontempo & D’Augelli, 2002; Wilkinson & Pearson (2009); Russel, et al., 2011; Martin-Storey & Crosnoe, 2012) states that high levels of homophobic harassment and abuse leads to experiences of negative mental health for LGBT learners.

##### 4.2.3.1 Internal conflict

In this subtheme the learner participants’ experiences of internal conflict is discussed.

From the data obtained it became apparent that only one of the lesbian learners included in this study experienced internal conflict before. Learner participant A however reported that the inner conflict that she experienced in the past was not caused by negative school

experiences. She explained that her experience of inner conflict was caused by her mother and sister who refused to accept her lesbian sexual orientation. Below follows data from research transcripts that substantiates the above mentioned:

*LPA: “Yes. When it happens at home that they tell me they do not want these lesbian things. They put me under a lot of pressure. Then I start thinking maybe it is not a good thing to be lesbian. Maybe if I can change then they will be cool. Everyone will accept and then we will move on.” (Learner participant A, lines 1125-1131).*

*“My sister thinks lesbianism is Satanism. She believes that the devil is in control of us.” (Learner participant A, lines 1135-1136).*

*“The way my mother looks at me and the way she reacts. You can see this person does not like what I am doing.” (Learner participant A, lines 1201-1204).*

Research by Munoz-Plaza, et al. (2002) indicated that the learner participants in their study experienced inner turmoil during the process of coming out because it was difficult for them to acknowledge their sexual orientation at school. The data obtained in this study indicates that this is not the case in the schools included in this study because most of the heterosexual learners and teachers are tolerant and accommodative of the lesbian learners' sexual orientation. There are also more lesbian learners who are visible and who support each other at school. Below follows data extracted from research transcripts that demonstrates the level of self-acceptance experienced by the lesbians in the schools included in this study:

*“No there is no problem in accepting themselves as lesbian.” (Teacher participant B, lines 633-634).*

*“They are outgoing; they are registering their presence you know.” (TPA, lines 1019-1020).*

*“They are confident.” (Teacher participant A, lines 1019-1020).*

*“They are proud.” (Teacher participant A, lines 1019-1020).*

*LPC: “Yes they are because they can show themselves. But some haven't accepted the way they are.” (Learner participant C, lines 1169-1171)*

*Interviewer: “Are they still struggling?”*

*LPC: “Yes, they still struggling because of family matters but at school they come out but some can't because of family matters.” (Learner participant C, lines 1173 -1176).*

From the data obtained in this subtheme it can be asserted that the impact of being rejected and discriminated against by family members are much more severe than the impact of

rejection and discrimination by peers and teachers. It could be that the lesbian learners experience the rejection and harassment by peers and teachers as less significant or they learned to cope with it because they cannot change it.

#### **4.2.3.2 Low self-esteem**

In this subtheme the occurrence of low self-esteem among lesbian learners is discussed. None of the lesbian learner participants included in this study viewed themselves as having a low self-esteem.

In accordance with various research (Munoz-Plaza et al., 2002; Butler, 2008; Martin-Storey & Crosnoe, 2012; Kosciw et al., 2013) this study revealed that even though there are lesbian learners who do not experience low levels of self-esteem there are those who do. Teacher participants A and B described the lesbian learners enrolled at their schools' experience of low esteem as such:

*I am thinking of all the ones we have at school, No they do not have a low self-esteem. I know they do not that is why they are so visible. They are a few but they are all visible.”* (Teacher participant A, lines 978-981).

*“They act differently. Especially the lesbians because they want to be felt around the school. You can't ignore them.”* (Teacher participant B, lines 621-623 & 625).

Teacher participant C reported that there are lesbian learners who do not experience low self-esteem and there are those who do because of their constant exposure to homophobic verbal harassment and abuse:

*“Ja, I should think because you know learners they will tease each other even if you are not aware. In class when you are teaching and asking questions in most cases they don't raise up their hands even if they know the answer. If they can raise their hand and say a wrong answer they will be laughed at. And that creates more low self-esteem. So they are not able to express themselves to the fullest.”* (Teacher participant C, lines 564-573).

#### **4.2.3.3 Negative mental health**

Negative mental health issues such as depression, suicidal ideation/suicide and anxiety experienced by the lesbian learners in secondary schools are discussed in this subtheme.

In accordance with research conducted by Almeida et al. (2009), Russell et al. (2011) and Bolton and Sareen (2011) this study found that the learner participants do at times experience emotional distress in the form of sadness, depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation. All of the learner participants reported that they have experienced feelings of sadness and depression at

school before, especially if they had been subjected to rejection, resentment, humiliation and exclusion.

### ***Experiences of sadness***

*“Ja, because like emotionally when something someone at school says something maybe for that time you just change. Maybe I tell my friend this and this happened she will try to cheer me up and I will be fine”.* (Learner participant B, lines 814-817).

*“Ja, but now it improved a little bit because most of the girls enjoy having us around and they like us a lot. So you feel more included. But the teachers and the other learner’s haai they are still the same.”* (Learner participant B, lines 830-834).

*“At school they depress me when they talk about the way I am. They can just build another school for us lesbians and gays only.”* (Learner participant C, lines 1125-1131).

In correlation with research done by Almeida et al. (2009), Russell et al. (2011) and Birkett et al. (2009) this study revealed that less of the learner participants’ experiences of negative mental health were caused by negative school experiences. Other than gay and bisexual learners, the lesbian learners found it easier to adjust to their school environment. This research also correlates with research done by D’Augelli et al. (2001) who stated that LGBT youth whose parents/guardians acted with intolerance and rejection towards them reported more depression and suicidal attempts than those whose parents were supportive of them.

Learner participants A and C reported that their experiences of depression were not caused by school related incidences but by their parents/guardian’s reaction of intolerance and rejection towards them. Learner participant A reported that her mother and sister do not want to accept her lesbian sexual orientation and rejects her because of it. Learner participant C reported that she has been moving from one household to another staying with family, friends or employers because her mother is unemployed and cannot afford to keep her in school. She explained that she has been rejected and ill-treated by all these people since she was fifteen years old.

### ***Experiences of depression and suicidal ideation***

***LPA:*** *“No. but then I wanted to commit suicide once.”* (Learner participant A, lines 1184).

***LPA:*** *“Because it hurts when your mother rejects you. You feel like she does not love you. She loves my sister. Why can’t she accept me and move on. That is all I ask.”* (Learner participant A, lines 1237-1240).

***Interviewer:*** *“So nothing at school happened to make you feel like that?”*

***LPA:*** *“No.”* (Learner participant A, lines 1243).

**Interviewer:** *“Have you ever tried to commit suicide or thought about it.”*

**LPC:** *“No, when it comes to lesbian stuff no, but when to come to my family issues. Yes.”*  
(Learner participant C, lines 1145-1146).

Learner participant B who seems to be the most stable in terms of her emotional wellbeing reported that her parents and family have always been very supportive of her lesbian sexual orientation:

**LPB:** *“My family did see I am different I am not like other straight girls and then they will just ask me like what’s happening. And I just told them what it is.”*

**Interviewer:** *“Did they accept it?”*

**LPB:** *“Yes, It was not hard for me to tell them because I was sharing everything with them.”*

**Interviewer:** *“And the fact that they supported you made it easier for you.”*

**LPB:** *“Yes.”* (Learner participant B, lines 35-48) (This is learner participant B description of her coming out to her parents and the support she received from them)

The teacher participants reported that they are not aware of any of the lesbian learners experiencing negative mental health issues because of negative school experiences. According to the teacher participants the lesbian learners enrolled at their schools are not threatened by their peers or teachers, hence they do not have to suppress their true identities. They are allowed to express their sexual orientation openly and freely at school. The teacher participants indicated that none of their lesbian learners have ever requested assistance with negative mental health issues and neither have any of them been identified as in need of assistance in this regard. Below follows supporting data extracted from research transcripts:

*“They have never suffered from it unless maybe they did in their homes and no one knew.”* (Teacher participant A, lines 1023-1025).

*“I don’t remember anything like that. That why I am saying it may be because of the environment. Maybe if we did not have any other lesbian here and the person was the only one that would have been a problem because she would have had to suppress herself and behave more like a girl even though she knows she is not a girl. But because we have a few of them they are open about it they do not feel threatened because they are different.”* (Teacher participant C, lines 610-620).

*“We just accommodate them and go with the flow creating mentally healthy learners.”*  
(Teacher participant C, lines 636-638).

#### 4.2.3.4 Substance abuse

This subtheme explains the prevalence of alcohol and drug addiction amongst the lesbian learner participants included in this study.

In relation to research done by Daniel et al. (2002) this study revealed that lesbian learners who are exposed to lower levels of homophobic harassment and abuse experience lower levels of substance abuse. The data obtained in this subtheme indicated that the occurrence of homophobic harassment and abuse in school A and B have declined over the past two years. Learner participants B and C reported that they do not use addictive substances such as alcohol or drugs and learner participant A reported that she uses Cannabis for weight loss purposes only. Below follows data extracted from research transcripts that substantiates the above mentioned:

**Interviewer:** *“Are you using any form of addictive substances at this point in time?”*

**LPB:** *“No.”*

**Interviewer:** *“Have you ever felt the urge to abuse alcohol or any other drug?”*

**LPB:** *“No.”* (Learner participant B, lines 875-880).

**Interviewer:** *“Substance abuse?”*

**LPC:** *“No.”*

**Interviewer:** *“Are you not abusing substances. Do you ever think about it?”*

**LPC:** *“Ja, sometimes.”*

**Interviewer:** *“Why have you decided not to abuse alcohol or drugs?”*

**LPC:** *“Because I love myself. I have a big dream, a big future. Sometimes when I look I could just think hard and then I see myself so far with education, working, building my own home, buying my mother a home. Ja, so I wouldn’t do substance abuse.”* (Learner participant C, lines 1154-1161).

**Interviewer:** *“O, so she wants to gain weight and you want to loose weight that is why you smoke weed? But it does not make sense.”*

**LPA:** *“Yes, it does because if I smoke it I stop eating. I will see some changes.”* (Learner participant A, lines 641-642).

**Interviewer:** *“How much to you smoke?”*

*LPA: “Once a day but every day. Not before I go to school but after I come from school.” (Learner participant A, lines 605-606).*

Teacher participants B and C confirmed learner participants B and C’s reports on their use of addictive substances. Teacher participant A indicated that she was not aware of learner participant A’s use of Cannabis:

*“The ones that we have they don’t do that. We had one but she has left. She was involved with boys who use drugs and she was very aggressive as well. I remember the other time she spit in the face of an educator.” (Teacher participant C, lines 653-658).*

*Interviewer: “But you say with the lesbians you are not aware of anyone that abuses drugs or alcohol.”*

*TPA: “No.” (Teacher participant A, lines 1067-1070).*

From discussions with the guardian of learner participants B and C during a recent visit to their home concerns were raised with regard to suspicions of alcohol and Cannabis use by them. Their concerns and suspicions are grounded in the fact that learner participants B and C who is respectively 16 and 18 years old this year, have begun to visit lesbian clubs almost every weekend. They also have older lesbian friends who use Cannabis. In accordance with research done by Kowen and Davis (2006) the data that emerged from this conversation as well as the fact that participants B and C reported that they felt excluded from mainstream school culture raised concerns as to whether these learners are seeking a sense of belonging amongst older gay people in clubs. Learner participants B and C’s guardians concerns are relevant as Kowen and Davis (2006) indicated that it is in these settings where lesbian youth obtain access to alcohol and drugs which place them at risk of being exploited.

#### **4.2.3.5 Behavioural problems**

This subtheme was created due to information that surfaced during semi-formal interviews with the teacher participants. In this subtheme the teachers’ perceptions of behavioural problems experienced by the learner participants are presented.

According to the teacher participants the lesbian learners included in this study never find themselves on the wrong side of the schools rules and regulations because honouring the school rules and doing their work protects them from drawing unnecessary attention and conflict to themselves. The previously mentioned was not indicated in the literature I studied and may be a topic for future research. Below follows data extracted from research transcripts that supports the previously stated:



*“Haai, they do not have, do they? No other wise if they had behavioural problems they would have been reported and gone for disciplinary hearing. So far they have never gone to the principal’s office or their parents have been asked to come to school.” (Teacher participant A, lines 1076-1082).*

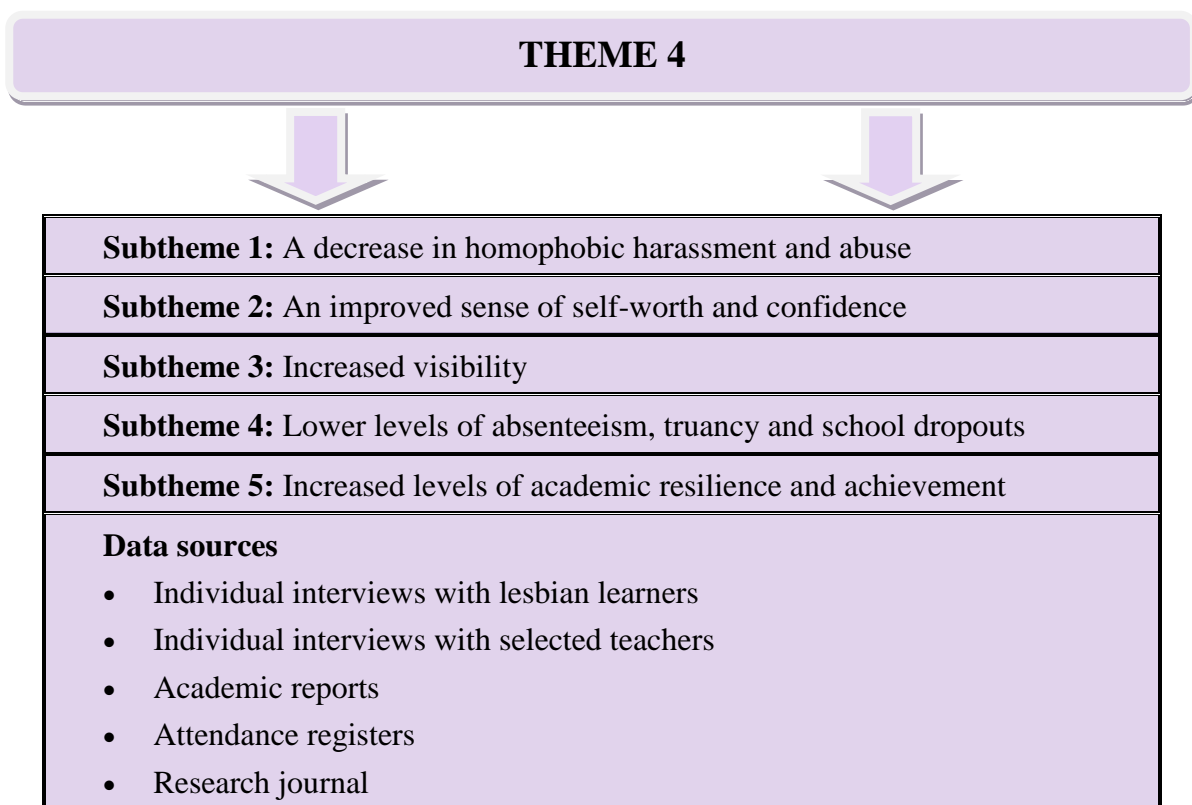
*“They do not want to break the school rules that are the thing. Not that they are extra careful but they are always on the right side of the schools rules and regulations.” (Teacher participant A, lines 1085-1089).*

*“The lesbian learners don’t want to be on the wrong side of the educators. They always want to do what is right so that they cannot come out bad. Most of the time the will do you work. In fact I see they hate confrontation. So in order to avoid confrontation with the educators do the work and don’t dotch and then you will always be on their good side.” (Teacher participant C, lines 316-324)*

#### 4.2.4 THE POSITIVE SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES OF LESBIAN LEARNERS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL

Theme 4 as summarized in the table below presents the results that demonstrate the learner participants’ perceptions of their positive school experiences.

**Table 4.5: Theme 4 – Summary**



#### 4.2.4.1 A decrease in homophobic harassment and abuse

In this subtheme I present the learner participants' perceptions of the decrease in homophobic harassment and abuse that they are experiencing at school.

Research conducted by Bhana (2012) indicated that the South African schools are laden with discrimination and suppression. The data obtained in this research study revealed that even though homophobic tendencies still exist amongst some of the learners and teachers at the schools included in this study, its frequency and severity has decreased significantly. As indicated by McCormack (2011) the schools involved in this study have become more accommodative and tolerant with regard to sexual diversity.

Learner participant A reported that most of her fellow learners and teachers have always had a positive attitude towards her even though their Christian belief does not allow them to accept her sexual orientation. Learner participant C reported that she has been at her school since 2011. She explained that lesbianism was new to the school then as she was the first lesbian to enroll at the school. She also explained that the level of rejection and harassment from peers and teachers was much higher then. Learner participants B and C reported that most of the learners and teachers at their school are kind and respectful towards them even though they do not support their lesbian sexual orientation. There are however those who are harsh and mean towards them.

The learner participants believe that the attitudes of most of their peers and teachers are changing for the better because their numbers are increasing and they are used to having lesbian learners around them. Below follows data extracted from research transcripts that validates the decrease in homophobic harassment discovered at the schools included in this study:

*Interviewer: "Do you think things at the school have changed for the better for lesbian learners since 2011?"*

*LPA: "No it has always been the way it is now." (Learner participant A, line 1317).*

*Interviewer: "So it was never bad for you as a lesbian at school."*

*LPA: "Yes" (Learner participant A, line 1319).*

*"Ja, verbal abuses are becoming less because I think that now other learners are getting used to this lesbian thing. There are many lesbians at my school." (Learner participant B, lines 918-920).*

*“Ja, because like let me say I was the only lesbian in school maybe they will just like try to kick me out of the school or make me feel like an outsider but now because we are many that will not happen.” (Learner participant B, lines 934-942).*

*“Another teacher came and gave me toilet paper to dry my eyes. So she called me at her own office. So she is kind of a deputy principal. So she told me I must stick to what I am. I must not lose hope and she told me I must wear a trouser she will talk to the principal and it is what I did. So they started accepting the other lesbians so it is because of me, I was the first one at school B.” (Learner participant C, lines 281-290).*

The teacher participants affirmed the lesbian learners’ perceptions of the decrease in homophobic harassment and abuse at school by stating the following:

*“Definitely. I say definitely because they just interact with them in marvelous ways you know. Though I am just worrying if this is the very same learners that over the holiday or when they head home harass the lesbian learners.” (Teacher participant A, lines 1152-1158).*

*“Ja, it has improved because they are no more laughing at them they just accept them”.* (Teacher participant B, lines 701-703).

*“Today it is normal we are used to it.” (Teacher participant B, line 727).*

*”Ja, I should think there is a change. As long as the level of teasing is low it means there is accommodation. And in most cases we have not experienced confrontation between them.” (Teacher participant C, lines 690-694).*

#### **4.2.4.2 An improved sense of self-worth and confidence**

This subtheme explains the improved sense of self-worth experienced by the lesbian learners included in this study.

The data obtained in this subtheme correlates with the finding of research conducted by Msibi (2012) who stated that lesbian learners in secondary schools are no longer powerless, passive and hopeless because they feel worthy, they are proud and they are confident. The teacher participants explained that the lesbian learners’ increased visibility, sense of pride, vocal presence, and the fact that they want it to be known that they are a force to be reckoned with are all signs of an increased sense of self-worth and confidence. I present data extracted from research transcripts to support the previously mentioned:

*“They are extremely vocal and outspoken.” (Teacher participant A, lines 366-367).*

*“They do not want to be underrated they also want to be counted amongst those who are there. They want to show that they are a force to be reckoned with.”* (Teacher participant A, lines 420-423).

*“No, they are all over; they are all over the school.”* (Teacher participant A, lines 425-426). *“They are outgoing; they are registering their presence you know.”* (Teacher participant A, lines 984-985). (All the abovementioned was meant in a positive light).

The teacher participants are of opinion that the lesbian learners increased sense of self-worth and confidence can be attributed to the fact that they are acknowledged and accommodated by the majority of their teachers and peers. Those individuals that deem it acceptable to harass and abuse them because of their sexual orientation are in the minority:

*“Maybe for the mere fact that they are accommodated and nobody discriminates against them. It also gives them a boost you know. They see they are part of the whole. They are acknowledged. That is why they lift their heads high you know.”* (Teacher participant A, lines 997-1003).

*“Definitely because if you feel accommodated you do not have anything to fear so you can do and express yourself without fear.”* (Teacher participant C, lines 733-736).

#### **4.2.4.3 Increased visibility**

In this subtheme I present the perceptions that the lesbian learners included in this study have in terms of their visibility at school.

In accordance to research done by McCormack (2011) the lesbian learners in this study are experiencing increased visibility because of most of their fellow learners and teachers positive change in attitude towards them. The learner participants explained that their increased visibility can be attributed to: 1) a decreased sense of fear to show themselves; 2) an increase in their numbers and 3) the fact that they make themselves more visible by wearing the uniform designated for boys and by cutting their hair like boys. Below follows data extracted from the research transcripts that validate the above mentioned:

*“Yes the pants show that they are lesbian.”* (Learner participant B, lines 944).

*LPC: “Yes they are because they can show themselves.”* (Learner participant C, lines 1169-1170).

*“A lot of lesbian want to do **Mohawks** (a punk hairstyle) and dye their hair blonde to be more visible. That they (the school) do not allow but otherwise they are fine.”* (Learner participant A, lines 843-847).

The teacher participants confirmed that the lesbian learners' dress code, hairstyles, confidence, outspokenness, and lack of fear to show themselves, contribute to their increased visibility:

*“What makes them more visible at school are the fact that they always in their trousers.”* (Teacher participant C, lines 369-371).

*“Learner participant A likes boys' hairstyles you know, even their movement. Even lesbian Y she leaves her hair she wants' it to be kinky. But she leaves it just as natural and then she cuts it somehow so that everybody distinguishes her as a boy.”* (Teacher participant A, lines 460-466).

*“In most cases as I am saying in this school most learners are free they quickly express themselves and you can see them. They don't hide you can see them.”* (Teacher participant C, lines 376-379).

*“The lesbians they do not want to be underrated they also want to be counted amongst those who are there. They want to show that they are a force to be reckoned with.”* (Teacher participant A, lines 418-423).

*“But it is easy to come out of the closet now. Even last week when I drove to WITS I saw some toilets that were pink.”* (Teacher participant A, lines 1213-1215). (Teacher participant A indicated that on further investigation she found that these toilets was meant for LGBT people).

*“So they not afraid to show who they are.”* (Teacher participant C, line 380).

From the data that transpired in this subtheme it can be affirmed that the lesbian learners included in this study do not regard themselves as lesser human beings. They are proud of who they are and they are not afraid to show themselves at school. Having self-identified lesbians that are visible at school may be exactly what society needs to become more knowledgeable and accepting of those with a different sexual orientation than what they are used to.

#### **4.2.4.4 Lower levels of absenteeism, truancy and school dropouts**

According to McCormack (2011) homosexual youth generally have higher levels of absenteeism and truancy. Research by Mishna et al. (2009) indicated that their school dropout rate is also higher. This study however found the opposite in the two schools included in this study. The learner participants explained that they do not stay absent from school unless it is absolutely necessary, they do not play truant and they all intend to complete their schooling career despite the challenges they are confronted with at school.

*“I never mind them and I walk away no matter what they say or I just concentrate on my aim to finish school and see myself being successful.”* (Learner participant B, lines 481-483).

The teacher participants confirmed that the lesbian learner participants do not stay absent from school without reason and they do not play truant:

*“It is like she comes to school and when she is not there, there is a reason for her not to be present. She is not truant, she doesn’t bunk classes.”* (Teacher participant A, lines 382-389).

*“Hey that ones are ever present. I don’t remember a day when I missed one of them. I sometimes even wonder whether they get sick or not, because they are always present”* (Teacher participant C, lines 305-309).

Teacher participant C explained that the learner participants’ lower level of absenteeism and truancy can be attributed to: 1) their high level of responsibility; 2) the fact that they do not like confrontation; they want to be on the good side of their teachers; and 3) they want to do better at school than their heterosexual peers. This finding was not included in the literature consulted and could be a topic for further research. Below follows extracts from the research transcripts that depicts teacher participant C’s understanding of why the lesbian learners at school B experience lower levels of absenteeism, truancy and school dropouts:

*“I should think maybe their resilience has caused them to be more responsible. They don’t want to be on the wrong side of the educators. They always want to do what is right so that they cannot come out bad. Most of the time they will do you work. In fact I see they hate confrontation. So in order to avoid confrontation with the educators do the work and don’t dotch and then you will always be on their good side.”* (Teacher participant C, 315-324)

*“Ja, I think so. That is why I say they develop a sense of responsibility. They want to be better than their heterosexual peers. If you praise them they become very happy.”* (Teacher participant C, 330-334).

Rivers (2000) indicated that the rate of absenteeism and truancy of LGBT learners can only be decreased if their school environment is made safe. Teacher participant A affirms this finding by describing the safety of school A as follows:

*“There is no learner who is going to take advantage of another learner simply because he is gay or lesbian. No bullying. Each and every learner who is found to be guilty of that faces punishment.”* (Teacher participant A, lines 603-607).

In accordance with Grossman et al. (2009) this study revealed that a decrease in homophobic harassment and abuse leads to fewer school dropouts among the lesbian learners:

*Interviewer: Do you think that the heterosexual learners' attitude towards lesbian learners has changed for the better?*

*TPA: Definitely. I say definitely because they just interact with them in marvelous ways you know. (Learner participant A, lines 1152-1153).*

#### **4.2.4.5 Increased levels of academic resilience and achievement**

In this subtheme the learner participants' display of increased academic resilience and achievement are presented.

In correlation with research conducted by Kosciw (2004) this research study discovered that the lesbian learners included in this study's prospects of educational success are significantly increased despite the difficulties they are confronted with at school. This study revealed that the lesbian learners included in this study are experiencing a decrease in homophobic harassment and abuse at school. Research by Murdock and Bolch (2005), Mishna et al. (2009) as well as Blackburn and McCready (2009) indicated that a decrease in homophobic harassment and abuse at school results in grades of improved quality and lower levels of academic failure for many LGBT learners.

The data obtained in this subtheme indicated that the learner participants' academic performance was in accordance with their individual academic potential. It also indicated that all the learner participants intended to complete their schooling career and continue their education on tertiary level. Supporting data extracted from research transcripts that demonstrates the lesbian learners academic performance follows below:

*"Yes I do excel but English worries me. Sometimes I want to say more." (Learner participant A, lines 587-588).*

*"I am doing great. The day I received my report I found that I obtained level 7 in English. My African language, level 7 and Maths level 5, Life science level 5 or 6." (Learner participant B, lines 488-490).*

*"At school I just make sure that I concentrate and forget about everything and forget about the fact that I am like this. If the teacher ask a question and I raise my hand I not afraid what other learners will say. Even If I get it wrong." (Learner participant B, lines 860 & 863).*

*"Now I am doing fine. I am passing. I only failed in June because I failed Mathematics and Life sciences." (Learner participant C, lines 29-31).*

*“Even though when there is times when people tell you bad things. I will avoid it and tell myself not to listen to what other people has to say about me, I am here to learn and build my future.” (Learner participant C, lines 769-773)*

The teacher participant confirmed that the lesbian learners are coping well in school. They are performing according to their own potential; experiencing constant and increased levels of academic achievement:

*Interviewer: “Would you say that learner participant A and the other lesbian learners that you know are engaged with their education?”*

*LPA: “Yes they are. They really love their education, except the fact that at times they fall short of academic excellence you know. But they really try very, very hard.” (Teacher participant A, lines 562-566).*

*“Academically they are performing well. Most of them are performing well and they want to learn. They are eager to learn.” (Teacher participant B, lines 328-331).*

*“Ja, I think so because part of it is they want to do better in order to be accommodated. So that wanting to do better makes them to do better academically.” (Teacher participant C, lines 725-729).*

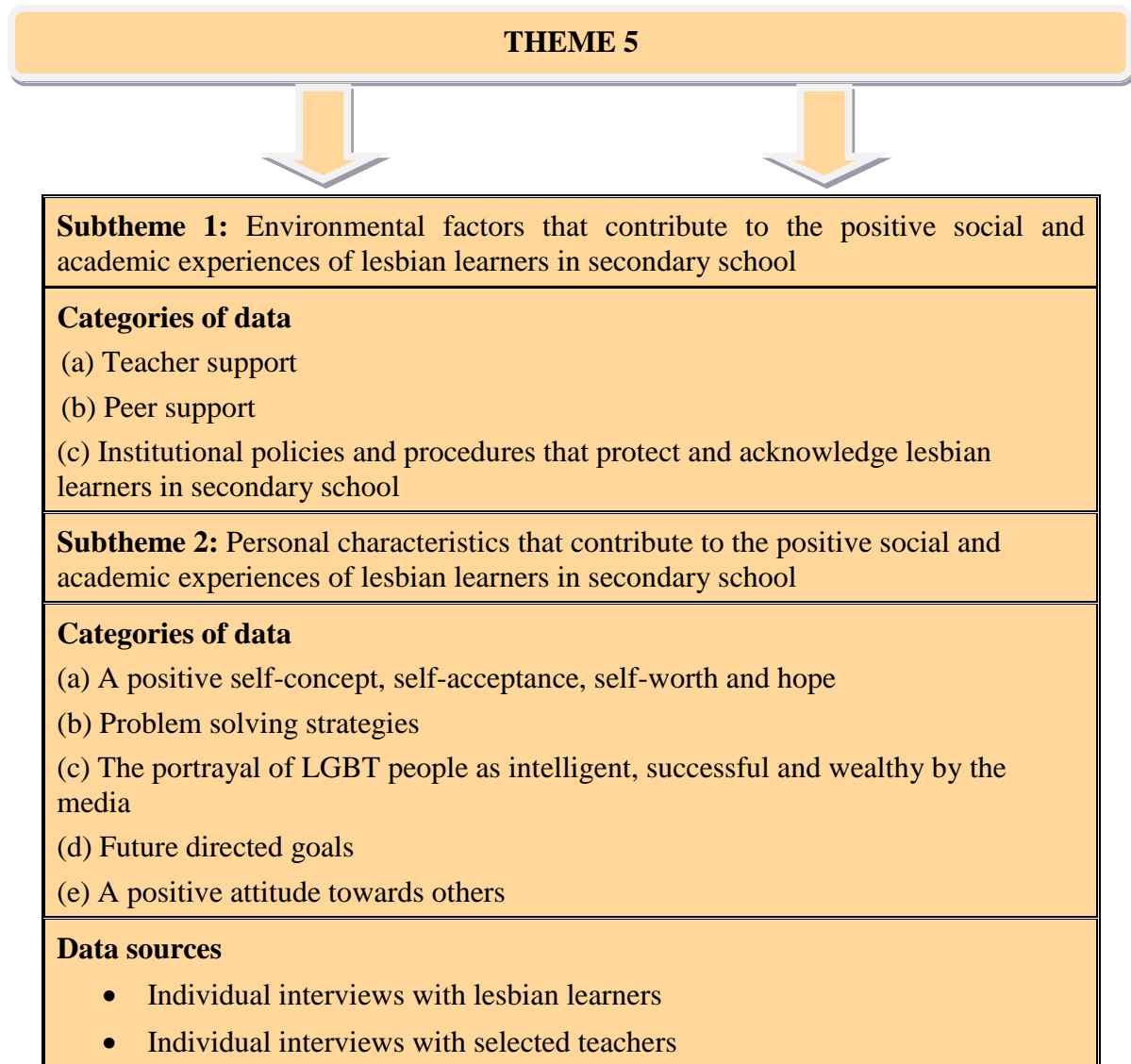
*“No they are good. They don’t fail. They are always in the middle. They are going in the middle group.” (Teacher participant C, lines 339-341).*

#### **4.2.5 FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE POSITIVE SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES OF LESBIAN LEARNERS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL**

Theme five as summarized in the table below presents the lesbian learner participants’ view of the environmental and personal factors that contribute to their positive experiences at school.



**Table 4.6: Theme 5 – Summary**



**4.2.5.1 Environmental influences that contribute to the learner participants’ positive social and academic experiences at school**

In this subtheme the learner participants’ understanding of the external factors that contributes to the increase in their positive social and academic experiences at school are presented. In correlation with research conducted by Kosciw et al. (2013) this study indicated that supportive teachers, supportive peers and protective institutional policies contributes to the positive school experiences of lesbian learners in secondary schools.

**(a) Teacher support**

In this category of data the teacher’s support as an environmental influence that contributes to the positive experiences of lesbian learners in secondary schools is discussed.

Kosciw et al. (2013) states that teachers who make means to intervene to ensure a school environment that is safe for all learners including LGBT learners contribute to a less hostile school climate, a decrease in homophobic harassment and abuse and an increase in the level of attendance and academic achievement for LGBT learners. The learner participants explained that their schools have put measures in place to address issues of misconduct that impacts negatively on the safety of the learners at school.

In accordance with McCormack study (2009) the lesbian learners at schools A and B reported that they really benefit from their teachers' academic support because it helps them to address their academic challenges in order to reach their full potential. Similar to McCormack's (2009) research, this study also found that knowing that they are allowed to be themselves in an environment where they are respected, acknowledged and affirmed by most of their teachers made school a more positive experience for the lesbian learners included in this study. The following data extracted from research transcripts demonstrates the learners' perception of their teachers' support:

*“If I do not understand something I will just raise my hand and the teacher will explain it to me.” (Learner participant A, lines 622-623).*

*“You know if a boy called you “stabane” they will call the same boy and they will ask him what that is. You know why you called those names. Do you know what it stands for so don't do it to other children or else you will be suspended.” (Learner participant A, lines 1349-1353).*

*“And if I have a problem I can ask any teacher I want. About you know that menstruation I can talk to any teacher. Those pads they offer at school.” (Learner participant A, lines 951-954).*

*“There are many because they know that I am a hard worker. So like ja... If I ask my teachers for help they will assist me.” (Learner participant B, line 953-955).*

*“My teachers are supportive especially my Physical Science teacher. He tells me never to give up. To stick to my studies. He will tell me if I ever need help on a subject I must come to him.” (Learner participant C, lines 863-867).*

*“The positive things that I am experiencing are that the teachers help us a lot to achieve our things even though you are lesbian.” (Learner participant C, lines 1180-1183).*

*“If ever they find you bullying they will take you straight to the police station.” (Learner participant C, lines 942-943).*

Learner participant B reported that having a lesbian student teacher at school was a significant source of support for her. She mentioned that this student teacher helped her to understand and accept that she was different and she helped her with the challenges that she was experiencing when she first realised that she was lesbian:

*“Like she was the one who I was speaking to. She was the one who called me and told me that I am different.”* (Learner participant B, lines 59-62.) (According to learner participant B she could not understand why she is different from other girls. Teacher DEF who, is also lesbian, explained that she is different because she is lesbian.)

*“I used to hang out with teacher DEF and tell her that I am experiencing this and she would help me with this and all that.”* (Learner participant B, lines 65-67).

The teacher participants substantiated the learner participants’ reports by stating that the staff of their schools protect and support all their learners academically and otherwise depending on their needs:

**Interviewer:** *“Do you regard yourself as one of the educators on the premises that are supportive of the lesbian learners?”*

**TPA:** *“Yes I may regard myself as one although I am not the only one everybody does so.”* (Teacher participant A, lines 844-845).

*“Those who need more attention will definitely get that attention. Particularly if you realise they may have missed out on a specific section, five or six including someone who is lesbian because it is a learner. And once they got it right it is fine you carry on with the larger group. We are not selecting them on the basis of being lesbian.”* (Teacher participant A, lines 885-894).

**Interviewer:** *“Teacher mentoring. Do you think that the teachers at your school are supportive and accepting of the lesbian learners?”*

**TPC:** *“Ja, they do support them even though we do not have something in writing. We have never had a complaint from a lesbian stating that she has been harassed by a teacher.”* (Teacher participant C, lines 770-774).

*“In most cases we have to be defensive and say “hey that is not the proper way to do things.”* (Teacher participant C, lines 149-151). (This reprimand was used by teacher participant C to address the derogatory statements made by heterosexual boys and girls about a lesbian netball player).

*“You have to protect them from such incidences.”* (Teacher participant C, lines 154-155).

It can thus be asserted that the lesbian learners receive support as would other learners because their teachers accept them as their students even though they do not support their lesbian sexual orientation. Their unwillingness to accept and support lesbianism is motivated by their staunch Christian beliefs and convictions.

**(b) Peer support**

I present the learner participants' view on peer support as an environmental influence that contributes to their positive school experiences in this category of data.

In accordance with research done by Robinson (2010) this study revealed that peer support acts as a protective measure against homophobic victimization and harassment. Learner participant A reported that some of her heterosexual peers understand why she is lesbian; hence they are very protective of her. She explains that her heterosexual classmates and friends defend her when people make derogatory remarks about her sexual orientation. Learner participant A stated the following:

*“But if someone says “stabane” to me they can’t laugh because they say that one is not a joke.” (Learner participant A, lines 639-641).*

*“The others just said why you keep on saying such things to her. They do not want to hear those words because they understand.” (Learner participant A, lines 237-239). (Comments made by Learner participant A’s classmates if someone makes derogatory remarks about her lesbian sexual orientation)*

In relation to research conducted by Craig et al. (2008) this study also revealed that the lesbian learner participants find support from other LGBT youth through friendship groups. Craig et al. (2008) indicate that this happens because sharing their stories with each other helps them to experience a sense of collective empowerment; being together helps them to feel less isolated.

As indicated in a study by Grossman et al. (2009) some heterosexual learners also form part of established LGBT friendship groups. According to Grossman et al. (2009) coming together with homo- and heterosexual others is regarded as a positive school experience for LGBT learners because it gives them the opportunity to meet people who accept and support them. According to Asakura (2010) these informally established friendship groups seem to contribute to improved relationships with others, a positive sense of self, identity and safety for the lesbian learners included in this study. Supporting data extracted from research transcripts that demonstrates the support the lesbian learners are experiencing through friendship groups follows below:

*“Informally and it just happened spontaneously. Even if it is during break you will never find the lesbian alone and on their own you will find them with others laughing etc. you can see they are free.” (Teacher participant C, lines 762-766)*

This research study, however, revealed that the lesbian learners included in this study are concerned that an increasing number of heterosexual girls are supportive and accepting of their lesbian sexual orientation because they want to be lesbians too. Their reasons for wanting to become lesbian includes them thinking that: 1) it is cool to be lesbian; 2) entering into a lesbian relationship is safe because lesbians do not hurt or rape their partners; and 3) they will not fall pregnant from being intimate with a lesbian. This finding was not mentioned in the literature studies hence further research seeking clarification on this finding is a possibility. Below follows extracts from research transcripts that demonstrates the previously mentioned:

*“Some learners yes they do accept us. They want to be like us. Even though they can’t they trying. You will even see a girl walking like a man saying I am a lesbian tomorrow its something else.” (Learner participant C, lines 1184-1188).*

*“She will tell her that it is good to date lesbians because they don’t hurt girls. Boys hurt girls.” (Learner participant C, lines 622-624). (A comment made by a heterosexual girl dating lesbian girls)*

*“You now the reason why I chose to be lesbian were because I wanted to safeguard myself against these boys you know. So that they think I am also a boy. In a way they shouldn’t harass me. I didn’t want a boyfriend that is why I was protecting myself.” (Teacher participant A, lines 134-140) (This extract indicates the reason a heterosexual girl gave to teacher participant A for pretending to be lesbian.)”*

*“That is when I pitched up and asked why they want to be lesbian and that is when they said they do not want to be raped.” (Teacher participant B, lines 398-400). (Question asked to determine why some girls choose to enter into lesbian relationships).*

*“Yes. They advice me. Some teachers they say you are helping yourself by being lesbian because we are having problems with teenage pregnancy at school. Seeing that you are lesbian we do not expect you to fall pregnant you see. That is how you help yourself.” (Learner participant A, lines 614-618).*

**(c) Institutional policies and procedures that protect and acknowledge lesbian learners in secondary school**

This category of data discusses the institutional policies that are perceived as supportive and protective by the lesbian learners included in this study.

As indicated in research done by Kosciw et al. (2013) this study found that the implementation of safety policies, which includes anti-bullying policies, positively contributes to the lesbian learners psychological wellbeing as it increases their safety and it strengthens their sense of belonging and feelings of self-worth. In this study the learner participants from schools A and B reported that they feel safer at school because their principals recently announced and implemented a new safety policy which is designed to ensure the safety and protection of all learners. The lesbian learner participants indicated that, because they know that their schools are protective of their learners, they are not afraid to come to school. Below follows supporting data extracted from research transcripts:

*“Yes, because it is a new policy for the school when you fight they punish you and already it happened.”* (Learner participant A, lines 1360 -1361). (Comment on the schools newly announced and implemented safety policy)

*“Yes, then they call the police.”* (Learner participant A, lines 1365).

*“Ja, there is this policy our principal announced. He said that each and every learner of the school must enjoy being here and they must not be afraid to be here because of this and this and this. He said like we have to all be free and feel free.”* (Learner participant B, lines 765-768).

*“If ever they find you bullying they will take you straight to the police station.”* (Learner participant C, lines 942-943).

**Interviewer:** *“Are you no longer scared of the other children?”*

**LPB:** *“No I am no longer scared of them.”* (Learner participant B, lines 854).

**Interviewer:** *“Are you afraid of the teachers?”*

**LPB:** *No I am not. If they ask me questions. I will tell them I did not choose to be like this.* (Learner participant B, lines 856-857).

Learner participant A reported that her school has adapted the policy on the dress code for girls in order to meet the needs of the lesbian learners. She explained that all the girls at her school are allowed to wear the boys’ uniform if they wish to do so, as long it is worn as indicated in the code of conduct.

*“No, unless you don’t wear your uniform properly then they say if you are not going to wear your trousers properly, others make their trousers like skinny jeans, or they roll it up like this, see, then they see it will be better for you to wear a skirt and that will be fine.”* (Learner participant A, lines 939-945).

Teacher participant C reported that even though school B has not adapted their policy on the dress code for girls they do acknowledge the presence and the needs of their lesbian learners, hence they allow them to dress according to the dress code agreed upon for boys:

*“They once forced Karabo to not put on pants and she went straight to the management and she said “people I can’t. Please let me wear pants. And the principal gave her permission and made an exception to the uniform committee to say please allow this one to put on trousers. And even her friend. So they were allowed to put on trousers.”*

Based on the data obtained in this category of data it can be affirmed that the implementation of safety policies and the adaptation of institutional policies such as the school’s code of conduct contributed to the positive experiences of the lesbian learners enrolled at the school included in this study.

#### **4.2.5.2 Individual characteristics that contribute to the learner participants’ positive social and academic experiences at school**

In this subtheme the learner participants’ perception of the individual characteristic that contributes to a more positive school experience is discussed.

##### **(a) A positive self-concept, self-acceptance, self-worth and hope**

In relation to research conducted by Ebersöhn and Ellof (2002), Msibi (2012) and Robinson (2010) this study revealed that a positive self-concept, a sense self-worth and hope contributed to the learner participants’ positive experiences at school. All the learner participants reported that they have a positive self-esteem and high levels of self-acceptance, self-worth and pride as well as hope for the future. Below follows data extracted from research transcripts that supports the previously mentioned:

##### ***Self acceptance***

*“Ha I don’t feel bad because I have accepted myself. Last of last year in 2010. I was fighting with them if they say those things. But now even if a person says “stabane” I do not worry.”* (Learner participant A, lines 226-229)

*“No I am fine the way I am. I accept myself the way I am.”* (Learner participant C, lines 238-239)

##### ***A sense of self-worth and pride***

*“In my mind it is me, I want people to accept us the way we are. I have my own future and I am going to marry my own wife. That is what is on my mind. I don’t care what people*

*say, what they do whether they accept me but I will stick to being Les.” (Learner participant C, lines 457-461).*

### **Hope**

*“Ja, I always have hope even if they say we are Satanist but I pray every night asking God that people should understand and accept me the way I am because it is hard to live a live that other people do not understand and don’t accept you the way you are.” (Learner participant C, lines 223-229).*

The study revealed that these positive characteristics help the learner participants to cope with the negative remarks made by some of their peers and teachers, dismissing it as insignificant. This in turn contributes to them being less vulnerable to homophobic verbal harassment and abuse.

### **(b) Problemsolving strategies**

As stated by Scourfield et al. (2008) the lesbian learners included in this study use their perception of lesbianism as being biologically based, assertiveness as well as safe spaces and people to protect and defend themselves against the onslaughts of homophobic harassment and abuse which in turn increases their positive experiences at school. I present data extracted from research transcripts that supports the above mentioned:

#### ***The perception of lesbianism as biologically based***

*“Some of the times but I did not let it change my ways because that’s the way I am. It is not that I wanted to be like this. The thing is my hormones are mostly men’s hormones and outside I look like a straight female.” (Learner participant B, lines 96-99).*

*“I think I was born like this because when my mom was pregnant with me they expected to get a baby boy and then I came a baby girl and my father treated me like a boy. He was always cutting my hair, buying me boy’s toys. I grew up like this.” (Learner participant B, lines 238-242).*

*“My mother’s sister took me to be baptized. When he baptized me he told my mother’s sister it is a demon. We went to church they prayed. Nothing came out. It is me, it is the real me inside. Nothing even a church or a thunder storm can’t change it. It is the way I am. If people can understand I would be very, very happy.” (Learner participant C, lines 1360-1367).*



### *Assertiveness*

*“You know when I say a thing to a person that he does not like they will come to me straight and tell me I don’t like this and that. Then I apologize and then we are cool. But if you come to me shouting and screaming I promise you I will beat you. You will never do it again.”* (Learner participant A, lines 344-350).

### *Safe people and safe spaces*

*“Yes, you know sometimes they exclude themselves those other lesbians. They are afraid. They do not want to mix with other children. You see they don’t want to talk to them and see how they are.”* (Learner participant A, lines 650-654).

### **(c) The portrayal of LGBT people as intelligent, successful and wealthy by the media**

In correlation with research conducted by Msibi (2012) this study revealed that portrayal of LGBT people as intelligent, successful and wealthy contributed to higher levels of motivation to do better academically amongst the lesbian learner participants. The learner participants reported that they are inspired to improve themselves by: 1) the successful and wealthy LGBT people they interact with at “Pride”; and 2) the amount of LGBT people who are awarded for their achievements in the fields of sport, academics and arts and culture at the annual lesbian awards ceremony hosted by the Gauteng Lesbian Association. Below follows supporting data extracted from research transcripts that demonstrates the positive impact that successful LGBT adults have on the LGBT youth included in this study:

*LPA: “Yes I do excel but English worries me. Sometimes I want to say more. So you see lesbian life they speak English. When we are at Pride and the places we sometimes go to lesbians and gays than when we arrive there the majority of them are successful and you find that everyone speaks English. And if you don’t know how to speak it well they will laugh at you.”* (Learner participant A, lines 587-595)

*Interviewer: “Do they have good jobs?”*

*LPA: “Yes.”* (Learner participant A, line 601)

*Interviewer: “What kind of jobs do they have?”*

*LPA: “They are lectures, lawyers many of them are psychologist.”* (Learner participant A, line 603)

*Interviewer: “What do you want to?”*

*LPB: "I like engineering" (Learner participant B, line 493)*

*Interviewer: "Civil or mechanical or chemical?"*

*LPB: "Mechanical engineer."(Learner participant B, line 495)*

**(d) Future directed goals**

In correlation to research conducted by Ebersöhn and Eloff (2002) and Robinson (2010) this study indicated that having future directed goals (future career objectives and a family of their own) contributed to the academic achievements of lesbian learners included in this study. The data obtained revealed that the learner participants have an inherent need to succeed and improve their lives in spite of the challenges they are confronted with at school and at home:

*"Matric is a very important year. It is an opportunity that only comes ones. Yesterday I worked until late at school and only came home at half past ten. I want to succeed in my exam this year." (Learner participant A, lines 883-887).*

*"I want my mother to be proud of me. (Learner participant A, line 909).*

*"I never mind them and I walk away no matter what they say or I just concentrate on my aim to finish school and see myself being a successful." (Learner participant B, lines 481-483).*

*"I cope even though it is hard. I tell myself let it go forget about it. Think about the future. Think straight and think about passing, achieving your things. Ja that is how I cope I speak with my mind." (Learner participant C, lines 1197-1201).*

*"I always think that one day I will buy my mother a house. It is what I tell myself every day. And I want to take my family and put them in that house." (Learner participant C, lines 790-794).*

*"In my mind it is me, I want people to accept us the way we are. I have my own future and I am going to marry my own wife. That is what is on my mind. I don't care what people say, what they do whether they accept me but I will stick to being Les." (Learner participant C, lines 457-461).*

**(e) A positive attitude towards others**

What was also revealed in this research study is that being accessible and having a positive attitude towards others contributed to a more positive school experience for LGBT learners. This information was not indicated in the literature studied.

In this study learner participant A reported that because she made an effort to interact with her heterosexual class mates and fellow learners they got to know and understand her. She believes that if she did not do this they would not have had the opportunity to see that there was no need for them to be afraid of her. People are sometimes afraid of the things that society labels as negative. Learner participant A mentioned the following:

*“If you nice and good and attempt to socialize, acceptance of you is easier.” (LPA, lines 663-664).*

*“The other kids are just cool. They understand me. I like joking and I spend a lot of time playing you see. When it is break I want to know everyone.” (LPA, lines 273-276).*

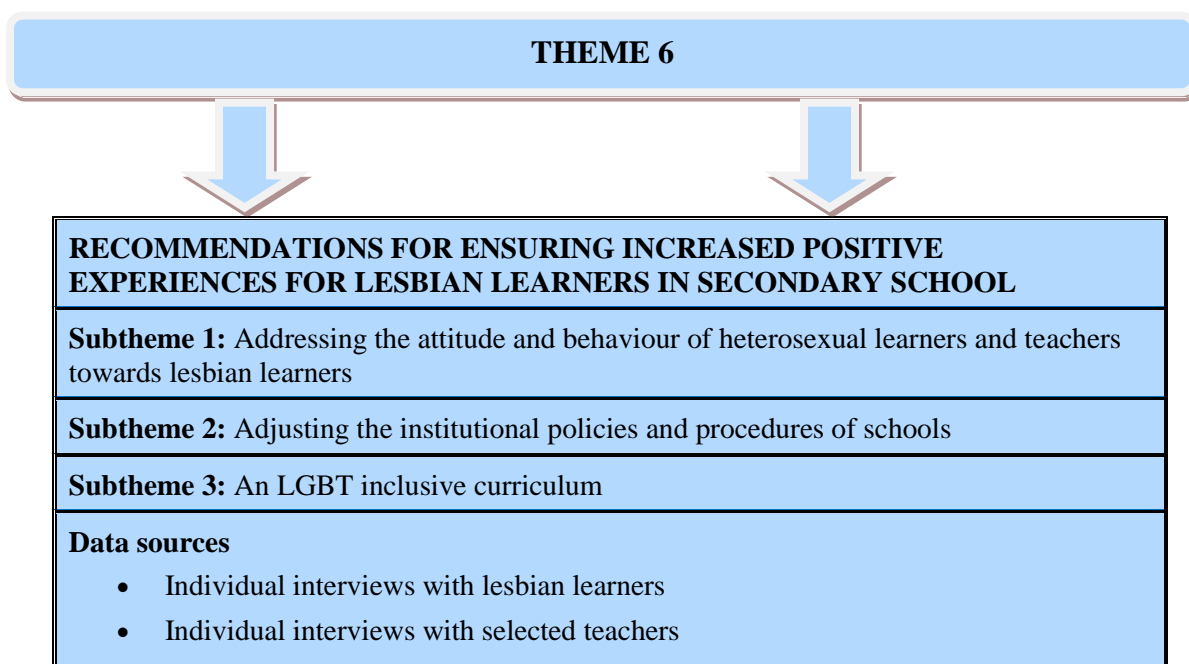
*“The thing is to girls I am very sweet. I like doing jokes when I do jokes girls laugh. That is why they like me.” (LPC, lines 429-432).*

The teacher participants confirmed that the abovementioned personal characteristics as well as a positive attitude towards others contributed to the learner participants being respected, supported and accommodated by most of their heterosexual peers and teachers.

#### 4.2.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENSURING INCREASED POSITIVE EXPERIENCES FOR LESBIAN LEARNERS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL

In this theme as summarized in the table below, the recommendations made by the learner and teacher participants in terms of ensuring more positive experiences for lesbian learners in secondary schools is presented.

**Table 4.7: Theme 6 – Summary**



In this theme I present the learner and teacher participants' recommendations in terms of ensuring increased positive experiences for lesbian learners in secondary school.

#### **4.2.6.1 Addressing the attitude and behaviour of heterosexual learners and teachers towards lesbian learners**

In this subtheme recommendations made by the learner and teacher participants regarding the attitude and behaviour of heterosexual learners and teachers towards lesbian learners are discussed.

The learner and teacher participants recommended that the homophobic attitude and lack of knowledge in terms of lesbianism displayed by some heterosexual learners and teachers should be addressed by themselves as well as the Department of Education. They suggested that their schools' learners and teachers be capacitated and sensitized in terms of sexual orientation and alternative lifestyles:

*"I will change the way those Christian teachers think. They need to learn about lesbian and gay people."* (Lerner participant A, lines 1659-1660).

*"I will inform them and explain because I think they do not have any idea about lesbians and gays. Even my friends and classmates when I tell them like we do go to church. They like, "you go to church" and all that."* (Learner participant B, lines 981-984).

*"Maybe you could say that according to the research there is too much discrimination towards the lesbians and all that. And then teach them to understand even though they do not accept it just to show us that they welcome us the way we are."* (LPB, lines 1023-1030).

*"Maybe they can send memos at first and thereafter address the head of institutions and then ask them to cascade that information."* (Teacher participant A, lines 1300-1303).

#### **4.2.6.2 Adjusting the institutional policies and procedures of schools**

In this subtheme recommendations made by the learner and teacher participants regarding the adjustment of institutional policies and procedures are presented. The following recommendations were made:

- **A formalized policy that will protect LGBT learners against homophobic harassment and abuse should be established**

*"As much as we have an HIV policy I should think we need to have something written about him. We also teachers one day someone might be offended and come and vent his anger on someone like that."* (Teacher participant C, lines 777-782).

➤ **The Life Orientation and Life Sciences curriculum should be adjusted to include aspects on sexual orientation:**

*“Like on Life Orientation they have to do a special thing about lesbians and gays and all that and they have to show the kids first that we understand lesbians even though we do not accept them and like explain to the other learners about it so that can also be like fine with it and not discriminate against us.” (Learner participant B, lines 996-1001).*

*“They should start to tell out teachers to start teaching about lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender people.” (Learner participant C, lines 1258-1260)*

*“It should be included in Life Sciences where it belongs. Life Sciences must tell us why lesbians and gays are the way they are.” (Teacher participant C, lines 472-475).*

Learner participant C suggested that the following aspects on lesbianism should be covered in the curriculum:

*“They shouldn’t just like the way I am they should understand my personality from inside. They should know what I am made of. They should know like the things I go through before they discriminate against me. Whenever it comes to gays and lesbians learners should know what we are made of what we are born of. They mustn’t just like the way we walk the way we talk. They must understand like inner, inner inside.” (LPC, L 1313-1323).*

#### **4.4 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, I reported the results that I obtained from this study by using direct quotations, illustrating the themes that emerged from the thematic data analysis. The results and findings indicated that:

- The lesbian learners included in this study are experiencing challenges in terms of homophobic harassment and abuse at school. They have however learned to cope with their challenges because they are acknowledged and accommodated by most of their peers and teachers.
- Their positive experiences at school are increasing and even though they do experience incidences of homophobic harassment and abuse its frequency and intensity is decreasing.
- The lesbian learners are visibly confident and proud to be who they are and they are doing well at school. Having self-identified lesbians that are visible at school may be exactly what society needs in order to become more knowledgeable and accepting of those with a different sexual orientation.

- The lesbian learners' constancy in terms of academic performance and school attendance, their visibility at school and their engagement in the learning process can be attributed to:
  - them being acknowledged by most of their teachers and fellow learners
  - a decrease in the frequency of homophobic harassment and abuse at school
  - constant academic support from their teachers.
- There is a definite need for heterosexual learners and teachers to be capacitated in terms of sexuality and sexual orientation as well as homophobic bullying (harassment and abuse) and its consequences. Every learner who enrolls at any given school in South Africa has the right to feel safe, to be treated with respect and to be accepted and welcomed into the school community.

In chapter five the research questions that directed this exploration are answered and the potential contribution of this study to society is discussed. This is followed by conclusions and recommendations for future research.

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## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The objective of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the social and educational experiences of three South African lesbian secondary school learners. These learners were enrolled at two different public township schools in Gauteng, Pretoria. The study intended to explore their positive and negative social and academic school experiences by: 1) determining what they are experiencing at school; 2) investigating the cause of their experiences; 3) finding out what the academic and psychological consequences of their experiences are; and 4) looking into recommendations to enhance their positive experiences at school.

An overview of the previous chapters is as follows:

Chapter 1 provided an introduction to the study in which the rationale, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the conceptual framework and the paradigmatic perspective, from which the study was approached, was discussed. The research questions were introduced and the main concepts relating to the context of the research study were explained.

This was followed by a literature review in chapter 2 which explored existing literature on the experiences of lesbian learners in secondary schools. Previous research on this topic conducted in countries such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Australia and South Africa were studied with the aim of obtaining an understanding of the negative and the positive experiences of lesbian learners in secondary schools as well as the impact it has on their psychological wellbeing. A detailed discussion on the theoretical framework from which the topic was examined and contextualized concluded the chapter.

Chapter 3 focused on the research plan which includes the paradigmatic perspective, the research design and methodology, aspects regarding the trustworthiness of the study and the ethical guidelines adhered to during the process of research.

In Chapter 4, I presented the results of the study by grouping it into themes, subthemes and categories of data that emerged from previous research as well as during the process of thematic analysis. A comparison was made between existing literature on the social and academic experiences of lesbian learners and their current experiences in secondary school.

## 5.2 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

I now present the central findings of this study by examining the secondary research questions in order to answer the primary research question.

### 5.2.1 THE PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION

This research study was directed by the following primary research question:

*What are the negative and the positive social and educational experiences that lesbian learners in South African secondary schools are exposed to?*

### 5.2.2 SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

#### 5.2.2.1 Secondary research question 1

*What are the negative social and academic experiences that lesbian learners in South African secondary schools are exposed to?*

The findings of this study indicated that the lesbian learners included in this study perceive their experiences of homophobic verbal, sexual and emotional harassment and abuse as negative. They did however indicate that the frequency and intensity at which homophobic harassment and abuse occurs has significantly declined since they first enrolled at their schools (three to four years ago). The lesbian learner participants hold the view that the positive change in attitude of the heterosexual learners and teachers towards them as well as their increase in numbers have contributed to a decline in homophobic abuse and an increase in positive school experiences for them. Below follows a detailed account of the learner participants' negative school experiences as mentioned above:

#### (a) Homophobic verbal harassment and abuse

The study found that homophobic verbal abuse is the most prevalent in the schools included in this study. The study however revealed a difference in the type of homophobic verbal harassment and abuse employed by learners and teachers. Predominant forms of homophobic verbal harassment and abuse employed by some of the heterosexual learners' includes humiliation, cursing, threats of rape, name calling and blackmail. The most prominent derogatory words used by the learners to refer to lesbians include Isitabane (a woman who wants to be a man) and illuminatè (Devil worshipper/ Satanist).” The learner participants added that these words are sometimes used with additional vulgar curses. It could be that the learners are using the word illuminate because they do not understand the concept of lesbianism. They do however know that Christianity does not condone sexual relations between people of the same gender, hence their perception of it as satanic.



The learner participants indicated that the most prevalent form of verbal harassment and abuse inflicted on them by some of their teachers includes constant negative feedback in the form of reprimands to change, insults, humiliation, name calling and sarcasm. Derogatory words that are mostly used by teachers when referring to them are **mona mosate** (man-women), **transi** (transgender) and **gay** (a male homosexual). The previously mentioned is concerning as such behaviour is not only unprofessional but also unconstitutional.

**(b) Homophobic physical and sexual harassment and abuse**

The study found that homophobic sexual harassment and abuse do occur in the schools included in this study but at a much lower rate. The learner participants reported that threats of rape made by some of the older boys in grade 11 and 12 accompanied by inappropriate touching (sexual harassment/abuse) are the most frightening and concerning of all the negative experiences they have to endure at school. The learner participants indicated that these boys seem to believe that raping a lesbian would cure her from being lesbian.

I, the researcher, am of opinion that such threats should not be taken lightly as it places the lesbian learners at risk of being sexually violated and emotionally scarred by the very same boys, whether it be on or off the school premises. Research by Swarr (2012) indicated that some of the men in South African townships sexually assault and sometimes kill lesbian women as punishment for being lesbian. The urgency of this situation is thus intensified as the schools included in this study are situated in a township.

**(c) Social exclusion and emotional abuse**

The findings of the study indicated that some of the heterosexual learners do refrain from interacting with the lesbian learners. The lesbian learners included in this study reported that some of the girls at school look at them with disgust and make derogatory remarks when they pass. Some of their classmates confront them just to express their utter disgust and disapproval of their lesbian sexual orientation. The learner participants stated that such behaviour hurts, but that they do not allow it to derail them because most of their peers and teachers are protective, supportive and accommodative of them.

The learner participants from school B reported that some of their teachers, especially the female teachers who are staunch in their Christian beliefs went as far as to exclude them from cultural and sporting activities in which they had an interest last year by using dress code and logistics as an excuse. The teacher participants however reported the opposite, indicating that all the learners enrolled at their schools are free to participate in any of the extramural activities their schools are able to provide. The possibility do however exists that the teachers at schools A and B are not interested in meeting the needs of the lesbian learners in terms of

extramural activities. The study revealed that some of the lesbian learners enrolled at the schools included in this study prefer to be excluded by and isolated from their heterosexual peers because they are afraid of being ridiculed and rejected by them.

The learner participants indicated that they experience most of their teachers as tolerant and accommodative. There are however those who believe that lesbianism is a satanic endeavour that can only be cured through prayer. The learner participants were of opinion that these individuals' negative responses to them were not only motivated by their faith but also by their lack of knowledge in terms of lesbianism and their lack of professionalism.

What drew my, the researcher's, attention most was firstly, the fact that learner participants indicated that the teachers, whom they deem as guilty of homophobic verbal harassment and abuse, do not seem to regard their behaviour as wrong or unprofessional and secondly, the fact that two out of the three teachers included in this study indicated that they were not aware of the occurrence of homophobic verbal and sexual harassment and abuse at their schools. This situation raises concern as to whether the management and staff of the schools included in this study regard the safety and wellbeing of their lesbian learners as important enough to address.

#### **5.2.2.2 Secondary research question 2**

*What factors contribute to the negative social and academic experiences of lesbian learners in South African secondary school?*

This study found that environmental factors such as: a) homophobia and heterosexism; b) peer pressure; c) school climate; d) religion; e) institutional policies and procedures; f) a lack of teacher support in terms of lesbianism; g) a non-LGBT inclusive curriculum; and 8) a lack of school based Gay Straight Alliances contributed to the negative experiences of learner participants enrolled at the secondary schools included in this study.

##### **(a) Homophobia and heterosexism**

The existence of homophobia in the schools included in this study is evident through the occurrence of incidences of homophobic verbal and sexual harassment and abuse. The presence of heterosexism is evident through the reported occurrence of incidences such as:

- Lesbian learners being excluded from the school choir because of their request to wear the uniform prescribed for boys.
- Lesbian learners being excluded from playing soccer because of logistics and gender.

- Constant reprimands from teachers to act like girls rather than lesbians because it is un-Christian-like.
- Statements such as “I will pray for you so that you can see that you are not a lesbian but a beautiful woman just as God intended you to be.”
- Teachers and learners making fun of lesbianism in class.

**(b) Peer pressure**

The study found that the lesbians as well as the heterosexual girls experience peer pressure with regards to lesbianism. The learner participants reported that they experience incidences such as threats of rape, and looks and remarks of disgust as pressure to conform to societal gender norms.

They indicated that most of the heterosexual girls wanting to be friends with them are too frightened to do so because they are manipulated into believing that they would become lesbian if they associate themselves with the lesbian girls. Their fear is intensified by the fact that they might be shunned and ridiculed by their heterosexual friends.

**(c) School climate**

Both schools included in this study are township schools with large learner populations. The findings of the study indicated that the learner participant enrolled at school A experienced a greater sense of happiness, a higher level of engagement and connectedness and a higher level of commitment to her school than the learner participants enrolled at school B.

The findings of the study indicated that the difference in their experiences can partially be attributed to the difference in their school environments. The study revealed that: 1) school A's level of discipline and academic drive is higher than that of school B's; 2) the learners and the teachers at school A are more willing to accommodate the lesbian learners than the learners and the teachers at school B; 3) school B had more learners with severe behavioural challenges over the last four years than school A; and 4) the lesbian learners at school A experienced less homophobic harassment and abuse from their peers and teachers than the lesbian learners at school B.

The previously mentioned indicates that school climate most definitely impacts on the experiences of lesbian learners. It seems as if a positive school environment contributes to more positive school experiences and higher levels of academic performance and emotional wellbeing for lesbian learners. This finding clearly illustrates the importance of creating

school environments that are safe, healthy and accommodating of all learners despite their differences.

**(d) Religion**

The learner participants indicated that even though they are not rejected as learners, their sexual orientation are not approved of or accepted by most of their peers and teachers. The learner participants indicated that they experience constant reprimands from most of their teachers; motivated by their Christian faith. They indicated that most of their peers and teachers are under the impression that they do not believe in God because they are lesbian. When taking all the factors that contributed to the learners and the teachers at schools A and B's inability to accept the lesbian learners' sexual orientation into consideration, religion seemed to carry the most weight.

**(e) Institutional policies and procedures that disregard the existence on lesbian learners**

The study revealed that the learner participants perceive institutional policies such as the policy on the provision of bathroom facilities and the policy on dress code for learners as having a negative impact on their school experiences. The learner participants indicated that using the female bathrooms causes distress as the heterosexual girls regard them as boys while using the boys' bathrooms increases their risk of being sexually assaulted. It could be that the creation of sanitation facilities for LGBT learners are not regarded as priority by the schools included in this study as their financial resources are limited to providing learning material, electricity and water to their learners.

The learner participants from school B indicated that their school's policy on dress code has not been formally adjusted to accommodate them; consequently they have to face the schools uniform committee on a regular basis. School B's policy on dress code seems to leave room for the exclusion of lesbian learners from sport and cultural activities provided by the school.

**(f) Lack of teacher support in terms of lesbianism**

The findings of this study indicated that the learner participants perceive their teachers' lack of support in terms of their lesbian sexual orientation as a factor that significantly contributes to their negative experiences at school. They are of opinion that their teachers' unwillingness to accept lesbianism as a sexual orientation renders them with an inability to deal with lesbianism in an informed, professional manner.

**(g) A curriculum that is non-inclusive of LGBT issues**

The study indicated that the South African curriculum (CAPS) does not include content on LGBT issues. The lesbian learner participants however reported that issues on lesbianism are discussed when raised in class. They however perceive these impromptu discussions as harmful to them as it is unplanned, uninformed, disrespectful and humiliating. They added that they do not believe that these discussions are in any way beneficial to them or their heterosexual classmates.

The teacher participants are of opinion that information on the nature and cause of homosexuality, bisexuality and trans-sexuality should be included in the Life Orientation and Life Sciences curricula. They believe that formal education on these issues will accelerate society's acceptance of homosexuality, bisexuality and trans-sexuality as normal human sexual orientations.

I, the researcher, am of opinion that formal education on the above mentioned will not only increase society's acceptance of the previously mentioned sexual orientations, but it will also eradicate the fear that exists among most heterosexual people with regards to sexual orientations that are different from the societal norm.

**(h) The lack of gay straight alliances at school**

The negative impact of not having a Gay Straight Alliance at the schools included in this study is reflected by: 1) the fact that the lesbian learner participants are unaware of the existence of Gay Straight Alliances; 2) the leisurely speed at which school policies and procedures are adjusted to protect and promote the dignity and safety of LGBT learners; and 3) the lack of knowledge with regard to LGBT issues among heterosexual learners and teachers.

The teacher participants reported that they do not have GSA's at their schools, but they regard the lesbian learners' friendship groups as informally established Gay Straight Alliances. They are of opinion that members of such groups function as a source of support to each other.

Research done by Grossman et al. (2009) indicates that GSA's are responsible for more than support, they are also responsible for capacitating heterosexual learners and teachers in terms of LGBT issues, speeding up the process of change in institutional policies and ensuring that school environments are healthy and safe for LGBT learners. Hence it is important to raise awareness of the existence of such support groups amongst the teachers and the learners at the schools included in this study.

### 5.2.2.3 Secondary research question 3

*What impact does the negative social and academic experience of lesbian learners enrolled at South African secondary schools have on their mental health and psychological wellbeing?*

The findings of this study indicated that the learner participants have all experienced periods of negative mental health in the form of internal conflict, low self-esteem, depression, and suicidal ideation during their schooling career. The study found that only one out of the three learner participants used an addictive substance. She however indicated that this was for weight loss purposes only.

The study revealed that none of the mental health challenges experienced by the learner participants was primarily caused by their negative school experiences. Being rejected by their closest family members (parents and siblings) and guardians (uncles, aunts, friends of the family) was identified as the primary cause of their negative mental health experiences.

The teacher participants reported that they did not identify any of the learner participants as experiencing negative mental health during the last two to four years that they have known them. They added that if the learner participants were experiencing mental health challenges they managed to hide it very well. What serves as an issue for concern, is that the lesbian learners included in this study believe that they cannot disclose their challenges in terms of their sexual orientation to their teachers. Hence the possibility exists that they do hide the fact that they are experiencing emotional challenges because they do not trust their teachers.

### 5.2.2.4 Secondary research question 4

*What are the positive social and academic experiences of lesbian learners enrolled in South African secondary schools?*

The findings of this study indicated that the lesbian learners enrolled at the schools included in this study are experiencing the following positive occurrences:

#### (a) **A decrease in homophobic harassment and abuse**

This study indicated a significant decrease in the frequency and severity of homophobic harassment and abuse at the schools included in this study, over the last two to four years. The learner participants reported that most of their heterosexual peers and teachers have become more tolerant, accepting and accommodative of their presence. The learner participants attributed this positive change to an increase in their numbers and visibility. I, the researcher, am of opinion that this is a step in the right direction as far as the selected schools' journey towards inclusivity is concerned.

**(b) An improved sense of self-worth and confidence**

The study found that the lesbian learners enrolled at the schools included in this study experience high levels of self-worth and confidence. This finding is validated by the teacher participants' reports of increased levels of visibility, vocal presence and pride exhibited by their lesbian learners. The teacher participants highlighted this occurrence by indicating that the lesbian learners want their presence to be felt; they want everybody at school to know that they are a force to be reckoned with. I, the researcher, am concerned that their visibility and vocal presence might be a mechanism employed by them to cope with the challenges they are experiencing at school.

**(c) Lower levels of absenteeism, truancy and school dropouts**

In contrast with research by Mishna et al. (2009) and McCormack (2011) this study found that the learner participants experience lower levels of absenteeism and truancy and that the possibility of them dropping out of school is almost non-existent. The study revealed that this occurrence can be attributed to a range of factors which includes the learner participants' perceptions of education as the key to a better life and future, their increased level of responsibility and their fear of confrontation.

**(d) Increased levels of educational resilience and academic achievement**

The study found that the learner participants are experiencing constant and increased levels of academic performance in accordance with their individual academic potential. The findings indicated that the learner participants' prospects of eventually experiencing educational success are significantly elevated. The learner participants attributed this positive experience to the invaluable academic support they receive from their teachers.

**5.2.2.5 Secondary research question 5**

*What aspects contribute to the positive social and academic experiences of lesbian learners enrolled at South African public secondary school?*

The findings of this study reflected particular environmental and personal factors that contributed to the positive experiences of the lesbian learners included in this study.

**(a) Environmental influences that contribute to the learner participants' positive social and academic experiences at school**

The environmental factors that impacted positively on the learner participants' school experiences are: 1) academic support from their teachers; 2) support from most of their peers; 3) their schools' efforts to adjust and implement institutional policies and procedures to protect and acknowledge them and 4) the positive manner in which LGBT people are portrayed by the media.

**(b) Support from their teachers**

The participants indicated that even though most of their teachers do not approve of their lesbian sexual orientation, they can always rely on them for academic support. They mentioned that their support is beneficial as it helps them to address their academic challenges and it makes them feel acknowledged and accepted by their teachers. It is the view of the teacher participants that every learner enrolled at their schools must be supported academically and otherwise, depending on their needs. The teacher participants indicated that they regard all their learners as equal; hence they work towards accommodating them all, despite their differences. The study also found that having a lesbian student teacher on the staff who can act as a guardian and mentor for LGBT learners is a tremendous source of support.

**(c) Support from their peers**

The study found that the learner participant experience support from most of their peers and classmates. The learner participants indicated that some of their heterosexual classmates defend them against those who try to humiliate and hurt them because of their lesbian sexual orientation. The learner participants added that their classmates understand why they are lesbian; they know them hence they experience them as more than just their sexual orientation.

The study revealed that the learner participants regard the informally established friendship groups consisting of lesbian, gay, bisexual and heterosexual learners as a major source of support. The study found that these groups function as a platform where LGBT learners can share their stories and experience a sense of belonging, safety and collective empowerment. The teacher participants indicated that the level of freedom exhibited by the lesbian learners is at its highest when they are with their friends.

The learner participants indicated that the increasing number of straight girls who support them is concerning. The learner participants indicated that most of the girls, who support



them, only support them because they desire to be lesbian themselves. The learner participants regard their reasons for wanting to be lesbian as most concerning because it includes the following: 1) the heterosexual girls that support them are afraid of being hurt or raped in heterosexual relationships; 2) they are curious and they want to experience intimacy without the risk of falling pregnant and 3) they do not realize that there is more to being lesbian than what meets the eye.

**(d) The schools' efforts to adjust and implement institutional policies and procedures to protect and acknowledge the LGBT learners**

The study found that the learner participants perceive their schools' adjusted policy on dress code for learners and the newly implemented school safety policies as accommodative and protective of all learners. In accordance with research done by Kosciw et al. (2013) the learner participants reported that the previously mentioned changes contributed to their increased sense self-worth, confidence, belonging and safety at school.

**(e) The manner in which LGBT people are portrayed by the media**

The findings of this study indicated that the portrayal of LGBT people as intelligent, successful and wealthy by the media and LGBT outreach groups contributed to the level of confidence and self-worth experienced by the learner participants. Knowing that there are other people like them who do well despite of the challenges they had to endure, increased the learner participants motivation to achieve academically.

**(f) Individual characteristics that contribute to the learner participants' positive social and academic experiences at school**

This study found that individual character traits play an important role in terms of how people experience their environment. The study found that character traits such as a positive self-concept, self-acceptance, self-worth, hope and a positive attitude towards others contributed to the positive school experiences of the lesbian learners included in this study.

The study also revealed that the learner participants were goal directed and ambitious; intending to continue their education on tertiary level. It is a display of such characteristics utilised in conjunction with self-protective and problemsolving skills that enabled the learner participants included in this study to cope within their heterosexual school environment. The learner participants indicated that they often used the following self-protective and problemsolving skills to cope with the challenges they experienced at school:

- They viewed their sexual orientation as biologically based.

- They refrained from entering into conflict with their teachers by ensuring that they are present at all times, do well at school and act respectfully towards their teachers, peers and their school.
- They refrained from responding impulsively and negatively to homophobic attacks imposed on them by some of their peers and teachers.
- They chose to focus on their education as they perceive education as the key to a better life.

I, the researcher, am of opinion that the lesbian learners included in this study are coping well within their school environment; their increased level of school attendance and academic performance serves as confirmation of the above-mentioned.

#### **5.2.2.6 Secondary research question 6**

*What can be done to support lesbian learners in South African secondary schools?*

In order to ensure more positive school experiences for lesbian learners in South African secondary schools the learner and teacher participants suggested that:

- The homophobic attitudes and behaviour of some of the heterosexual learners and teachers at their schools be addressed by the Department of Education. They are of opinion that sensitizing secondary school learners and teachers in terms of sexual orientation and alternative lifestyles can be achieved through the curriculum and workshops for teachers.
- The Life Orientation and Life Sciences curriculum be adjusted to include content on the etiology and nature of homosexuality, bisexuality and transgender.
- The school safety policy designed by the Department of Education is adjusted to include measures that are specifically aimed at protecting LGBT learners against homophobic harassment and abuse.

### **5.3 STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY**

The literature review indicated that ample research on the experiences of lesbian learners in secondary schools has been conducted in countries such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Australia. The literature review however indicated that South African research on this topic is limited; justifying the need for research in this field of study.

The qualitative research approach that I followed allowed me to use different sources for data collection. This made the triangulation of the data collected possible and it increased the validity of my study. The use of semi-structured interviews consisting of open-ended

questions provided me with the opportunity to obtain rich descriptions of the learner and teacher participants' views and perceptions. Spending time with the learner participants outside the school context allowed me to obtain an understanding of their personalities and life outside the gates and fences of their schools.

The research process allowed the participants the opportunity to discuss their perceptions and feelings with regard to their experiences at school. It also allowed them to talk about their dreams for the future with someone who strived towards providing an emphatic ear and a safe space for them to tell their stories. The participants indicated that exploring their thoughts and feelings regarding this matter was cleansing and motivational as none of them has ever had the opportunity to speak freely about their school experiences and the impact that it has on their lives.

I, the researcher, am of opinion that this study sensitized the participant with regards to the South African Constitution, the South African Schools Act, the White Paper 6 and other concepts such as Gay Straight Alliances. This research study also opened a world that was closed to me. It gave me a newly found sense of understanding, acceptance and respect for lesbian people.

## **5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

In this section the limitations of this research study which includes the level of transferability of the study, the role of the researcher, the sampling of participants and contextual factors are discussed.

### **5.4.1 LEVEL OF REPRESENTATIVENESS OF THE STUDY**

The research population of this study is not representative of the diverse socio-economic and cultural groups living in South Africa. This implies that the results of this study is not representative of the experiences of the larger population of lesbian learners enrolled at South African schools. Hence the findings of this study cannot be generalised as such. The purpose of this study was not to generalize but to obtain an in-depth understanding of the school experiences of the selected cases.

### **5.4.2 THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER**

I approached this research study from the viewpoint of an educational psychology master's student and assumed the role of researcher. Being employed by the Department of Education as a counsellor and inclusive education facilitator increased the possibility of role confusion. To prevent role confusion I constantly monitored my actions as I needed to act in accordance with my role as researcher.

I did however play both roles when necessary. The lesbian learners included in this study were all exposed to socio-economic challenges; discrimination and rejection by their peers, teachers and family, hence the possibility of them experiencing negative mental health issues were high. I therefore remained sensitive and observant in order not to cause harm through my line of questioning and referred them to appropriate professionals in incidences where professional support was needed.

Furthermore entering someone else's world as I had to do allowed me so close to the participants that I constantly had to remind myself that I was in there in the capacity of a researcher. If not, I would not have been able to maintain the boundaries and objectivity required to complete this research project successfully.

### **5.4.3 SAMPLING OF PARTICIPANTS**

It was my intention to include learners from schools situated in different income group areas. This intention was however complicated by the fact that the more affluent schools that I approached were not prepared to allow their learners to participate in a research study of such a sensitive nature. They indicated that they were concerned about the legal implication that the identification of learners as lesbian might have for their schools. To compensate I employed the assistance of a lesbian teacher from one of the schools I serve to assist me in finding suitable research participants. I also changed my sampling strategy by obtaining permission to include them in this study from the possible learner participants and their parents, before I approached their schools.

### **5.4.4 CONTEXTUAL FACTORS**

Finally it is important to bear in mind that the views and experiences of the research participants are influenced by their individual life experiences and upbringing.

## **5.5 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY**

The results of this study may contribute:

- To the expansion of existing South African literature on LGBT issues as it serves to inform literature on the current views and experiences of lesbian learners in South African secondary schools.
- To the prevention of heterosexism and homophobia in South African secondary schools by utilising it to sensitise heterosexual learners and teachers in terms of the aetiology of lesbianism and the mental health challenges caused by homophobia and heterosexist.

- To enhancing the motivation of teachers to work towards transforming their school environments into inclusive, healthy and safe spaces for all learners; LGBT learners included.
- The adaptation of the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement for the Senior and Further Education and Training phases to include LGBT issues by providing the Department of Education with scientific evidence regarding the need to include information on homosexuality, bisexuality and transgender in the Life Orientation and the Life Sciences curricula.

## **5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS**

In this section recommendations for future training and research are made.

### **5.6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

This study may serve as a platform for further research in the field of Lesbian and Gay psychology. Possible future research studies include:

- Similar research using a larger sample of teacher and learner participants from secondary schools that differ in socio-economic status. Such a study could expand our understanding of the experiences of lesbian learners in South African secondary schools. It could also enhance our understanding of the practices and procedures that different schools employ to increase the positive experiences, mental health and psychological wellbeing of their LGBT learners.
- An exploration of the growing attraction of heterosexual girls towards lesbianism. Such an investigation can contribute to addressing possible societal challenges that makes lesbianism a better lifestyle option for many women. If it is found that such societal challenges do exist it should be addressed through education.
- An exploration into the attitude of male learners towards lesbian learners enrolled in black township schools. Such a study will provide an opportunity to obtain an in-depth understanding of the reason why some of the older boys deem it appropriate to verbally and sexually harass and assault their lesbian fellow learners.

### **5.6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE TRAINING**

Inclusion is about developing an inclusive community and education system. It is based on a value system that includes and celebrates diversity. It is about including everyone, regardless of ability, gender, language, disability, ethnicity and social status. It is about giving all learners access to the educational outcomes that a school can offer (White Paper 6 - Special Needs Education, building an inclusive education system, 2001). Hence it is important to

continuously train and develop teachers on aspects that have a negative impact on the academic performance, mental health and psychological wellbeing of the learners. This includes training on LGBT issues and concerns.

### **5.6.3 RECOMMENDATION FOR PRACTICE**

One may presume that more joint efforts between the Department of Education, the Department of Health, the Department of Social Services, LGBT outreach organizations and secondary schools are needed to capacitate the youth with regard to sexual orientation, relationships, intercourse and family planning.

## **5.7 CONCLUSION**

Chapter 5 concludes the interpretation of the research findings of this study with past findings in literature. Findings were confirmed; contradictions and silences stated and possible explanations and hypothesis for the participants' reports were provided. The primary and secondary research questions were answered, limitations were stated and recommendations for further research in the field of Lesbian and Gay Psychology were made.

As far as education is concerned, the White Paper 6, Special Needs Education (2001, draft policy) indicates that the approach to learner support must be holistic so that it can address the diversity of needs experienced by the learners. This refers to learning support within and outside the classroom context. The findings of this study indicated that at least one of the learner participants were experiencing psychological difficulties (barrier to learning) at the time of the research and that all of them had been subjected to mental health challenges during their secondary school career because of homophobic harassment and abuse at school.

The findings of the study revealed that the teachers do their best to accommodate, protect and support these learners academically. Unfortunately the study also indicated that two out of the three teachers included in the study were unaware of the psychological difficulties experienced by the learner participants. Hence their challenges in terms of homophobic harassment and abuse were never addressed and they never received the appropriate psychological support needed.

I, the researcher, am of opinion that this is an indication that urgent intervention with regard to the capacitation of the teachers employed at the schools included in this study is needed. Specific attention should be given to sexual orientation, homophobic harassment and abuse and its effect on the mental health of LGBT learners. The study indicated that the teachers at the participating schools are open to intervention that will empower them to address the challenges experienced by their LGBT learners.

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## APPENDICES

**All Appendices are captured on memory stick**

**Appendix A:**

Declaration of originality

**Appendix B:**

Ethical clearance certificate

**Appendix C:**

Semi-structured interviews (Learners and teachers)

**Appendix D:**

Letter of permission from principal, teacher and learners

**Appendix E:**

Consent forms

**Appendix F:**

Transcripts of interviews

**Appendix G:**

Letters and poems by learners

**Appendix H:**

Research journal

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

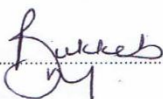
This document must be signed and submitted with every  
essay, report, project, assignment, dissertation and/or thesis.

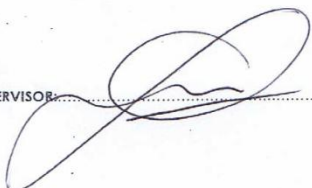
Full names of student: Melanie Annabelle Brikkes

Student number: 04401853

Declaration

1. I understand what plagiarism is and am aware of the University's policy in this regard.
2. I declare that this dissertation (eg essay, report, project, assignment, dissertation, thesis, etc) is my own original work. Where other people's work has been used (either from a printed source, Internet or any other source), this has been properly acknowledged and referenced in accordance with departmental requirements.
3. I have not used work previously produced by another student or any other person to hand in as my own.
4. I have not allowed, and will not allow, anyone to copy my work with the intention of passing it off as his or her own work.

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT: 

SIGNATURE OF SUPERVISOR: 

ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
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Faculty of Education

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

**CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE**

**CLEARANCE NUMBER :**

EP 13/05/01

**DEGREE AND PROJECT**

MEd

Social and educational experiences of secondary school lesbian youth

**INVESTIGATOR(S)**

Melanie Annabelle Brikfels

**DEPARTMENT**

Educational Psychology

**DATE CONSIDERED**

27 November 2014

**DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE**

APPROVED

Please note:

*For Masters applications, ethical clearance is valid for 2 years*

*For PhD applications, ethical clearance is valid for 3 years.*

**CHAIRPERSON OF ETHICS  
COMMITTEE**

Prof Liesel Ebersöhn

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read 'Liesel Ebersöhn', written over a horizontal line.

DATE

27 November 2014

CC

Jeannie Beukes  
Liesel Ebersöhn  
Prof C Lubbe-De Beer

This ethical clearance certificate is issued subject to the following condition:

1. It remains the students' responsibility to ensure that all the necessary forms for informed consent are kept for future queries.

Please quote the clearance number in all enquiries.

## APPENDIX C

### SEMI STRUCTURED INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW: LEARNER AND TEACHER PARTICIPANTS

#### DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUE: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW (LEARNER PARTICIPANTS)

**Interviewer:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Interviewee reference:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Place:** \_\_\_\_\_

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Thank you for agreeing to this meeting. As previously explained this interview forms part of my dissertation research into the experiences of lesbian learners in secondary schools. The purpose of this interview is to obtain your views on your experiences at secondary school.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- Tell me a little about yourself?
- How and when did you come to realise that you were attracted to girls rather than boys?
- How did you go about telling you friends and family about your attraction to girls?
- How did your friends and family react to your disclosure?
- How did the learners and the teachers at your school react to your disclosure?
- How has your life at school changed since you have disclosed your sexual orientation?



## **2.2 THE NEGATIVE SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES OF HOMOSEXUAL FEMALES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

### **2.2.1 Negative social experiences**

What kind of difficulties are you experiencing at school that you can directly link to you being lesbian? Can you elaborate by describing your difficult experiences? (Address each challenge named individually).

***If the learner does not mention any of the aspects below/or if you are not satisfied with their answer probe further by asking:***

#### **2.2.1.1 HOMOPHOBIC VERBAL ABUSE**

Have you ever had any one at school (whether it be a teacher or a learner or anyone of the school staff) call you names, tease you, or humiliate you in front of others.

- If yes, tell me what happened?
- What names did they use to refer to you?
- What did you do when this happened to you?
- Why did you decide to do what you did?
- How did this experience make you feel?
- If not, do you think this could ever happen to you? If yes/No. Why/ Why not?

#### **2.2.1.2 HOMOPHOBIC PHYSICAL AND SEXUAL ABUSE**

Have you ever been physically attacked (hit, kicked or assaulted or had your property stolen) or sexually assaulted (touched inappropriately, pushed and squeezes against a wall while someone made ugly comments towards you, raped) by peers, educators or any of the other staff members at the school?

- If yes, tell me what happened?
- What did you do to defend yourself?
- Did you report the incident to the office/police? Why/Why not?
- What was the office/ police response?

- How did this experience make you feel?
- If not, do you think this could ever happen to you? If yes/No. Why/ Why not?

### **2.2.1.3 Social and emotional exclusion and abuse**

- Do you think that you are being excluded from social activities and friendships with straight girls in your school because you are lesbian? Why do you think this is the case?
- Have you ever tried becoming friends with straight girls at you school. What was their response?
- How does being excluded make you feel?
- If you ever had the opportunity to tell the heterosexual boys and girls about being lesbian what would you say?

## **2.2.2 Negative academic experiences**

### **2.2.2.1 Increased levels of absenteeism**

- Do you attend school regularly? If no. Why not.

### **2.2.2.2 Lower levels of academic achievements**

- How are you doing at school?
- If the learner is not doing well ask: What do you think contributes to you not doing well at school?
- If the learner is doing well ask: What do you think contributes to your good results?

### **2.2.2.3 Invisibility and school disengagement**

- Do you have many friends at school that are straight?

If yes. How do you experience their friendship?

If no. Why do you think these girls do not want to associate themselves with you?

- How do those not wanting to associate themselves with you make you feel?

- Tell me about the school activities that you are involved in?

### **3. THE ASPECTS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEGATIVE SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES OF HOMOSEXUAL FEMALES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

What do you think contributes to straight boys and girls

Acting out against lesbian learners?

Do you think it can be one or more of the following aspects?

#### **3.1 Peer pressure**

- Are you being pressurized by your peers to act like and dress like a girl? If yes why do you feel this way?
- Do you think that the other girls in your school are being pressurized into not being friend with you because you are a lesbian? If yes why do you think so?

#### **3.2 School characteristics**

- How would you describe your school?
- Do you think your school is supportive of lesbian and gay learners? Please elaborate on your answer?

#### **3.3 Your own characteristics**

- Do you think that who you are as a person has an impact on how you are treated by your peers despite of the fact that you are lesbian?

#### **3.4 Religion and culture of the students and teachers**

- Does religion have an impact on how you are treated at school? If yes, please explain how and why?

#### **3.5 School policies and procedures**

- Do you think the schools that you are attending's policies are supportive of you as a lesbian? If not why do you think so?

### **3.6 Lack of support from educators**

- Are you experiencing any support from you teachers? Please explain why you feel this way?
- Are you experiencing any form of discrimination from the side of your educators? Please explain your answer?

### **3.7 Heterosexism and homophobia**

- Do you know what heterosexuality and homophobia is?
- Do you think this heterosexuality and homophobia contributes to what you are experiencing at school?

## **4. THE IMPACT OF NEGATIVE SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING OF HOMOSEXUAL FEMALES IN SECONDARY SCHOOL**

- Has your experiences had any effect on your emotional wellbeing? Please explain?

### **4.1 LOW SELF ESTEEM**

**Would you regard yourself as having a low self-esteem? (Afraid to mix with others, you do not believe that you are worthy or capable of being loved, accepted or excelling in your school work.**

### **4.2 INTERNAL CONFLICT**

Have you ever experienced feelings of not wanting to be lesbian anymore? If yes please explain why?

### **4.3 ANXIETY, DEPRESSION AND SUICIDAL IDEATION**

Have you ever experienced feelings of anxiety, depression or suicidal ideation? Please explain your experience and tell me why you have experienced this?

### **4.4 SUBSTANCE ABUSE**

Are you abusing any substances at this moment in time (e.g. Dagga, alcohol, tik, cocaine, etc.? What is your reason for using these substances?

## **5. THE POSITIVE SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES OF HOMOSEXUAL FEMALES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

- Do you have any positive school experiences that you would like to share with me?
- How do these experiences make you feel?

### **5.1 A DECREASE IN HOMOPHOBIC HARASSMENT AND ABUSE**

- When did you enrol at this school?
- Do you think that your fellow students and teachers attitudes towards lesbians have changed since you have enrolled in the school?
- If yes how did it change?
- If, no why do you think that their attitudes towards lesbians has not changed.

### **5.2 INCREASED EDUCATIONAL RESILIENCE**

Do you think you are going to complete your matric? What are your aspirations for the future? Are your results in line with what you would like to study one day? (Ask if you may see her report card)

### **5.3 INCREASED VISIBILITY AT SCHOOL**

Do you think lesbian learners are becoming more and more visible at school. If yes. Why do you think this is the case?

### **5.4 AN IMPROVED SENSE OF SELF-WORTH AND CONFIDENCE**

- Do you experience feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness at school?
- Do you think your sense of self-worth and confidence at school has increased? Please motivate your answer?

### **5.5 POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES**

- What would you regard as positive as far as your educational experiences in school is concerned?
- Why do you consider these educational experiences as positive?

- What about your education do you consider as negative experiences?
- Why do you consider these educational experiences as negative?

## 6. THE ASPECTS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE POSITIVE SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES OF HOMOSEXUAL FEMALES IN SECONDARY SCHOOL

### 6.1 A POSITIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

### 6.2 TEACHER MENTORING

### 6.3 SUPPORTIVE PEERS

### 6.4 A POSITIVE SELF IMAGE

- How did you manage to cope within your school setting?
- Do you think that your school does enough to keep lesbians safe from homophobic bullying and victimisation? If yes, what measures has the school put in place to protect you against homophobic bullying and victimisation?

If no, explain what the school can do to transform your school into a healthy and safe environment for all?

- What do you think you as a lesbian can do to make your peers and your teachers more accepting of you and other lesbian girls in your school?
- What do you think the teachers and the school can do to make your peers and your teachers more accepting of you and other lesbian girls in your school?
- What do you think the department of education can do to make your peers and your teachers more accepting of you and other lesbian girls in your school?
- What do you think about the curriculum's efforts to sensitize learners on the differences in terms of sexuality?
- If you could change anything at school what would it be?

**FINAL QUESTION:** Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about? (Do not forget to unwind the interview).

## DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUE: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW (TEACHER PARTICIPANTS)

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewee reference: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Thank you for agreeing to this interview. As previously explained this interview forms part of research on the experiences of lesbian learners in South African secondary schools. The purpose of this interview is to obtain your view on the experiences of lesbian youth in your school.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- Please tell me a little about yourself?
- What is your relation to \_\_\_\_\_ (the name of the learner participant)?
- How would you describe \_\_\_\_\_ (name of learner participant) in terms of physical appearance, behaviour and emotional wellbeing?
- What is your understanding of lesbianism?
- How do you feel about lesbianism?

## 2.2 THE NEGATIVE SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES OF LESBIANS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

### 2.2.1 NEGATIVE SOCIAL EXPERIENCES

Firstly we will be looking at possible negative social experiences that lesbian learners might be exposed to at school. These experiences include homophobic verbal harassment/abuse, physical harassment/abuse, sexual harassment/abuse, social exclusion and emotional abuse. Shall we start with homophobic verbal abuse first?

#### 2.2.1.1 HOMOPHOBIC VERBAL HARASSMENT/ABUSE,

a) Have you ever witnessed or received a complaint from \_\_\_\_\_ (the name of the learner participant) or any other lesbian learner stating that she has been humiliated, teased or called names because she is lesbian.

**If yes, ask:**

- Can you tell me what happened?
- What names did the individual call her?
- How did you react to the incident or complaint?
- Why did you react in this way?
- How did witnessing this incident/ hearing this complaint make you feel?

**If no, ask:**

- Why is it that you have never witnessed or received complaints of incidences of homophobic verbal harassment/abuse?



b) Have you ever received a complaint from \_\_\_\_\_ (the name of the learner participant) or any other lesbian learner that negative rumours are being spread about her throughout the school because of her lesbian status?

**If yes, ask:**

- Please describe the reported complaint?
- What was your reaction to the reported complaint?
- Why did you react in this way?
- How did this occurrence make you feel?

**If no, ask:**

- Why is it that you have received complaints of heterosexual girls spreading rumours about lesbian girls throughout the school because of their lesbian status?

### **2.2.1.2 HOMOPHOBIC PHYSICAL AND SEXUAL ABUSE**

a) Have you ever witnessed or received complaints from \_\_\_\_\_ (the name of the learner participant) or any other lesbian learner that she has been physically attacked or robbed at school because of lesbian status.

**If yes, ask:**

- Please describe the witnessed incident or reported complaint?
- What was your reaction to the witnessed incident or reported complaint?
- Why did you react in this way?
- How did witnessing this incident/ hearing this complaint make you feel?

**If no, ask:**

- Why is it that you have never witnessed or received complaints of incidences of homophobic physical harassment/abuse?

b) Have you ever witnessed or received complaints from \_\_\_\_\_ (the name of the learner participant) or any other lesbian learner that she has been sexually harassed (e.g. touched inappropriately, pushed and squeezes against a wall while having to listen to inappropriate sexual remarks made against her) by a learner, a teacher or any other staff member at school because she is lesbian?

c) Have you ever received complaints from \_\_\_\_\_ (the name of the learner participant) or any other lesbian learner that she has been sexually assaulted by a learner, a teacher or any other staff members at school because she is lesbian?

**If yes, ask:**

- Please describe the reported complaint?
- What was your reaction to the reported complaint?
- Why did you react in this way?
- How did this occurrence make you feel?

**If no, ask:**

- Why is it that you have never witnessed or received complaints of incidences of homophobic sexual harassment/abuse?

### **2.2.1.3 SOCIAL EXCLUSION**

a) Do you think that \_\_\_\_\_ (the name of the learner participant) or the other lesbian learners at your school are excluded from social activities such as sport, drama, music, etc. because of their lesbian status?

**If yes/no ask:**

- Why do you think this is the case?

(Could it be that the religion, culture and beliefs of the heterosexual learners or negative rumours that are being spread about lesbianism contributes to them being isolated)

- b) Do you think that \_\_\_\_\_ (the name of the learner participant) or the other lesbian learners at your school are isolated from/rejected by their heterosexual peers?

- **If yes/no ask:**

Why do you think this is the case?

**2.2.1.4 PEER PRESSURE**

- a) Do you think that \_\_\_\_\_ (the name of the learner participant) and the other lesbian learners in your school are being pressurized by their peers to be different than what they are?

**If yes/no ask:**

- Why do think this is the case?

- b) Do you think that there are heterosexual learners, especially girls, in your school that refrains from interacting or making friend with \_\_\_\_\_ (the name of the learner participant) and the other lesbian learners?

**If yes/no ask:**

- Why do think this is the case?
- Could it be because of their fear of lesbians, their religion, culture or beliefs. Or could it be because of negative rumours that are being spread about lesbians?

## **2.2.2 NEGATIVE ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES**

Now let's talk about the possible negative academic experiences that lesbian youth might be experiencing. These include a high level of absenteeism, a high level of truancy and poor academic performance.

### **2.2.2.1 INCREASED LEVELS OF ABSENTEEISM/TRUANCY**

a) Would you regard \_\_\_\_\_ (the name of the learner participant) rate of absenteeism and truancy (dodging) as high?

**If yes/no, ask:**

- Why do you think this is the case? (ask for a copy of the school attendance register and subject attendance register for 2013 and 2014).
- Do you think that being lesbian has an impact on one's rate of absenteeism and truancy?

b) Do you think that the rate of absenteeism and truancy is higher amongst the lesbian population of your school?

**If yes/no, ask:**

- Why do you think this is the case?

### **2.2.2.2 ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE**

a) Is \_\_\_\_\_ (the name of the learner participant) academic performance good or bad?

**If good or bad, ask:**

- Why do you think this is the case? (ask for copies academic reports)
- Do you think that being lesbian has any impact on her academic performance?

### **2.2.2.3 INVISIBILITY AND SCHOOL DISENGAGEMENT**

a) Would you say that \_\_\_\_\_ (the name of the learner participant) is visible and involved as far as education, extramural activities and socialization with her peers is concerned?

**If yes/no, ask**

- Please explain why/why not?

b) Would you say that all the lesbian learners at your school are visible and involved as far as education, extramural activities and socialization with their peers are concerned?

**If yes/no, ask**

- Please explain why/why not?

## **3. THE ASPECTS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEGATIVE SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES OF LESBIAN LEARNERS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

### **3.2 SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS**

a) Do you think that your school's ethos, code of conduct, religion, culture and discipline have an impact what \_\_\_\_\_ (the name of the learner participant) and the other lesbian learners are experiencing at school?

(focus on negative and positive experiences)

**If yes/no, ask:**

- Please explain why the abovementioned **does/does not** have an impact on what these learners are experiencing at school? (discuss one aspect at a time)

### **3.5 SCHOOL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

a) Do you think that safety and educational policies that the school must adhere to (inclusive education- white paper 6 and SASA) are supportive and protective of lesbian learners?

b) Does the school adhere to these policies?

**If yes/no, ask:**

- Please explain why/why not?

### **3.3 THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LESBIAN LEARNER**

a) Do you think that being lesbian determines how you will be treated by your peers and teachers at school or do you think that it is your personality and behaviour that determines you will be treated by your peers and teachers at school?

**If yes/no, ask:**

- Please explain.

### **3.6 LACK OF SUPPORT FROM EDUCATORS**

a) Would you say that you are supportive of \_\_\_\_\_ (the name of the learner participant) and the other lesbian learners that you know in your school?

- If yes/no, ask:
- Please explain how your support them?
- Please explain why you support them/why you do not support them?

b) Would you say that your colleagues are supportive of the lesbian learners enrolled at your school?

**If yes/no, ask:**

- Please explain why/why not?

### **3.7 HETEROSEXISM AND HOMOPHOBIA**

a) Do you think that there is a possibility that some of the learners and educators may be homophobic (experience a sense of fear and dislike towards homosexuals)?

**If yes/no ask:**

Please explain why/why not?

## **4. THE IMPACT OF NEGATIVE SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING OF LESBIANS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL**

### **4.1 LOW SELF ESTEEM**

a) Do you think that the social and academic experiences that \_\_\_\_\_ (the name of the learner participant) were exposed to had an effect on her self-esteem?

**If yes, ask:**

- Please explain?

(Take note that a low self esteem may include a fear of interacting with others; a believe that you are not worthy of being loved or accepted by others; a believe that you are not capable of succeeding in anything that you do).

### **4.2 INTERNAL CONFLICT**

a) Are you aware of internal conflict experienced by \_\_\_\_\_ (name of learner participant)? (Internal conflict in this instance may be caused by an individual's inability to accept his/her sexual orientation due to moral or religious reasons or guilt).

**If yes, ask:**

- Please explain?

b) Do you think that her experiences at school can be linked to the conflict that she is/is not experiencing in terms of acceptance of her sexual orientation?

**If yes/no, ask:**

- Please explain why/why not?

### **4.3 ANXIETY, DEPRESSION AND SUICIDAL IDEATION**

a) Are you aware of any emotional difficulties (anxiety, depression or suicidal ideation) experienced by \_\_\_\_\_ (name of learner participant)?

**If yes, ask:**

- Please explain?
- b) Would you say that the emotional difficulties/health that she is experiencing can be linked to her experiences in school?
- Please explain why/why not?

### **4.4 SUBSTANCE ABUSE**

a) Are you aware of any form of substance abuse (Dagga, alcohol, tik, nicotine, cocaine, etc.) experienced by \_\_\_\_\_ (name of learner participant)?

**If yes, ask:**

- Please explain?



b) Would you say that the fact that she is/is not abusing substances was influenced by her experiences in school?

**If yes/no, ask:**

- Please explain why/why not?

#### **4.5 BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS**

a) Are you aware of any behavioural problems that \_\_\_\_\_ (name of learner participant) are experiencing?

**If yes, ask:**

- Please explain?

### **5. THE POSITIVE SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES OF LESBIANS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

#### **5.1 A DECREASE IN HOMOPHOBIC HARASSMENT AND ABUSE**

a) How long have you been teaching at the school sir/madam?

b) Would you say that there has been a decrease in homophobic harassment and abuse towards lesbian learners since you started teaching at this school?

**If yes/no, ask:**

- What impact did it have on the social and academic experiences of the lesbian learners at your school?

#### **5.2 INCREASED EDUCATIONAL RESILIENCE**

a) What do you think contributes to the academic success/resilience experienced by \_\_\_\_\_ (name of learner participant) and the other lesbian learners in your school?

### **5.3 INCREASED VISIBILITY AT SCHOOL**

a) Do you think that \_\_\_\_\_ (name of learner participant) and the other lesbian learners at your school are currently more visible than in the past?

b) What do you think contributes to the increased visibility of lesbian learners at your school?

### **5.4 AN IMPROVED SENSE OF SELF-WORTH AND CONFIDENCE**

a) Do you think that \_\_\_\_\_ (name of learner participant) has a strong sense of self worth and confidence?

**If no, ask:**

- What do you think contributes to her sense of hopelessness and powerlessness?

**If yes, ask:**

- What do you think contributes to her strong sense of self worth and confidence?

## **6. THE ASPECTS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE POSITIVE SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES OF LESBIANS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL**

### **6.1 A POSITIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT**

a) Do you think that your school environment contributes to positive school experiences for lesbian learners?

**If yes, ask:**

- Is your school safe from homophobic bullying and victimisation?
- What measures have your school put in place to protect lesbian youth against homophobic bullying and victimisation?

- What measures have your school put in place to support lesbian learners?
- Do you think your school has done enough to promote an understanding and acceptance of lesbian learners in your school?

**If no, ask:**

- Why not?

## **6.2 TEACHER MENTORING**

a) Do you think that your teachers are supportive and accepting enough of the lesbian learners in your school?

**If yes, ask:**

- What do you do to support these learners?

**If no, ask:**

- What do you think can be done to increase the educator support and acceptance of lesbian learners in your school?

## **6.3 SUPPORTIVE PEERS**

a) Do you think that the learners in your school are supportive and accepting enough of the lesbian learners in your school?

**If yes, ask:**

- What peer support structures have been put in place to support these learners?

**If no, ask:**

- What do you think can be done to increase the level of peer support for lesbian learners in your school?

#### **6.4 A POSITIVE SELF IMAGE**

- What do you as a teacher do to increase the self image of lesbian learners at you school.
- What else to you think can be done to increase the self image of lesbian learners?

**FINAL QUESTION:** Is there anything else that you would like say that you feel is important in terms of this study?

We have come to the end of the interview and I would like to thank you for agreeing to be part of this research study. I will make the verbatim version of this interview available for your perusal and approval.

## APPENDIX D

### LETTER REQUESTING PERMISSION TO INCLUDE LEARNER, TEACHER, SCHOOL IN RESEARCH STUDY



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA  
Faculty of Education

Dear Principal

I am a student at the University of Pretoria. I am currently enrolled for my Masters in Educational Psychology in the Faculty of Education. In order to meet the all the requirements for a Masters degree in Educational Psychology I have to conduct research and write a research report about my work. Hence I would like to request permission to include a learner and a teacher from your school in my research study.

The topic of my research is: **An exploration of the social and educational experiences of lesbian youth in South African secondary schools.** The proposed research study is primarily intended to explore and obtain an in-depth understanding of the social and educational experiences of lesbian youth in South African secondary schools. Positive and negative experiences will be explored. Positive experiences include acceptance and support by peers and educators, support from family members, access to human resources such as counselors and social workers, inclusion in all school activities and academic achievement. Negative experiences include homophobic verbal abuse, physical assault/violence, isolation, a lack of acceptance, pressure to disclose their sexual orientation, negative feedback about their sexual orientation, poor academic performance and a high rate of absenteeism. The impact of the above mentioned on the psychological wellbeing of lesbian youth will be explored secondary to the research objective.

The unit of analyses will include three purposefully selected self identified lesbian learners from three different secondary schools in District Tshwane South, their parents/guardians and a teacher from each school that will be selected by the participating learners themselves. The Department of Education, District Tshwane

South includes all the schools in Pretoria East, Pretoria West, Pretoria South, Pretoria Central and Centurion. I have chosen to conduct the research study with learners and teachers in schools in this district as it is accessible to me.

I attached a copy of the interview schedules for your information. Interviews will be conducted at a venue and time that will suit the learners, their parents and the selected teachers. It will not interfere with learning and teaching time. The interviews will be audio taped and transcribed by me for analytic purposes only. I would also like to request access to related incident reports and attendance registers as document analyses will form part of the research.

The learners, their parents/guardians and the selected teachers will receive a letter requesting their participation in the research project. The learners, their parents/guardians and the selected teachers' participation are voluntarily and they may withdraw at any time.

The identity of the school and the participants will be protected. Only my supervisor and I will know which schools, learners, parents and teachers are involved in the research. The participants' identity and the information provided by them will only be accessed by me and my supervisor and will be treated as confidential. Pseudonyms will be used for all the schools, learners, parents/guardians and teachers during data collection, data analysis, other communications and research report writing. No identifying information will be given. The information to be collected will only be used for academic purposes.

Collected data will be in my or my supervisor's possession and will be locked up for safety and confidential purposes. After completion of the study, the material will be stored at the University of Pretoria's Educational Psychology Department according to policy requirements.

If you agree to allow a learner and a teacher from your school to participate in this research study, please fill in the consent form provided below. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact my supervisor or me at the numbers or e-mail address given below.

Name of supervisor:	Dr. Carien Lubbe-De Beer
Contact number for supervisor:	012 420 2765
E-mail of supervisor:	carien.lubbe@up.ac.za
Name of student:	Melanie Brikkels
Contact number for student:	076 458 1110
E-mail of student:	julien.brikkels@telkomsa.net

Yours sincerely

M A Brikkels



## Consent form

I, Mr/Mrs \_\_\_\_\_ (your surname), teacher of \_\_\_\_\_ agree / do not agree (delete what is not applicable) to take part in the research project titled: **An exploration of the social and educational experiences of lesbian youth in South African secondary schools.**

I understand that:

- I will be interviewed about this topic for approximately one hour at a venue and time that will suit me and that it will not interfere with school activities or teaching time.
- I understand that a follow up interview of at least an hour may be conducted if necessary.
- The interviews will be audio taped and transcribed.
- Incident reports and attendance registers that is relevant to the study will be copied and analysed by the researcher.
- The researcher subscribes to the principles of:
  - *Voluntary participation* in research, implying that the participants might withdraw from the research at any time.
  - *Informed consent*, meaning that research participants must at all times be fully informed about the research process and purposes, and must give consent to their participation in the research.
  - *Safety in participation*; put differently, that the human respondents should not be placed at risk or harm of any kind e.g., research with young children.
  - *Privacy*, meaning that the *confidentiality* and *anonymity* of human respondents should be protected at all times.
  - *Trust*, which implies that human respondents will not be respondent to any acts of deception or betrayal in the research process or its published outcomes.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_





Dear Sir/Madam

I am a student at the University of Pretoria. I am currently enrolled for a Masters degree in Educational Psychology at the Faculty of Education. In order to meet all the requirements for a Masters degree in Educational Psychology I have to conduct a research study and write a research report about my work. I would like to ask if you would be willing to participate in this research project as you have been selected to do so by \_\_\_\_\_ (learners name), who have already agreed to participate.

The topic of my research is: **An exploration of the social and educational experiences of lesbian youth in South African secondary schools.** The proposed research study is primarily intended to explore and obtain an in-depth understanding of the social and educational experiences of lesbian youth in South African secondary schools. Positive and negative experiences will be explored. Positive experiences include acceptance and support by their peers and teachers; support from family members, access to human resources such as counselors and social workers at school, inclusion in all school activities and academic achievement. Negative experiences include homophobic verbal abuse, physical assault/violence, isolation, a lack of acceptance, pressure to disclose your sexual orientation, negative feedback about your sexual orientation, a high rate of absenteeism and poor academic performance. The impact of the abovementioned on their psychological wellbeing will be explored secondary to the research objective.

The unit of analyses will include three purposefully selected self identified lesbian learners from three secondary schools in District Tshwane South, their parents and a teacher from each school selected by the participating learners themselves. The Department of Education, District Tshwane South includes schools in Pretoria East, Pretoria South, Pretoria West, Pretoria Central and Centurion. I have chosen to conduct the research study with learners, their parents and selected teachers in three schools selected from the abovementioned areas as it is accessible to me.

You do not have to participate in this research if you do not wish to, you will not be penalised in any way if you decide not to take part. If you decide to participate, but you change your mind later, you can withdraw your participation at any time. If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed about the previously stated topic. The interview will take place at a venue and time that will suit you and it will not interfere with your school activities or teaching time. The interview will not take longer than an hour and a half. A follow up interview of at least an hour may also be necessary. The interviews will be audio taped and transcribed for analytic purposes. I would like to request access to related incident reports and attendance registers as document analyses will also form part of the research.

Your identity will be protected. Only my supervisor and I will know your real name, as a pseudonym will be used during data collection and analysis. Your school will not be identified either. The information you give will only be used for academic purposes.

In my research report and in any other academic communication, your pseudonym will be used and no other identifying information will be given. Collected data will be in my or my supervisor's possession and will be locked up for safety and confidential purposes. After completion of the study, the material will be stored at the University of Pretoria's Educational Psychology department according to policy requirements.

If you agree to take part in this research project, please fill in the consent form provided below. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact my supervisor or me at the numbers e- mail address given below.

Name of supervisor:	Dr. Carien Lubbe-De Beer
Contact number for supervisor:	012 420 2765
E-mail of supervisor:	carien.lubbe@up.ac.za
Name of student:	Melanie Brikkels
Contact number for student:	076 458 1110
E-mail of student:	julien.brikkels@telkomsa.net

Yours sincerely

M A Brikkels



## Consent form

I, Mr/Mrs \_\_\_\_\_ (your surname), teacher of \_\_\_\_\_ agree / do not agree (delete what is not applicable) to take part in the research project titled: **An exploration of the social and educational experiences of lesbian youth in South African secondary schools.**

I understand that:

- I will be interviewed about this topic for approximately one hour at a venue and time that will suit me and that it will not interfere with school activities or teaching time.
- I understand that a follow up interview of at least an hour may be conducted if necessary.
- The interviews will be audio taped and transcribed.
- Incident reports and attendance registers that is relevant to the study will be copied and analysed by the researcher.
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  - *Safety in participation*; put differently, that the human respondents should not be placed at risk or harm of any kind e.g., research with young children.
  - *Privacy*, meaning that the *confidentiality* and *anonymity* of human respondents should be protected at all times.
  - *Trust*, which implies that human respondents will not be respondent to any acts of deception or betrayal in the research process or its published outcomes.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



Dear student .....

I am a student at the University of Pretoria. I am currently enrolled for my Masters in Educational Psychology in the Faculty of Education. In order to meet all the requirements for a Masters degree in Educational Psychology I have to conduct a research study and write a research report about my work. Hence I would like to ask if you would be willing to participate in this research project.

The topic of my research is: **An exploration of the social and educational experiences of lesbian youth in South African secondary schools.** The proposed research study is primarily intended to explore and obtain an in-depth understanding of the social and educational experiences of lesbian youth in South African secondary schools. Positive and negative experiences will be explored. Positive experiences include acceptance and support by peers and teachers; support from family members, access to human resources such as counselors and social workers at school, inclusion in all school activities and academic achievement. Negative experiences include homophobic verbal abuse, physical assault/violence, isolation, a lack of acceptance, pressure to disclose your sexual orientation, negative feedback about your sexual orientation, poor academic achievement and a high rate of absenteeism. The impact of the abovementioned on the lesbian youth's psychological wellbeing will be explored secondary to the research objective.

The unit of analyses will include three purposefully selected self identified lesbian learners from three secondary schools in District Tshwane South, their parents and a teacher from each school, selected by the participating learners themselves. The Department of Education, District Tshwane South includes school in Pretoria East, Pretoria South, Pretoria West, Pretoria Central and Centurion. I have chosen to conduct the research study with learners, their parents and selected teachers in three schools selected from the abovementioned areas as it is accessible to me.

You do not have to participate in this research if you do not wish to, you will not be penalised in any way if you decide not to take part. If you decide to participate, but you change your mind later, you can withdraw your participation at any time. If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed about the previously stated topic. The interview will take place at a venue and time that will suit you and it will not interfere with school activities or

teaching time. The interview will not take longer than an hour and a half. A follow up interview of at least an hour may also be necessary. The interviews will be audio taped and transcribed for analytic purposes. I would also like to request access to personal documents such as incident reports and attendance registers and any other documents that are related to this research study as document analyses will form part of the research.

Your identity will be protected. Only my supervisor and I will know your real name, as a pseudonym will be used during data collection and analysis. Your school will not be identified either. The information you give will only be used for academic purposes only.

In my research report and in any other academic communication, your pseudonym will be used and no other identifying information will be given. Collected data will be in my or my supervisor's possession and will be locked up for safety and confidential purposes. After completion of the study, the material will be stored at the University of Pretoria's Educational Psychology department according to policy requirements.

If you agree to take part in this research project, please fill in the consent form provided below. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact my supervisor or me at the numbers or e-mail address given below.

Name of supervisor:	Dr. Carien Lubbe-De Beer
Contact number for supervisor:	012 420 2765
E-mail of supervisor:	carien.lubbe@up.ac.za
Name of student:	Melanie Brikkels
Contact number for student:	076 458 1110
E-mail of student:	julien.brikkels@telkomsa.net

Yours sincerely

M A Brikkels



## Consent form

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (your name), agree/do not agree (delete what is not applicable) to take part in the research project titled: **An exploration of the social and academic experiences of lesbian youth in South African secondary schools.**

I understand that:

- I will be interviewed about this topic for approximately one and a half hours at a venue and time that will suit me and that it will not interfere with school activities or teaching time.
- I understand that a follow up interview of at least an hour may be conducted if necessary.
- The interviews will be audio taped and transcribed.
- Personal documents such as diaries, sms's, letters, photos, etc. that is relevant to the study will be copied and analysed by the researcher.
- The researcher subscribes to the principles of:
  - *Voluntary participation* in research, implying that the participants might withdraw from the research at any time.
  - *Informed consent*, meaning that research participants must at all times be fully informed about the research process and purposes, and must give consent to their participation in the research.
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  - *Trust*, which implies that human respondents will not be respondent to any acts of deception or betrayal in the research process or its published outcomes.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

CONSENT FORMS



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA  
Faculty of Education

Consent form

I, Esie Maimango (your name), agree/do not agree (delete what is not applicable) to take part in the research project titled: **An exploration of the social and academic experiences of lesbian youth in South African secondary schools.**

I understand that:

- I will be interviewed about this topic for approximately one and a half hours at a venue and time that will suit me and that it will not interfere with school activities or teaching time.
- I understand that a follow up interview of at least an hour may be conducted if necessary.
- The interviews will be audio taped and transcribed.
- Personal documents such as diaries, sms's, letters, photos, etc. that is relevant to the study will be copied and analysed by the researcher.
- The researcher subscribes to the principles of:
  - *Voluntary participation* in research, implying that the participants might withdraw from the research at any time.
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  - *Privacy*, meaning that the *confidentiality* and *anonymity* of human respondents should be protected at all times.
  - *Trust*, which implies that human respondents will not be respondent to any acts of deception or betrayal in the research process or its published outcomes.

Signature: 14 October 2013


Date: Esie

**Consent form**

I, Karabo Msimango (your name), agree/do not agree (delete what is not applicable) to take part in the research project titled: **An exploration of the social and academic experiences of lesbian youth in South African secondary schools.**

I understand that:

- I will be interviewed about this topic for approximately one and a half hours at a venue and time that will suit me and that it will not interfere with school activities or teaching time.
- I understand that a follow up interview of at least an hour may be conducted if necessary.
- The interviews will be audio taped and transcribed.
- Personal documents such as diaries, sms's, letters, photos, etc. that is relevant to the study will be copied and analysed by the researcher.
- The researcher subscribes to the principles of:
  - *Voluntary participation* in research, implying that the participants might withdraw from the research at any time.
  - *Informed consent*, meaning that research participants must at all times be fully informed about the research process and purposes, and must give consent to their participation in the research.
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  - *Privacy*, meaning that the *confidentiality* and *anonymity* of human respondents should be protected at all times.
  - *Trust*, which implies that human respondents will not be respondent to any acts of deception or betrayal in the research process or its published outcomes.

Signature: 

Date: 17/10/2013





**Consent form**

I, EUNICE PHIRI (your name), agree / ~~do not agree~~  
(delete what is not applicable) to take part in the research project titled: **An exploration of the social and educational experiences of lesbian youth in South African secondary schools.**

I understand that:

- I will be interviewed about this topic for approximately one and a half hours at a venue and time that will suit me and that it will not interfere with school activities or teaching time.
- I understand that a follow up interview of at least an hour may be conducted if necessary.
- The interviews will be audio taped and transcribed.
- Incident reports and attendance registers in the school's possession that are relevant to the study will be copied and analysed by the researcher.
- The researcher subscribes to the principles of:
  - *Voluntary participation* in research, implying that the participants might withdraw from the research at any time.
  - *Informed consent*, meaning that research participants must at all times be fully informed about the research process and purposes, and must give consent to their participation in the research.
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  - *Privacy*, meaning that the *confidentiality* and *anonymity* of human respondents should be protected at all times.
  - *Trust*, which implies that human respondents will not be respondent to any acts of deception or betrayal in the research process or its published outcomes.

Signature: Eunice Phiri

Date: 03/09/2014



**Consent form**

I, Mr/Ms MAREMA R.W. (your surname), agree/do not agree (delete what is not applicable) to allow a lesbian learner and a teacher selected by the learner to participate in the research study titled: **An exploration of the social and educational experiences of lesbian youth in South African secondary schools.**

I understand that:

- The learner, her parents/guardians and the teacher selected by the learner will be interviewed about this topic for approximately one and a half hours each at a venue and time that will suit them as well as the researcher. The interviews will not interfere with school activities or teaching time.
- A follow up interview of at least an hour may be conducted with the participants if necessary.
- The interviews will be audio taped and transcribed.
- Incident reports and attendance registers in the school's possession that are relevant to the study will be copied and analysed by the researcher.
- The researcher subscribes to the principles of:
  - *Voluntary participation* in research, implying that the participants might withdraw from the research at any time.
  - *Informed consent*, meaning that research participants must at all times be fully informed about the research process and purposes, and must give consent to their participation in the research.
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  - *Privacy*, meaning that the *confidentiality* and *anonymity* of human respondents should be protected at all times.

o *Trust*, which implies that human respondents will not be respondent to any acts of deception or betrayal in the research process or its published outcomes.

Signature: Maen

Date: 14/08/14



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA  
Faculty of Education

### Consent form

We, Mr and Mrs NELLY Msimango (your surname),  
parents/guardians of E. Msimango and P. Felusi agree / do not agree (delete  
what is not applicable) that our daughter takes part in the research project titled: **An  
exploration of the social and educational experiences of lesbian youth in South African  
secondary schools.** Unfortunately we will also not be available to participate.

We understand that:

- Our daughter will be interviewed about this topic for approximately one hour at a venue and time that will suit her and that it will not interfere with school activities or teaching time.
- We will be interviewed about this topic for approximately one hour at a venue and time that will suit us and that it will not interfere with our daughter's school activities or teaching time.
- We understand that a follow up interview of at least an hour may be conducted if necessary.
- The interviews will be audio taped and transcribed.
- Personal documents such as diaries, sms's, letters, photos, etc. that is relevant to the study will be copied and analysed by the researcher.
- The researcher subscribes to the principles of:
  - *Voluntary participation* in research, implying that the participants might withdraw from the research at any time.
  - *Informed consent*, meaning that research participants must at all times be fully informed about the research process and purposes, and must give consent to their participation in the research.
  - *Safety in participation*; put differently, that the human respondents should not be placed at risk or harm of any kind e.g., research with young children.
  - *Privacy*, meaning that the *confidentiality* and *anonymity* of human respondents should be protected at all times.

o. Trust, which implies that human respondents will not be respondent to any acts of deception or betrayal in the research process or its published outcomes.

Signature: 

Date: 12/10/2013



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA  
Faculty of Education

### Consent form

We, Mr and Mrs MERIAM NUOATLA (your surname),  
parents/guardians of NTHABISINY NUPATA agree / do not agree (delete  
what is not applicable) that our daughter takes part in the research project titled: **An  
exploration of the social and educational experiences of lesbian youth in South African  
secondary schools.** Unfortunately we will also not be available to participate.

We understand that:

- Our daughter will be interviewed about this topic for approximately one hour at a venue and time that will suit her and that it will not interfere with school activities or teaching time.
- We will be interviewed about this topic for approximately one hour at a venue and time that will suit us and that it will not interfere with our daughter's school activities or teaching time.
- We understand that a follow up interview of at least an hour may be conducted if necessary.
- The interviews will be audio taped and transcribed.
- Personal documents such as diaries, sms's, letters, photos, etc. that is relevant to the study will be copied and analysed by the researcher.
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  - *Safety in participation*; put differently, that the human respondents should not be placed at risk or harm of any kind e.g., research with young children.
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## TRANSCRIPTS OF INTERVIEWS

 2<sup>nd</sup> ATTEMPT AT ANALYSES

<b>Interview with learner participant C: Learner participant C (K in text))</b> <b>Grade: 10</b> <b>Age: 17 years old</b> <b>Venue: Public park selected by learner participant C</b> <b>Date : 15 October 2013</b> <b>time 16:30 – 18:30</b>			
	<b>Transcription</b>	<b>Line no.</b>	<b>Interpretation of data/ Summary</b>
<b>2.2.1 NEGATIVE SOCIAL EXPERIENCES OF LESBIAN LEARNERS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS</b>			
<b>2.2.1.1 Homophobic verbal abuse</b>			
Interviewer	How do the teachers at your school react to you being lesbian?	241 242	<b>2.2 THE NEGATIVE SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES OF LESBIAN LEARNERS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL</b>  <b>2.2.1 NEGATIVE SOCIAL EXPERIENCES OF LESBIAN LEARNERS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS</b>  <b>2.2.1.1 Homophobic verbal harassment and abuse</b> Homophobic verbal harassment and abuse at the hands of teachers and learners has been present in school B since their first lesbian learner enrolled in 2012. The occurrence and intensity of homophobic verbal harassment and abuse by teachers has decreased over the last two years. Most of the teachers are understanding, kind, supportive and compassionate towards the lesbian learners because the numbers of the lesbian learners have increased and the teachers are used to them being at school.  Learner participant C
LPC	Eh eh eh, the teachers. My teachers will call me names and it was hard because at Bbbbbbbbbb I was the first Les at school.	243 244 245 246	
Interviewer	What about learner participant B?	247	
LPC	learner participant B came last year. So I was the first one so at January they took me in questioning.	248 249 250	
Interviewer	Who took you?	251	
LPC	These other teachers? Mam Xoxoxox They told me girls do not wear trousers at this school. So I said I do not know cause I am new at the school. So they told me that I should wear a skirt. So I told them that I couldn't. I feel that when I am walking I feel like I am naked. Then she laughed as if it was a joke. It wasn't a joke. I was serious so it hurt me she does not know what I am going through.	251 252 253 254 255 256 257 258 259 260	
Interviewer	And she did not make an effort to understand.	261 262	
LPC	Yes. Then they kept on asking me questions. Some were very difficult to answer because they will ask me if I know my father. So I will say yes I can't describe him if he arrives. Then she said it is because you do not have a father that is why you wear trousers you are trying to make yourself a man when you are not a man. So it was hurtful.	263 264 265 266 267 268 269 270 271	
Interviewer	So they actually insulted you?	272	
LPC	Ja they insulted me.	273	
Interviewer	Did they laugh while they were talking to you?	274 275	
LPC	Yes they laughed as if it was a joke. To	276	

	me it was not a joke it was so painful.	277	<p>explains that even though the conditions at school B are more accommodative of lesbians there are still some teachers verbally harass and abuse them because of their sexual orientation. She indicates that the most prominent forms of homophobic verbal harassment and abuse employed by some teacher are name calling, confrontation, interrogation, insults, humiliation and sarcasm.</p> <p><b>a)Name calling</b> Learner participant C explains that the most prominent homophobic pejoratives used by some of the teachers are mona mosati (man-women), transi (transsexual) and gay (homosexual individual):</p> <p>they call me names like mona mosate in Tswana. So that is not right? (LPC, L 295 – 297). Some call me transi and some call me gay (LPC, L 305 – 306).</p> <p><b>b)Confrontation</b> Learner participant C explains that when she first enrolled at school B she was confronted by a particular teacher and her friends. The teacher said: Don't you know that girls do not wear trousers at this school? So I said I do not know cause I am new at the school. So they told me that I should wear a skirt. So I told them that I couldn't. I feel that when I am walking I feel like I am naked. Then she laughed as if it was a joke" (LPC, L 254 - 259)</p>
Interviewer	How did you respond?	278	
LPC	I am a soft person. Only tears came out in front of them but I did not say anything only tears came out. So another teacher came and gave me toilet paper to try my eyes. So she called me at her own office. So she is kind of a deputy principal. So she told me I must stick to what I am. I must not lose hope and she told me I must wear a trouser she will talk to the principal and it is what I did. So they started accepting the other lesbians so it is because of me, so I the first one BBB secondary.	279 280 281 282 283 284 285 286 287 288 289 290 291	
Interviewer	So that episode had a good outcome? It is a good thing for you.	293 294	
	Ja it is good but they still call me names like mona mosate in Tswana. So that is not right?	295 296 297 298	
Interviewer	What does mona mosati mean?	299	
LPC	Mana mosati means man-women.	300	
Interviewer	And other names.	301	
LPC	It is only that and they will call you transi. I am not transi. I am not transgender. For the lesbians they will only say mona mosati but some call me transi and some call me gay. But I will explain that I am not gay I am lesbian. A gay is a man that likes another man. A Les is a girl that loves another girl. So I will tell that always even today.	302 303 304 305 306 307 308 309 310	
Interviewer	So that a then? And you say the school has changed a little because they are now more accepting of you.	314 315 316	
LPC	A little bit ja.	317	
Interviewer	And they allow you now to wear your pants.	318 319	
LPC	Ja	320	
Interviewer	Ok K I am sure you have positive and negative experiences at school. So we going to speak about the negative experiences first. Can you think of any negative experiences that you had at school last year or this year because you are now at that school for three years?	321 322 323 324 325 326 327	
Interviewer	So tell me about this name calling.	337	
LPC	Are they teasing you or are they swearing at you or what?	338 339	
Interviewer	Some boys are swearing at me. They will tell me that they will rape me and stuff. But I trust myself.	340 341 342	



LPC	What do they say when they swear at you. They will tell me that they will rape me and they will change me the way I am. After they have raped me and then tomorrow I will come wearing a skirt and stuff.	343 344 345 346 347 348	<p><b>c) interrogation and d)insults</b> Learner participant C pointed out that this teacher and her friends did not stop there. They went as far as to interrogate, insult and humiliate her in front of other teachers because: "They kept on asking me questions. Some were very difficult to answer because they will ask me if I know my father. So I will say yes I can't describe him if he arrives. Then she said it is because you do not have a father that is why you wear trousers you are trying to make yourself a man when you are not a man. So it was hurtful "(LPC, L263 – 277).</p> <p><b>e) Humiliation</b> Learner participant C indicates that this was a very painful and humiliating experience because I could see that the teachers were amused by their own behaviour: Yes, they laughed as if it was a joke. To me it was not a joke it was so painful (LPC, L 276 - 277).</p> <p>It was serious, so it hurt me she does not know what I am going through (LPC, L 259 - 260).</p> <p>Only tears came out in front of them but I did not say anything only tears came out (LPC, L 279 - 281).</p> <p>Learner participant C explains that at that moment she did not know what to do or what to say but God send her and angel that came to her recue : "Another teacher came and</p>
Interviewer	And they say that at school?	349	
LPC	At school.	350	
Interviewer	What boys?	351	
LPC	They in grade 11 or 10.	352	
Interviewer	Do they come in groups when they say these things to you?	353 354	
LPC	Some come in groups like some make this as a joke. They will tell me that they will rape me to make their friend laugh.	356 357 358	
Interviewer	And to scare you? Are you scared?	359	
LPC	I am not scared. Last year I was very scared because there were some guys. When I travelled because sometimes I will walk to school. So it was very far and you have to pass Dddddd station. There at Dddddd station it s very dangerous. There are guys that smoke Nauype and drugs, and they smoke ganja. So it was hard because they will look at me and want the description if I am a girl or a boy some will approach me so I tell them I don't date guys I only date girls. So they will ask me if I have a penis. So I will tell them no they were very strange.	359 360 361 362 363 364 365 366 367 368 369 370 371 372 373	
Interviewer	Did they threaten you?	374	
LPC	Some did. This other guy he is from Zimbabwe and told me he will rape me.	375 376	
Interviewer	Have you ever told the principal what these boys are saying?	377 378	
LPC	No I didn't. I can't he will tell me why don't wear a skirt and all that stuff.	379 380	
Interviewer	Will he say it is because you not wearing a skirt that is why they saying those things to you.	381 382 383	
LPC	It is because I am not a straight girl. I am trying to make myself a boy while I am not.	384 385 386	
Interviewer	Do you feel safe at school?	387	
LPC	Last year and last of last year I did not feel safe because I was the only Les but now learner participant B (LPB) came and the others came so now I feel free.	388 389 390 391	
Interviewer	So do you see each other often you group of lesbian girls?	392 393	
LPC	it is only me and LPB that are friends. There are others but they are not our friends. We know them sometimes they come and we speak together and the rest is boys that are my friends.	394 395 396 397 398	

Interviewer	Tell me about you boy friends.	399	<p>gave me toilet paper to dry my eyes. So she called me at her own office. So she is kind of a deputy principal. So she told me I must stick to what I am. I must not lose hope and she told me I must wear a trouser she will talk to the principal and it is what I did. So they started accepting the other lesbians so it is because of me, so I the first one at school B.” (LPC, L281 – 290).</p> <p><b>f)Sarcasm</b> Learner participant C indicated that some teachers use sarcasm and subtle insults to humiliate her in front her classmates. An example of such sarcastic subtle insult is: Should I say thank you mam or thank you mister. So I will say mam call me whatever you want I do not care. And I will walk away and go sit down LPC, L 517 – 520)</p> <p>The frequent occurrence of homophobic verbal harassment and abuse at the hands of the heterosexual learners, especially the older boys in grade 10 and 11 is however extremely disturbing. The behaviour of these boys is an indication that the lesbian learners at school B are at risk of being sexually violated by them, whether it be during school or after school hours.</p> <p>Learner participant C reported that these boys more often than not threaten to rape them:</p> <p>They will tell me that they will rape me and they will change me the way I am.</p>
LPC	These two boys accept us the way we are. When we go to gay or lesbian pride they go with us they will support us every where we go.	400 401 402 403	
Interviewer	So they are good friends.	404	
LPC	Ja they are, they are real friends.	405	
Interviewer	How do these experiences make you feel, this boys threatening you and people calling you names?	406 407 408	
LPC	It makes me feel like I have been damaged inside. It makes me feel unwanted in the world. It makes me feel like I am an outsider I don't belong here. Ja its so hard.	409 410 411 412 413	
Interviewer	Its actually like they excluding you.	414	
LPC	Ja, they are excluding me.	415	
Interviewer	Because you are different?	416	
LPC	Mm	417	
Interviewer	Do you think they are threatened by you, the boys?	418 419	
LPC	I don't know. Maybe.	420	
Interviewer	Are they maybe thinking that you are going to steal their girls?	421 422	
LPC	One of my friend he was not that close to me but I used to call him my friend he used to tell me the way that I am beautiful the girls like me. I think that is the problem.	423 424 425 426 427	
Interviewer	(Laugh) I also think so.	428	
LPC	The thing is to girls I am very sweet. I like doing jokes when I do jokes girls laugh. That is why they like me and I don't know if that is a problem or what.	429 430 431 432	
Interviewer	Do you understand girls very well?	433	
LPC	I understand girls very well and sometimes a girl can ask me to write a letter for her. And I will write it and the girl will come back to me and say wow is it you really. Did you write this and then she will say wow I like you.	434 435 436 437 438 439	
Interviewer	So you charming. Are you Mr Charm?	440	
LPC	I might say that. Maybe I am but my words charm girls. I do not know about my beauty but some say I am very charming.	441 442 443 444 445	
Interviewer	Do you think you understand girls well because you also a girl?	446 447	
LPC	Ja sometimes, sometimes I don't understand them because they are very difficult.	448 449 450	
Interviewer	So you have said it is in your mind. What is in your mind?	451 452	
Interviewer	Do you think the boys are serious when	477	

	they say they will rape you?	478	After they have raped me and then tomorrow I will come wearing a skirt and stuff. (LPC, L 340 – 348).
LPC	I think they are serious because maybe like today they will tell me the same thing, tomorrow they will tell me the same thing.	479 480 481	
Interviewer	Are they joking?	482	
Interviewer	Ok, so the teachers what do they call you?	512 513	
LPC	They call us man-woman but now they are fine like for example when I am doing speech my English teacher will ask me what should I say thank you mam or thank you mister. So I will say mam call me whatever you want I do not care. And I will walk away and go sit down.	514 515 516 517 518 519 520	Some come in groups like some make this as a joke. They will tell me that they will rape me to make their friend laugh. (LPC, L 356 – 358).  I think they are serious because maybe like today they will tell me the same thing, tomorrow they will tell me the same thing (LPC, L 479 – 481)
LPC	It is only the women. They are so annoying because most of them are ZCC that go to Selikanayene in Limpopo. They are Christians and they tell me about Jesus and the bible. They say it is a sin. Satanism. I have evil things inside of me so I tell them I know I live with a sin every body lives with a sin .	893 894 895 896 897 898 899 900	Homophobic verbal harassment and abuse used by the girls are much more subtle and insulting. They say thing like:
Interviewer	But the thing is if you can't help the way you were born.	901 902	Do you know that what you doing is a sin. Then I will admit that yes it is a sin but everybody is living with a sin (LPC, L597 – 600).
LPC	I can't.	903	How do you guys do sex. How can you live with this? She asks me everyday (LPC, L602 – 604).  Why you are doing this. look at yourself you are so beautiful ( LPC, L 591 – 593).  Then she will come again asking the same questions. She is kind of snob so she will scream:" How can you, ha!" (LPC, L 614 - 617).  Learner participant C stated that she never told the principal what they were experiencing at school because he will say: Why don't you wear a skirt and all that stuff ( LPC, L379 - 380)

			<p>Learner participant C explained that she feels much safer this year now that there are more lesbian enrolled at the school: Last year and last of last year I did not feel safe because I was the only Les but now LPB came and the others came so now I feel free ( LPC, L 388 – 398).</p> <p>Learner participant C indicated that these experiences have damaged her emotionally.</p> <p>I feel like I have been damaged inside. It makes me feel unwanted in the world. It makes me feel like I am an outsider I don't belong here. Ja it's so hard. (LPC, L 409 – 413).</p>
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<b>2.2.1.1 Homophobic physical and sexual harassment and abuse</b>			
LPC	I think they are taking it serious because some will touch our buds and take advantage of us. Like they will come and tell us that they love us. When we tell them that we don't love them they'll tell us that they will rape us so I think they are serious.	483 484 485 486 487 488 489	<p><b>2.2.1.1 Homophobic physical and sexual harassment and abuse</b></p> <p><u>Homophobic sexual harassment do occur in school B. The older boys in the school are the reported as the perpetrators.</u></p> <p><u>Homophobic physical harassment and abuse and sexual abuse do not occur in school B.</u></p> <p>Learner participant C reported that the boys sexually harass them by touching them inappropriately. She states that: Some will touch our buds and take advantage of us. Like they will come and tell us that they love us. When we tell them that we don't love them they'll tell us that they will rape us so I think</p>
Interviewer	Don't you think this is a matter that the principle must know about?	490 491	
LPC	I think it is because it will be protective? Because if boys tell us they will rape us it is a dangerous thing.	492 493 494	
Interviewer	What do you prefer to be called?	521	
LPC	I am a female so she should call me she. Nothing has changed it is just my attraction and my wearings. So I will tell her "mam just call me she I am a female and I am proud to be a female."	522 523 524 525 526	
	Or just call me K, I have a name. So they do touch you?	527 528	
LPC	They touch me at my bud. I do not like it. But some are scared of me I don't know why. Some are not.	529 530 531	
Interviewer	You have strong arms you will punch them.	532 533	
LPC	I use to lift weights.	534	

Interviewer	So are you still doing it?	535	<p>they are serious (LPC, L 484 – 489). Learner participant C also reported that she has never been physically attacked or robbed at school because of her lesbian sexual orientation. Below follows an extract from her interview:</p> <p>Interviewer: Have you ever been physically attacked because you lesbian?          LPC: No I haven't.</p> <p>Interviewer: Have anyone ever stole you bag, books, just to rattle you because you are lesbian?          LPC: My books have been stolen, my phone, my memory card was stolen but that is not important (LPC, 539 – 547).</p> <p>Interviewer: It is not an anti-lesbian thing is it?          LPC: Is it just a stealing thing where anybody's belongings can be stolen at any point in time in class or outside the class? (LPC, L577 – 580)</p> <p>Learner participant C is of opinion that Homophobic physical and sexual harassment is a serious problem in school B that should be addressed by the principal.</p> <p><u>I think it is because it will be protective? Because if boys tell us they will rape us it is a dangerous thing.</u> (492 - 494).</p>
LPC	No because we don't have it here. My real mother can't afford to take me to a gym.	536 537 538	
Interviewer	Have you ever been physically attacked because you lesbian?	539 540	
LPC	No I haven't.	541	
Interviewer	Have anyone ever stole you bag, books, just to rattle you because you are lesbian?	542 543 544	
LPC	My books have been stolen, my phone, my memory card was stolen but that is not important.	545 546 547	
Interviewer	How did they steal it?	548	
LPC	Like last year in class, I was writing Mathematics so the teacher called me and said I must come in front. So I left my pen and everything there. Last year I was very brave when I come back I found that my book and my pen were not there. So I asked the class and the one who was next to me. Is asked the boy on the other side. He said he don't know but he stole it and he passed it to others. I went to the teacher and told her. The teacher just said to the boy "give the girl the book." So I got this anger inside and I can't control it. I do not know why? Then I went to the boy and I told him give me my book and my pen. And he laughed at me like I was afraid of him I grabbed him and told him give me my book so he gave it.	459 460 561 562 563 564 565 566 567 568 569 570 571 572 573 574 575 576	
Interviewer	It is not an anti-lesbian thing is it? Is it just a stealing thing where anybody's belongings can be stolen at any point in time in class or outside the class?	577 578 579 580	
LPC	Ja, This thing of stealing my things as a lesbian , no.	581 582	
Interviewer	And you have never been attacked it is only the threats.	583 584	
LPC	Ja	585	
<b>2.2.1.4 Emotional harassment and abuse</b>			
All three forms are linked to emotional abuse because they all cause emotional scares as well as poor mental health and psychological wellbeing			

<b>2.2.1.3 Social and emotional exclusion and abuse</b>			
Interviewer	How are the children in your class?	586	<p><b>2.2.1.3 Social exclusion and abuse by their peers</b>  <u>Most of the learners in school B are accepting of the lesbian learners, some are not. Therefore they do not feel totally isolated or excluded socially. They are however not accommodated in terms of the extramural activities that the school has to offer.</u></p> <p>Learner participant C explains she does have friends at school and she does interact with the girls in her class. She does however indicate that she only has a few close friends who consist of one female, one lesbian and a few males. She prefers not to be friend with the female learners because finds them annoying, she does not understand their language and she does not have the same interest as them. She indicates that she understands the boys and she likes the things they like:</p> <p>So I can't understand their language, the way they talk. Their topics are annoying.            ( LPC, L 638 – 639)</p> <p>So they will speak about the clothes by calling its names and I will not understand what kind of clothes is that. I wear boy's clothes. So if boys talk about Nike I understand. Ok sharp are you going to buy negatava or active or that. (LPC, L 651- 656)</p> <p>I love soccer. I like technology and I like short haircuts and Nike clothes?            (LPC, L664 - 667).</p>
LPC	In my class the girls accept me but there are some girls who don't. In my class girls do groups. There are many groups. There are only 6 boys in my class and the girls are so many. <u>20 – 21 girls. So other girls will tell me why you are doing this. look at yourself you are so beautiful. So why don't you wear a skirt and tomorrow you must come wearing a skirt. So I told them it is difficult for me and I don't feel free when I am in a skirt. So then they will say do you know that what you doing is a sin. Then I will admit that yes it is a sin but everybody is living with a sin. So then they will just ignore me. And then there is this girl, she is so annoying. She will ask me questions like how do you guys do sex. How can you live with this? She asks me everyday. She is so annoying! How do you feel when you kiss a women but she knows that she is bisexual. She dates lesbians and guys. So I will tell her whena how do you feel when you kiss a girl because I am les you are bisexual. But she does not want to admit that she is bisexual. She does not want people to know. So I will just ignore her and ask her questions. Then she will come again asking the same questions. She is kind of snob so she will scream:" How can you, ha!"</u>	587 588 589 590 591 592 593 594 595 596 597 598 599 600 601 602 603 604 605 606 607 608 609 610 611 612 613 614 615 616 617	
Interviewer	What are the other children's reactions when she acts like this in class?	618 619	
LPC	There is this other girl in my class who use to date lesbians and she will answer for me. <u>She will tell her that it is good to date lesbians because they don't hurt girls. Boys hurt girls. The other girls will just ignore her. They do not like her because she is kind of snobbish.</u>	620 621 622 623 624 625 626 627	
Interviewer	<u>Do you have many girl friends?</u>	628	
LPC	<u>No, I don't have many girlfriend I only have one.</u>	629 630	
Interviewer	I mean friends that are girls?	631	
LPC	<u>No I do not like girl friends.</u>	632	
Interviewer	<u>Why not?</u>	633	
LPC	Because when we are like together maybe during break they will tell you about there boyfriends. Tomorrow I am going to wear something he bought me. <u>So I can't understand their language, the way they talk. Their topics are annoying.</u> So the other one will say I am	634 635 636 637 638 639 641	

	no longer a virgin. We did it last night. It is so annoying. I myself I cannot talk about boyfriend I can only talk about girlfriends because I have experience of girlfriends so it does not combine the topics do not gel.	642 643 644 645 646 647	<p>What makes her uncomfortable though is the fact that some learners act strange around her and they gossip about her. This makes it difficult for her to feel free amongst them:</p> <p>Some learners act strange. They just don't accept me the way I am. They'll when they see us they'll look us down like face to face and when you pass they will spread rumours about us. So that for me is a negative experience. I do not like that. So at class I would not feel free. It is difficult a little bit difficult (LPC, L 328 – 336).</p> <p>Learner participant C reported that she would like to play soccer but the school does not have a ladies soccer team and they do not want them to practice or play with the boys. They also do not want them to be part of the choir:</p> <p>Yes at school this soccer girl's thing they do not take it seriously. They only take boys sport and all that kind of sports seriously. Last year I played soccer and then out of the blue there were no soccer anymore. I play chess but it is so difficult because it is not exciting(LPC, L701 – 706).</p> <p>They say God gave you a gift but they do not want to allow us gays and lesbian to use it because when you are in front people will see you are a girl and you have to wear girl clothes. They say it is the law. Hence last of last year they did not allow me. I do not know if they will allow_me this year.</p>
Interviewer	<u>Aren't you interested in the same things?</u>	648	
LPC	<u>Uh uh</u> because they will tell you I am going to buy clothes. So girl clothes have names. <u>So they will speak about the clothes by calling its names and I will not understand what kind of clothes is that.</u> I wear boys clothes. <u>So if boys talk about Nike I understand. Ok sharp are you going to buy negatava or active or that.</u>	649 650 651 652 653 654 655 656	
Interviewer	<u>So you fit in better with the boys and you understand the boy's language.</u>	657 658	
LPC	<u>I do.</u>	659	
Interviewer	<u>Do you like the things the boys do?</u>	660	
LPC	Some. <u>Some I don't like such as the smoking thing.</u>	661 662	
Interviewer	But you like soccer.	663	
LPC	<u>I love soccer.</u>	664	
Interviewer	<u>You like technology and you like short haircuts and Nike clothes?</u>	665 666	
LPC	Uh ha!	667	
Interviewer	So do you think boys understand you better?	668 669	
LPC	Ja they do.	670	
Interviewer	Are girls annoying?	671	
LPC	Yes they are?	672	
Interviewer	Am I also annoying?	673	
LPC	No you are not! You are not because you understand the way I am.	674 675	
Interviewer	It is very interesting. Some people at work ask me what I am studying. They all say it is a very interesting topic. Then I say yes it is. What is important about your learning is that it is just another person just like you. Nothing different. They all want to know what are they saying then I tell them you must wait for my findings. Ok. Have you ever tried becoming friend with straight girls?	676 677 678 679 680 681 682 683	
LPC	I used to have girl friend because there were no lesbians last of last year and there were no boys that I could talk to only in class. So at break I was sitting with them, girls. But some times I will sit alone. So I don't seem to be friends with straight girls because they are so annoying.	684 685 686 687 688 689 690 691 692	
Interviewer	<u>D o you feel excluded at school?</u>	693	

LPC	<u>No I don't feel excluded but last of last year I did because people would be surprised and confused about what am I like who am I. Am I a boy or a girl.</u>	694 695 696 697	(LPC, L745 – 750, LPC, L757 -759)
Interviewer	Maybe it is because they understand you better? <u>Do you feel excluded from activities at school?</u>	698 699 700	Learner participant C believes that Homophobic physical and sexual harassment is a problem that should be taken up with the principal as it makes the school unsafe for them (490 -494).
LPC	Yes at school this soccer girl's thing they do not take it seriously. They only take boys sport and all that kind of sports seriously. Last year I played soccer and then out of the blue there were no soccer anymore. I play chess but it is so difficult because it is not exciting.	701 702 703 704 705 706 707	I think it is because it will be protective? Because if boys tell us they will rape us it is a dangerous thing.  <b>RECOMMENDATIONS School B</b>  The teachers are in definite need to be capacitated in terms of the South African Constitution, the South African Schools Act, White paper six on inclusive education and lesbianism.  Clear rules needs to be include in the school's code of conduct with regard to verbal, physical, sexual and emotional harassment and abuse in this school.  Learners who are bullied/harassed/humiliated or abused in any way should feel confident enough to report it to the teachers and the office knowing that something will done to address it. This does not seem to be happening in school B. it seems as if the learner participant C does not have confidence in the teachers to protect her.
Interviewer	So what are you going to do about the soccer thing?	708 709	
LPC	I told my teacher because the one who is doing sports is my class teacher. I told her we want soccer. The he said it is difficult for him to set up a girls a girls soccer team because the girls are so lazy the do not want to play soccer.	710 711 712 713 714 715	



	They don't like soccer.	716	
Interviewer	So there is not enough girls to participate, Has he tried to set up a team?	717 718	
LPC	He did not.	719	
Interviewer	How many players must there be in a team?	720 721	
LPC	11	722	
Interviewer	So he can't find 11 girls?	723	
LPC	I do not know. Maybe he does not want this thing to go well.	724 725	
Interviewer	What do you think is the understanding of other boys and girls in terms of lesbians?	726 727	
LPC	I think it is the way we live. I think they understand us by the way we wear, the way we like girls and all that. But really I don't think they understand what lesbian is.	728 729 730 731 732	
Interviewer	But what do they say it is?	733	
LPC	They will say it is a girl that loves a girl it is all they understand.	734 735	
Interviewer	Do they sometimes refer to you as Satanist?	736 737	
LPC	Uh uh, No.	738	
Interviewer	What about the choir.	739	
LPC	We can't join the school choir because I am really a good singer. In class I sing. When my classmates hear me they will say wow you have such a wonderful voice. In church it is difficult. I love singing, I love drawing, I love writing. <u>They say God gave you a gift but they do not want to allow us gays and lesbian to use it because when you are in front people will see you are a girl and you have to wear girl clothes. They say it is the law.</u>	740 741 742 743 744 745 746 747 748 749 750 751	
Interviewer	It's the Lords word. Does this only happen in church or does it happen at school too?	752 753 754	
LPC	It happens in school too. At school girls are in front in the choir and boys at the back. <u>Hence last of last year they did not allow me. I do not know if they will allow me this year.</u>	755 756 757 758 759	
Interviewer	I think that I silly.	760	
LPC	I think it is silly and aggressive.	761	
Interviewer	And discriminating.	762	
LPC	Yes.	763	
Interviewer	So do you really think it is a sin?	892	
LPC	I don't think it is a sin but when people tell me I admit it is a sin. Yes I think it is a natural thing. It is what God created. If it is not what God created why are we	893 894 895 896	

	so many? I ask myself everyday why are we so many if God did not create us.	897 898	
Interviewer	It's just that in the past nobody really knew about LGBT people.	899 900	
LPC	Yes because they were hiding themselves because they were scared that they will do some things when they find out you are gay or lesbian.	901 902 903 904	
LPC	Negative experiences are that some learners act strange. They just don't accept me the way I am. They'll when they see us they'll look us down like face to face and when you pass they will spread rumours about us. So that for me is a negative experience. I do not like that. So at class I would not feel free. It is difficult a little bit difficult.	328 329 330 331 332 333 334 335 336	

## 2.2.2 NEGATIVE ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES OF LESBIAN LEARNERS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

### 2.2.2.2 Lower levels of academic achievement

LPC	Now I am doing fine. I am passing. I only failed in June because I failed Mathematics and Life sciences.	29 30 31	<b>2.2.2.2 Lower levels of academic achievement</b> All the lesbian learners in school B do not experience lower levels of academic achievement The lesbian learners at school B are not academically excluded. They do participate in classroom activities and they do receive academic support from their teachers when they request it or when the teacher identifies a need for support. In instances where a lesbian learner do experience lower levels of academic performance it is caused by personal factors such as challenging socio-economic conditions, negative mental health and poor academic ability.  learner participant C reports that her academic performance has improved: Now I am doing fine. I am passing. I only failed in June because I failed Mathematics and Life sciences. (LPC, L29 – 31). and I really cope, I have knowledge, skills and I
Interviewer	Tell me how you are coping in school?	1189	
LPC	I really cope, I have knowledge, skills and I pass. If things go bad I fail but I have hope that I will pass. I will do well the next term yes.	1190 1191 1192 1193	
Interviewer	And how do you cope socially? What to you do if you are being sworn at what do you do in that situation?	1194 1195 1196	

			pass. If things go bad I fail but I have hope that I will pass. I will do well the next term yes (LPC, L 1190 – 1191)
<b>2.2.2.3 Invisibility and school disengagement</b>			
Interviewer	Are you participating?	1216	<b>2.2.2.3 Invisibility and school disengagement</b> The lesbian learners at school B are not invisible at school. They are not disengaged as far as academic activities within the classroom context are concerned even though it is sometimes difficult for them to participate because of the negative the comments made by the learners and teachers. Unfortunately that is where connection with the school ends.  Learner participant C reports that comments such as the following sometimes occurs in class causing people to stare at you the whole day after that lesson: see Karabo they do anal sex and what not ( Life orientation class – topic: sexuality) (LPC, L1123 – 1124) and It is hard, like people will stare at you the whole day and ask you questions. (LPC, L 1126 - 1128).
LPC	Yes I am participating. In school I participate but when it comes to LO they go to this topic of sex and they will talk about different topics about sex. How people have sex and when they describe maybe give an example some will the class learners will say see K they do anal sex and what not.	1217 1218 1219 1220 1221 1222 1223 1224	
Interviewer	It is not true, is it?	1225	
LPC	It is true, it is a good example but it is hard like people will stare at you the whole day and ask you questions.	1226 1227 1228	
Interviewer	So what do you say about your sexuality in LO class.	1229 1230 1231	
LPC	I will tell them I don't do sex because I am still do young.	1232 1233	
Interviewer	Tell me about the strike.	1234	

### 3. FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEGATIVE SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES OF LESBIAN LEARNERS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL

#### 3.1 Homophobia and Heterosexism

Interviewer	Do you know what homophobia is?	1037	<b>3.1 Homophobia and Heterosexism</b> The homophobic and heterosexist behavior exhibited by some of the heterosexual learners and teachers at school B has a definite negative effect on the experiences of the lesbian learners enrolled at school B. This fact clearly manifested in the responses from learner participant C regarding the
LPC	Uh uh.	1038	
Interviewer	It is a feeling of fear and hatred towards homosexuals. <u>Do you think that there are people at your school that might be homophobic?</u>	1039 1040 1041 1042	
LPC	<u>No, not that much.</u>	1043	
Interviewer	<u>There might be a streak of homophobia amongst the boys that threaten you.</u>	1044 1045	
LPC	<u>Yes.</u>	1046	
Interviewer	Do you think your school is promoting heterosexuality rather than homosexuality? Are they promoting the fact that being a straight male or female	1047 1048 1049 1050	

	is right and being gay or lesbian is wrong?	1051 1052	1) homophobic verbal, physical and sexual harassment and 2) social exclusion experienced by her at school. Learner participant C explains that some of the learners actually hate the gays at school: Girls and boys accept lesbians but some when it comes to gays they like say that a man can't sleep with a man. They will say that they will beat him until he changes. They hate gays, I don't know why (LPC, L1057 – 1059). Some have hate but they don't show it. It I a protective school. ( LPC, L 927 – 938)	
LPC	Yes because people. Let me not say people. Girls and boys accept lesbians but some when it comes to gays they like say that a man can't sleep with a man. They will say that they will beat him until he changes. They hate gays, I don't know why.	1053 1054 1055 1056 1057 1058 1059		
Interviewer	So there is some form of homophobia at school?	1060 1061		
LPC	Yes, at school there is this guy, he is gay. My friend, my straight boy friend will tell me when that guy comes and kisses me he will beat him. So I said no, if you don't like the guy, just leave him but don't talk rubbish about him. I told him maybe when I am gone he talks about me behind my back. You tell the people that whenever I get her I will ..... (laughs)	1062 1063 1064 1065 1066 1067 1068 1069 1070		
Interviewer	Do you think it is more difficult for gays then for lesbians in school?	1071 1072		
LPC	<u>Yes it is, everywhere they go it is more difficult because girls would say look at him he is trying to make himself a girl.</u> You know some gays walk like girls, talk like girls all that stuff.	1073 1074 1075 1076 1077		
Interviewer	Do you think it is funny?	1078		
LPC	<u>They think it is funny but I take it serious because it is part of my life too.</u> I am Les, he is gay, so I would like them to accept themselves. You are gay but walk like a boy.	1079 1080 1081 1082 1083 1084		
Interviewer	Do you also have different kind of gays?	1085		
LPC	Yes, there are butch gays, femme gays and futch gays. The futch is those who wear men's clothes but also likes to wear girls' clothes.	1086 1087 1088 1089		
Interviewer	Oh, transvestites.	1090		
LPC	Yes.	1091		
<b>3.2 Peer pressure</b>				
Interviewer	Is there a lot of peer pressure at school to change?	905 906		<b>3.2 Peer pressure</b> Learner participant C indicates that there are some learners that does put you under pressure because you are lesbian She is putting more peer pressure on me but I am trying to avoid her. (LPC, L 907 – 910)
<b>3.3 School climate</b>				
Interviewer	Tell me about your school. What type of school is it?	924 925	<b>3.3 School climate</b> The school climate of	

LPC	<u>It is a wonderful school with loving learners. Some have hate but they don't show it. It I a protective school.</u>	926 927 928	<p>school B is improving in terms of safety. The school has put measures in place to make the school environment safer for all their learners. For example: They would not allow anyone to like fight in school. If ever they steal stuff you report it at the office. They will come and search everything. They'll bring police to school. If any boys has guns and weapons that are dangerous, the smoking stuff. Yes, it is very protective.</p> <p>Are there many bullies in school? Ja, there are. But since they brought the police to school and they talked to us</p> <p>What did the police say? If ever they find you bullying they will take you straight to the police station</p> <p>Is the talking helping. No, they smoke drugs, they smoke many things.</p> <p>Are there a lot of naughty boys at your school? There are I using to have this boy friend but I am not friends with him anymore. I told him straight I don't like the things he does. He sells cigarettes at school.</p> <p>How is the discipline at school? Good but you know boys, boys are so....</p> <p>Is the principal strict? The principal is.</p> <p>Is he at school everyday? Hmm</p> <p>And the teachers? Some teachers are strict. Some are in class everyday but they will just sit there not working. They Whats up in class. They will say today I am sick or today I am tired and play on her phone. Obviously when someone text you can see its Whats up. We know the sound of Whats up. (LPC, L960 – 966)</p> <p>So the teacher is talking to her friends while she is supposed to work. You should tell her that she should not be on Whats up and that she should be working with you. Is you school a big school?</p>
Interviewer	What is the school doing to protect you?	929	
LPC	They would not allow anyone to like fight in school. If ever they steal stuff you report it at the office. They will come and search everything. They'll bring police to school. If any boys has guns and weapons that are dangerous, the smoking stuff. Yes, it is very protective.	930 931 932 933 934 935 936 937	
Interviewer	Are there many bullies in school?	938	
LPC	<u>Ja, there are. But since they brought the police to school and they talked to us</u>	939 940	
Interviewer	What did the police say?	941	
LPC	<u>If ever they find you bullying they will take you straight to the police station</u>	942 943	
Interviewer	<u>Is the talking helping.</u>	944	
LPC	<u>No, they smoke drugs, they smoke many things.</u>	945 946	
Interviewer	Are there a lot of naughty boys at your school?	947 948	
LPC	<u>There are I using to have this boy friend but I am not friends with him anymore. I told him straight I don't like the things he does. He sells cigarettes at school.</u>	949 950 951 952	
Interviewer	How is the discipline at school?	953	
LPC	Good but you know boys, boys are so....	954	
Interviewer	Is the principal strict?	955	
LPC	The principal is.	956	
Interviewer	Is he at school everyday?	957	
LPC	Hmm	958	
Interviewer	And the teachers?	959	
LPC	<u>Some teachers are strict. Some are in class everyday but they will just sit there not working. They Whats up in class. They will say today I am sick or today I am tired and play on her phone. Obviously when someone text you can see its Whats up. We know the sound of Whats up.</u>	960 961 962 963 964 965 966	
Interviewer	So the teacher is talking to her friends while she is supposed to work. You should tell her that she should not be on Whats up and that she should be working with you. Is you school a big school?	967 968 969 970 971	

LPC	It is a big school.	972	
Interviewer	How many students do you have more or less?	973 974	
LPC	What I know it is 1192.	975	
<b>3.4 Religion and culture</b>			
Interviewer	Let's talk about religion, ZCC and culture? Do you think religion has an impact on how you are treated at school?	976 977 978	<b>3.4 Religion and culture</b> The religion (Christianity) practiced by most of teachers and the learners in school B has a negative impact on the experiences of lesbian learners in school B. The staunch Christian teachers at school reprimand them and tell them what they are doing is a sin: Yes, ZCC, because there are teachers who go to the ZCC church. They will tell you what you are doing is a sin. So it is affecting us. (LPC, L 979 – 982) and It is only the women teachers. They are so annoying because most of them are ZCC that go to Selikanayene in Limpopo. They are Christians and they tell me about Jesus and the bible. They say it is a sin. Satanism. I have evil things inside of me so I tell them I know I live with a sin every body lives with a sin (LPC, L 880 – 888).  and <u>My mother's sister took me to be baptized. When he baptized me he told my mother's sister it is a demon. We went to church they prayed. Nothing came out. It is me, it is the real me inside. Nothing even a church or a thunder storm can't change it. It is the way I am. If people can understand I would be very, very happy.</u>
LPC	<u>Yes, ZCC, because there are teachers who go to the ZCC church. They will tell you what you are doing is a sin.</u> So it is affecting us. My culture is OK because they do not make me feel that I am an outsider that does not belong in the family.	979 980 981 982 983 984 985	
Interviewer	What culture are you?	986	
LPC	I am a Pedi and a Coloured.	987	
Interviewer	Oh my goodness, you are mixed. <u>What about the different cultures in your school?</u>	988 989 990	
.LPC	<u>No I do not have a problem with that.</u>	991	
	<u>My mother's sister took me to be baptized. When he baptized me he told my mother's sister it is a demon. We went to church they prayed. Nothing came out. It is me, it is the real me</u>		

	<u>inside. Nothing even a church or a thunder storm can't change it. It is the way I am. If people can understand I would be very, very happy</u>		
<b>3.5 institutional policies and procedures that disregard the existence on lesbian learners</b>			
Interviewer	Are your bathrooms safe at school?	495	<b>3.5 Institutional policies and procedures that disregard the existence on lesbian learners</b> There are institutional policies/rules implemented by school B that disregards the existence on lesbian learners. These policies include the policy on the provision of bathroom facilities to the learners. These are longstanding policies from the Department that the schools fail to address in order to meet the needs of the lesbian learners. According to the school they are females hence they should use the girls' bathrooms. This policy however causes discomfort and insecurity among heterosexual girls: Because when I walk in girls will say "oh there is a boy in the bathroom!" and then they start running. Why are they running cant they see I have breasts. I ask myself many questions and I ask Essie many questions and then we will laugh. Some know us but some don't and they will scream boys in our bathroom and they will run. (LPC, L 503 – 511)  Using the boys bathrooms places them at risk of being sexually violated by the older boys in the school. <b>? Add on dangerous boys toilets</b> The policy on compulsory uniform for boys and girls also disregards the existence of lesbian learners because it requires
LPC	Our bathrooms are safe but last year they were not safe because guys will walk in our bathrooms some boys will act as if they were gays but this year there are less gays. Last year it was so difficult. This bathroom thing I don't go at school.	496 497 498 499 500 501	
Interviewer	Why not?	502	
LPC	Because when I walk in girls will say "oh there is a boy in the bathroom!" and then they start running. Why are they running cant they see I have breasts. I ask myself many questions and I ask LPB many questions and then we will laugh. Some know us but some don't and they will scream boys in our bathroom and they will run.	503 504 505 506 507 508 509 510 511	
LPC	<u>As I said in my class, yes that snobbish girl yes. She is putting more peer pressure on me but I am trying to avoid her.</u>	907 908 909 910	
Interviewer	<u>School policies, besides the fact that girls are not supposed to wear pants are there any other policies that do not support lesbians in school.</u>	992 993 994 995	
LPC	<u>No. it is only the trouser one.</u>	996	
Interviewer	Are your bathrooms safe at school?	495	
LPC	Our bathrooms are safe but last year they were not safe because guys will walk in our bathrooms some boys will act as if they were gays but this year there are less gays. Last year it was so difficult. This bathroom thing I don't go at school.	496 497 498 499 500 501	
Interviewer	Why not?	502	
LPC	<u>Because when I walk in girls will say "oh there is a boy in the bathroom!" and then they start running. Why are they running cant they see I have breasts. I ask myself many questions and I ask Essie many questions and then we will laugh. Some know us but some don't and they will scream boys in our bathroom and they will run.</u>	503 504 505 506 507 508 509 510 511	
LPC	<u>I said in my class, yes that snobbish girl yes. She is putting more peer pressure on me but I am trying to avoid her.</u>	907 908 909 910	

			the lesbian learners wear skirts. Although the school does accommodate them in terms of their uniform, the policy on school uniform for boys and girls must be adapted and formalized.  <b>? Add quote on uniform</b>
<b>3.6 Lack of teacher support</b>			
Interviewer	You said some of the teachers are supporting you and some are not. Do you think they are not supportive of you because you are lesbian?	997 998 999 1000	<b>3.6 Lack of teacher support</b> Some of the teachers are supportive others are not.
LPC	<u>Yes, they do not understand that I am lesbian. They wonder whether I am a boy or a girl.</u>	1001 1002 1003	
Interviewer	But you must tell them that you are a girl.	1004	
LPC	I did. Most of all when I do speech I talk about myself. I don't talk about other people When they say maybe they give us a topic "Talk about yourself". Even if they want us to talk about an article I want an article where there is a lesbian. Last time I did an article about Duduzile. She was 16 years old and she was a Les. They forced a toilet brush in her vagina, so I talked about it.	1004 1005 1006 1007 1008 1009 1010 1011 1012 1013	
Interviewer	That girl died. She died of internal bleeding. Can you belief it. That is why I do not want you to walk to school when you move to Dddddddddd. It is very dangerous.	1014 1015 1016 1017 1018	
LPC	As I can say I have these angels protecting me. Once my mother's sister abused me, She beat me up that night. I do not know why she did it. I went to school the following day. After school I just walked. I didn't go to her house. I walked, I passed the Highway. I did not know where my mother was working. I only knew she was working at Cccccccccc at Eeeeeee. I walked and walked until I found out where she worked. It was about 12 o'clock. I did not have a jacket. I was only wearing my school clothes and my books in my bag. I walked until I found my mother.	1019 1020 1021 1022 1023 1024 1025 1026 1027 1028 1029 1030 1031 1032 1033	
Interviewer	So you think you have angels protecting you?	1034 1035	
LPC	I think I have angels.	1036	



4. THE IMPACT OF NEGATIVE SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL BEING OF LESBIAN LEARNERS				
<b>4.2 Internal conflict</b>				
Interviewer	How does it feel to be lesbian?	230	<b>4.2 Internal conflict</b> Learner participant C reported that she has never experienced internal conflict. She has always known that she is different and she accepted it. Interviewer: How does it feel to be lesbian? LPC: It feels good, I feel free like other people (LPC, L 230 – 231) No I am fine the way I am. I accept myself the way I am (LPC, L239 – 240).	
LPC	It feels good, I feel free like other people. When I am wearing a skirt I feel that I am wearing nothing under. I feel so I do not know how to explain it feels like I am walking naked.	231 232 233 234 235		
Interviewer	And you totally not attracted to boys?	236		
LPC	Ah ah, No.	237		
Interviewer	But you would not want a sex change.	238		
LPC	No I am fine the way I am. I accept myself the way I am.	239 240		
<b>4.4 Negative mental health: anxiety, depression, suicide, anger and aggression</b>				
Interviewer	So you are a strong girl né.	824		
LPC	I am but all those past things affected me because now and then I have this anger inside of me and I don't know how to release it. Family anger. When I was about 11 – 12. I used to stay with my mother's sister, she was so abusive, I did not like the way she treated me. She only liked her own daughter's children not me. She used to say I stole her stuff or money even though I didn't. At night I was crying every day. But I still prayed to God to help me.	825 826 827 828 829 830 831 832 833 834 835 836 837		
Interviewer	But God will help you because you are working hard. God only helps those who help themselves. And I think you have met some good people in LPB's family. I think they are willing to help you through this thing. And now you also have a friend that understands you. And her mother also seems to understand you.	838 839 840 841 842 843 844 845		
LPC	Yes, LPB's mother is nice.	846		
Interviewer	So there is nothing to be afraid of at school and you attend school regularly?	847 848		
Interviewee	Yes.	849		
Interviewer	Ok. And your school achievement. Are you doing well?	850 851		
Interviewer	Ok let's cross over to how your experiences make you feel. Does the negative experiences that you had have an impact on your emotional well being?	1092 1093 1094 1095		
LPC	Yes, I could say the impact is anger.	1096		
Interviewer	Ok, it makes you angry.	1097		
LPC	And it makes me sad. It is anger and sadness but it is inside, I can't show it.	1098 1099		

		1100	as if I could just die, rest in peace( LPC, L 1102 – 1105)
Interviewer	So how does it feel?	1101	
LPC	It is painful. It feels like I not belonging in this world like I am neglected. It feels so painful. It sometimes feel as if I could just die, rest in peace.	1102 1103 1104 1105	She indicates that it is the socio -economic conditions and family relations that causes her emotional distress not being lesbian or the challenges she faces at school. It could be that she is does not comprehend that negative experiences at school may also have a negative effect mental health.
Interviewer	Is it because you are lesbian or is it because of something else.	1106 1107	
LPC	It is something else. Ha, lesbian stuff I am ok with it. Even though you make me sad I will forgive you. You tell me this today tomorrow I forgot.	1108 1109 1110 1111	
Interviewer	So the lesbian issue is not causing you emotional pain.	1112 1113	
LPC	No	1114	
Interviewer	Is it other stuff? The fact that you cannot stay at home, the fact that your mom does not have a job. Those are the things?	1115 1116 1117 1118	Learner participant C indicates that her being lesbian and the issues around her being lesbian does not cause her emotional pain but form what she has reported it clearly does. It could be that she is does not comprehend that the negative things she is experiencing because of lesbianism also has negative effect on her emotional wellbeing:
LPC	Yes	1119	
Interviewer	But you must just hang in there it is almost over. Have you ever felt not to go to school because you were <b>afraid</b> ?	1120 1121 1122	
LPC	No	1123	
Interviewer	Have you ever experienced depression?	1124	
LPC	I might say yes. At school they <b>depress</b> me when they talk about the way I am. When they talk behind my back they make me feel like I am lost like I don't belong at that school. They can just build another school for us lesbians and gays only. But that can't be.	1125 1126 1127 1128 1129 1130 1131	At school they <b>depress</b> me when they talk about the way I am. They can just build another school for us lesbians and gays only. (LPC, L 1125 – 1131)
Interviewer	That is why our schools are seen as inclusive schools. Everybody is supposed to have access to school and feel safe and free there. That is also why I am doing this study so that I can go back to the school and teach them about lesbians. Everybody has a right to be in school and the teacher must understand everybody. Not only certain kids. Our aim is to capacitate teachers with knowledge about different issues. Have you ever tried to commit suicide or thought about it.	1132 1133 1134 1135 1136 1137 1138 1139 1140 1141 1142 1143 1144	Learner participant C reports that she is not afraid to go to school and she does not fee anxious when at school:
LPC	No, when it comes to lesbian stuff no, but when to comes to my family issues. Yes.	1145 1146	Interviewer: Have you ever felt not to go to school because you were <b>afraid</b> ? LPC: No (LPC, L 1123)
			Learner participant C explained that she did try to commit suicide before because of her situation at home: Interviewer: Have you ever

			tried to commit suicide or thought about it. LPC: No, when it comes to lesbian stuff no, but when it comes to my family issues. Yes (LPC, L 1145 – 1146)
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<b>4.5 Substance abuse</b>			
Interviewer	<u>Substance abuse?</u>	1147	<b>4.5 Substance abuse</b> Learner participant C reported that she does not abuse drugs or alcohol:  Because I love myself. I have a big dream, a big future. Sometimes when I look I could just think hard and then I see myself so far with education, working, building my own home, buying my mother a home. Ja, so I wouldn't do substance abuse. (LPC, L1154 – 1161).
LPC	<u>No</u>	1148	
Interviewer	You are not abusing substances. Do you ever think about it?	1149 1150	
LPC	Ja, sometimes.	1151	
Interviewer	Why have you decided not to abuse substances?	1152 1153	
LPC	Because I love myself. I have a big dream, a big future. Sometimes when I look I could just think hard and then I see myself so far with education, working, building my own home, buying my mother a home. Ja, so I wouldn't do substance abuse.	1154 1155 1157 1158 1159 1160 1161	
Interviewer	It messes you up né.	1162	
LPC	It is going to ruin my knowledge.	1163	
Interviewer	And Learner participant A?	1164	
LPC	Haai, learner participant A, I know her through LPB.	1165 1166	

<b>5 POSITIVE SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES OF LESBIAN LEARNERS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL</b>			
<b>5.1 Increased visibility</b>			
Interviewer	Do you think lesbians are now more visible in schools?	1167 1168	<b>5 POSITIVE SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES OF LESBIAN LEARNERS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL</b>  <b>5.1 Increased visibility</b> The following aspects were found to contribute to the social and academic experiences of lesbian learners in secondary schools: <b>6.1 Increased visibility</b> Lesbian learners are more visible at school because they do not have to hide themselves anymore: Yes they are because they can show themselves. LPC, L 1169 – 1170).  This occurrence are motivated by legislation and
LPC	Yes they are because they can show themselves. But some haven't accepted the way they are.	1169 1170 1171	
Interviewer	Are they still struggling?	1172	
LPC	Yes, they still struggling because of family matters but at school they come out but some can't because of family matters.	1173 1174 1175 1176	
Interviewer	<u>The parents don't accept it.</u> Tell me, is there any positive things that you have experienced at school.	1177 1178 1179	

			<p>education policies such as of the South African Constitution, the South African School Act and the White paper six on inclusive education which promotes non discrimination and equality for all people. It is also motivated by ban increase in the number of lesbian learners at school who encourage and supports each other.</p> <p>There are however learners who find it difficult to come out of the closet and show themselves because of family their families refuse to accept their sexual orientation:          At school they come out but some can't because of family matters. The parents don't accept it.          (LPC, L 1174 – 1177).</p>
<b>5.2 Teacher Support</b>			
Interviewer	What do you think are the factors at school that contributes to you doing well?	861 862	<p><b>5.2 Teacher Support</b>          Most of the educators are in school B is accepting of the lesbian learners and they support them academically and emotionally if needed. My teachers are supportive especially my Physical Science teacher. He tells me never to give up. To stick to my studies. He will tell me if I ever need help on a subject I must come to him. LPC, L 863 – 867) and          The positive things that I am experiencing are that the teachers help us a lot to achieve our things even though you are lesbian (LPC, L 1180 - 1183).          and          Ja, The school took us to TUT to see. Some build cars, some create them but they don't build them. So</p>
LPC	My teachers are supportive especially my Physical Science teacher. He tells me never to give up. To stick to my studies. He will tell me if I ever need help on a subject I must come to him.	863 864 865 866 867	
Interviewer	So have you ever taken him up on his offer?	868 869	
LPC	Yes I did. On Maths the assignment I couldn't understand the assignment. So I went and he helped me.	870 871 872	
Interviewer	So you say the teachers are ok it is just those bad boys that say nasty things to you?	873 874 875	
LPC	<u>Yes but some teachers are not fine. Cause they will tell you that how come you a girl that wears a trouser.</u>	876 877 878	
Interviewer	Is it male or female teachers?	879	
Interviewer	And are you working hard to improve those marks.	32 33	
LPC	I am working hard. Very, very hard.	34	
Interviewer	What do you want to become?	35	
LPC	I want to become a mechanical engineer?	36	
Interviewer	Also a mechanical engineer. Do you know what they do?	37 38	

LPC	<u>Ja, The school took us to TUT to see. Some build cars, some create them but they don't build them. So some work with engines and the parts and makes a car to drive.</u>	39 40 41 42 43	some work with engines and the parts and makes a car to drive.  and Yes but some teachers are not fine. Cause they will tell you that how come you a girl that wears a trouser (LPC, L 876 – 878)
Interviewer	And the others draw them, they design them?	44 45	
LPC	Yes	46	
Interviewer	So what do you want to do?	47	
LPC	I want to do the engineer.	48	
Interviewer	Do you like cars	49	
LPC	Yes. I love them, actually I love drawing that I what I love doing.	50 51	
Interviewer	Tell me when did you realize that you are lesbian?	52 53	
	<u>Yes. The positive things that I am experiencing are that the teachers help us a lot to achieve our things even though you are lesbian. Some will help you do things. Some learners yes they do accept us. They want to be like us. Even though they can't they trying. You will even see a girl walking like a man saying I am a lesbian tomorrow its something else.</u>	1180 1181 1182 1183 1184 1185 1186 1187 1188	
Interviewer	And are you working hard to improve those marks.	32 33	
LPC	I am working hard. Very, very hard.	34	
Interviewer	What do you want to become?	35	
LPC	I want to become a mechanical engineer?	36	
Interviewer	Also a mechanical engineer. Do you know what they do?	37 38	
LPC	<u>Ja, The school took us to TUT to see. Some build cars, some create them but they don't build them. So some work with engines and the parts and makes a car to drive.</u>	39 40 41 42 43	
Interviewer	And the others draw them, they design them?	44 45	
LPC	Yes	46	
Interviewer	So what do you want to do?	47	
LPC	I want to do the engineer.	48	
Interviewer	Do you like cars	49	
LPC	Yes. I love them, actually I love drawing that I what I love doing.	50 51	
Interviewer	Tell me when did you realize that you are lesbian?	52 53	
<b>5.3 Peer support</b>			
Interviewer	<u>Do you think the other girls are under pressure not to associate them with you?</u>	911 912	<b>5.3 Peer support</b> Most of the learners at school are accepting and supportive of lesbian learners. The possibility does however exist that more girls choose to
LPC	<u>No, because they will tell us that they like us and they want to be like us. And then we tell them you can't be like us because it is not some that you grew up</u>	913 914 915 916	

	<u>with. It will be something that you yourself create. When you want to be like us you have to be born with it.</u>	917 918 919	become lesbian because they it is “cool” to be lesbian and because they want to protect themselves from being raped when entering a relationship with a boy. <b>ADD evidence</b> No, because they will tell us that they like us and they want to be like us. And then we tell them you can’t be like us because it is not some that you grew up with. It will be something that you yourself create. When you want to be like us you have to be born with it (LPC, L913 – 914)  and Some learners yes they do accept us. They want to be like us. Even though they can’t they trying. You will even see a girl walking like a man saying I am a lesbian tomorrow its something else (1184 – 1188)
Interviewer	<u>So the other girls are not afraid of you?</u>	920	
LPC	<u>No they 're not.</u>	921	
Interviewer	<u>They actually want to be around you?</u>	922	
LPC	<u>Yes because we are very attractive.</u>	923	

**6. POSITIVE CHARACTER TRAITS THAT HELPS LESBIAN LEARNERS TO COPE SOCIALLY AND ACADEMICALLY//INCREASES THEIR LEVEL OF RESILIENCY**

**6.1 A Positive self- image, self acceptance, self worth, confidence and hope**

LPC	In my mind it is me I want people to accept us the way we are. In my mind there this thing people won’t assault us or call us names. But most in my mind is I grew up, I have my own future and I am going to marry my own wife. That is what is on my mind. I don’t care what people say, what they do whether they accept but I will stick to being Les.	453 454 455 456 457 458 459 460 461	<b>5.4 Improved self worth, confidence and hope.</b> Learner participant C exhibits a strong sense of self acceptance, self worth, confidence and hope for the future. These qualities help her cope with the difficult times she is confronted with at school: In my mind it is me I want people to accept us the way we are. I have my own future and I am going to marry my own wife. That is what is on my mind. I don’t care what people say, what they do whether they accept but I will stick to being Les (LPC, L 457 – 461).  Ja, I always have hope even if they say we are
LPC	<u>My coping was a little bit difficult, but I was coping because I have trust in me. Hope too ja, that one day they will understand what I am going through.</u>	217 218 219 220	
Interviewer	<u>So you hoping that people will learn about this and understand?</u>	221 222	
LPC	<u>Ja, I always have hope even if they say we are Satanist but I pray every night asking God that people should understand and accept me the way I am because it is hard to live other live that other people do not understand and don’t accept you the way you are</u>	223 224 225 226 227 228 229	

			Satanist but I pray every night asking God that people should understand and accept me the way I am because it is hard to live a live that other people do not understand and don't accept you the way you are. (LPC, L 223 – 229)
<b>6.2 Ambition, diligence, focus, determination and goal direction</b>			
LPC	I started staying with LPB and them now because my mother doesn't have a job. Still now she does not have a job. So sometimes she did not have money. I was getting grants. So sometimes she will tell me I do not have money for you do go to school because I have to buy food. She will tell me stay at home until I get a job. And I told her I can't. I have to learn and build my future. I always think that one day I will buy my mother a house. It is what I tell myself every day. And I want to take my family and put them in that house.	781 782 783 784 785 786 787 788 789 790 791 792 793 794	<b>6.1.2 Ambition, diligence, focus, determination and goal direction</b> Learner participant C exhibits an increased level of resiliency because she is ambitious, focused, determined, and hardworking and goal directed. I always think that one day I will buy my mother a house. It is what I tell myself every day (LPC, L 804). Ja, I want to go out and see the world (LPC, L 804). Hence she is coping as well as she possible can under her circumstances. Yes I am doing well but sometimes I am not. I'm studying those subjects that I am not good at hard. I am trying. (LPC, L852 – 854) and You know I was always just at home growing up sometimes I would go to sleep without eating. My mother used to work at Rooiwal. She left me with my stepfather, went to Lesotho and left me alone without any money. So at weekends I used to work for the white people to earn money. I did gardens pick up things that are not wanted in the garden. Then I will buy myself food. Even though they did not pay me well I had hope. I prayed at night and asked God to help me.
Interviewer	Where do you want to live one day?	795	
LPC	Durban or Cape Town.	796	
Interviewer	Do you want to be at the ocean?	797	
LPC	Because at Sun City it was my first time travelling. I never ever travelled. I never went to special places and I really, really enjoyed it.	798 799 800 801	
Interviewer	So you want to go and stay there in Cape Town with all the coloureds.	802 803	
LPC	Ja , I want to go out and see the world.	804	
Interviewer	Do you know why I took you to Sun City because I wanted you to see exactly what you saw? So that you know that you must work hard in school so that you can get into varsity or technikon and build a better life for yourself.	805 806 807 808 809 810	
LPC	You know I was always just at home growing up sometimes I would go to sleep without eating. My mother used to work at Eeeee. She left me with my stepfather, went to Lesotho and left me alone without any money. So at weekends I used to work for the white people to earn money. I did gardens pick up things that are not wanted in the garden. Then I will buy myself food. Even though they did not pay me well I had hope. I prayed at night and asked God to help me.	811 812 813 814 815 816 817 818 819 820 821 822 823	
Interviewer	Are you doing well in school?	851	
LPC	Yes I am doing well but sometimes I am not. I'm studying those subjects that I am not good at hard. I am trying.	852 853 854	

			help me (LPC, L 811 – 823)
<b>6.3 Self motivation</b>			
LPC	I cope even though it is hard. I tell myself let it go forget about it. Think about the future. Think straight and think about passing, achieving your things. Ja that is how I cope I speak with my mind.	1197 1198 1199 1200 1201	<b>6.3 Self motivation</b> Learner participant C indicates that she uses self talk to motivate herself to succeed (LPC, L1197 – 1201).

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCREASING THE POSITIVE EXPERIENCES OF LESBIAN LEARNERS IN SCODARY SCHOOL

<b>7.1 Addressing the attitudes of heterosexual learners and teachers</b>			
Interviewer	Alright tell me what do you think you as a lesbian can do to make your peers and you teachers more accepting of you?	1202 1203 1204	<b>7. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCREASING THE POSITIVE EXPERIENCES OF LESBIAN LEARNERS IN SCODARY SCHOOL</b> The findings of this study indicates that the lesbian learners in school B are experiencing challenges in terms of safety at school. Hence they feel that the learners at the school should be sensitized in terms of lesbianism. The following recommendations were made by larner participant A.  <b>7.1.1 Addressing the negative attitude of some heterosexual teachers and learners</b> Learner participant A suggest that the lesbian learners raise awareness amongst their peers by picketing and telling them what lesbianism is all about: I will talk with other lesbians and when I talk with them we will do a strike to show people that we can do it even though they don't accept us. LPC 1205 – 1208).  <b>7.1.2 An inclusive curriculum</b> Issues on lesbianism should be included in the curriculum because the learners do not understand
LPC	<u>I will talk with other lesbians and when I talk with them we will do a strike to show people that we can do it even though they don't accept us.</u>	1205 1206 1207 1208	
Interviewer	A strike?	1209	
LPC	<u>I will ask the lesbians to stand up and go to school. Then I will ask them to accept us even though you can't accept us we will do it even though you don't want it. We will wear trousers, we will talk like boys because it is what we have inside and it is what we grew up with from born.</u>	1234 1235 1236 1237 1238 1239 1240	
Interviewer	So what you actually trying to say is you will make them aware by talking to them through your strike.	1241 1242 1243	
LPC	Yes.	1244	
Interviewer	<u>What do you think the teachers can do?</u>	1245	
LPC	All they can do is accept us the way we are. And when it comes to learners. <u>If learners try to assault us teachers stood up for us.</u>	1246 1247 1248 1249	
Interviewer	Is that what you want them to do because at present they not doing it?	1250 1251	
LPC	<u>That is all I want. Yes to make learners understand what we are, what we are made of.</u>	1252 1253 1254	
Interviewer	So basically you want them to protect you because they not? What do you think the department of education can do to help?	1255 1256 1257	
LPC	<u>They should start to tell out teachers to start teaching about lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender people.</u>	1258 1259 1260	
Interviewer	So that should actually be included in the curriculum?	1261 1262	
LPC	<u>Yes, especially in LO. LO is an open subject you can talk whatever you want to talk because they talk about sexuality.</u>	1263 1264 1265	



	<u>abuse and all the rape things.</u>	1266	it.
Interviewer	But they don't talk about being lesbian or gay specifically.	1267 1268	They should start to tell out teachers to start teaching about lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender people (LPC, L 1258 – 1260)
LPC	All they do is discriminate us.	1269	
Interviewer	Where, in class.	1270	
LPC	Yes especially when they refer to gay people. <u>In LO they will talk about a man and women. The class teacher will say a man and a woman produces an egg. And when it comes to LO they will say penis and vagina and when a man and a woman sleep together they produce a baby so they will discriminate and say not gay and gay not a man and a man can produce an egg to produce a child and then the class will laugh and laugh.</u>	1271 1272 1273 1274 1275 1276 1278 1279 1280 1281 1282	and They shouldn't just like the way I am they should understand my personality form inside. They should know what I am made of. They should know like the things I go through before they discriminate against me. Whenever it comes to gays and lesbians learners should know what we are made of what we are born of. They mustn't just like the way we walk the way we talk. They must understand like inner, inner inside (LPC, L 1313 – 1323)
Interviewer	This means that they not informed because science has developed so much and you can adopt. So you can have your own family if you want to.	1283 1284 1285 1286	
LPC	Ja, but in class they will make as if is impossible.	1287 1288	
Interviewer	Because they do not know?	1289	
LPC	Yes.	1290	
Interviewer	If there is something that you could change at school what would it be?	1291 1292	
LPC	At school I will change things by allowing girls to wear trousers. As I am a lesbian I know that there are lesbians, gays and all that. I will allow girls to wear trousers and I will allow the teachers to teach other learners about gays and lesbians and I will stop discrimination. At school I will change many things.	1292 1294 1295 1296 1297 1298 1299 1300	<b>7.2 Recommendation made by the researcher</b> Anti-homophobic policies should be included in the schools safety policy as well as their code of conduct.
Interviewer	With your strike?	1301	
LPC	Yes.	1302	and Disciplinary action should be taken against learners who does no obey these rules and regulations.
Interviewer	Very last question. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about your school and your experiences at school, whether it is positive or negative. Is there anything that we missed that you would like to talk about?	1303 1304 1305 1306 1307 1308	I the researcher made these recommendations because the findings of this research indicates that the lesbian learners are at risk of being sexually violated by the older heterosexual boys.
LPC	What I can tell is that even though the learners accepted me the way I am and they want to be the way I am but like some girls they don't understand what I am going through. <u>They shouldn't just like the way I am they should understand my personality form inside. They should know what I am made of. They should know like the things I go through before they discriminate against me. Whenever it comes to gays and lesbians learners should know what we are made of what we are born of. They</u>	1309 1310 1311 1312 1313 1314 1315 1316 1317 1318 1319 1320 1321	

LPC	<u>mustn't just like the way we walk the way we talk. They must understand like inne, inner inside.</u>	1322	
		1323	
Interviewer LPC	special thing in her, look at her and smile; she would look at me and smile. Then this thing came into my mind that I should tell her I love her but I was too scared	90	
	Did you do it?	91	
	92		
Interviewer LPC	No, I was too scared. I am afraid of girls, I can't face them	93	
	Is it because you never know what there	94	
Interviewer LPC		95	
	They must have been very curious né?	96	
<b>END OF INTERVIEW</b>		97	

### DECLARATION OF DEPENDABILITY OF INFORMATION

I, Mr/Mrs/Ms \_\_\_\_\_, learner/teacher/parent participant in this research study, hereby declare that the information contained in this document is correct. The information that I have shared with the interviewer, Mrs M. A. Brikkels, has been typed exactly as recorded during this interview.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

## LETTER, ESSAYS AND POEMS WRITTEN BY LEARNERS

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I live in  
\_\_\_\_\_ Block xx I am 19 years  
old.

I Am a lesbian butch and I like having fun  
with people and I don't want see anyone  
getting hurt. I am a kind of people really  
like doing crazy stuff. But what I like about  
my self even if many people didn't accept  
me the fact that am a lesbian. That  
nothing makes me feel Proud about who am  
I. When people calling me names I just ignore  
them.

I want to see my self as a successful  
person when I complete my matric, I want  
to study ~~further~~ further and become a lawyer.  
I like studying very hard It encourages you  
to work hard and you explore ~~many~~ many in life.

My family don't want to accept that am a  
lesbian and it makes them angry. I just give  
them time maybe they will come around. I don't  
understand why my family won't accept me  
the way I am, if ever they would accept me  
the way ~~that~~ I am, I would be happy and  
thankful because they accepted me the way  
I am. because this is very hard for me to  
hide my self from being a lesbian

1 I am in grade 10, a butch lesbian. I am 15.  
2 years old, live at but soon moving to  
3 12100 next makopane.

4 I am a kind, loving, crazy and naughty person. I am an outdoor  
5 person but don't usually party around. I have a lot of lesbian friends  
6 and I usually hang a lot with them. Most of the times I spend them  
7 with my cousin (K<sup>a</sup> pee), we always doing crazy things when we  
8 together and she is older than me.

9 As I'm a lesbian, my whole family did accept me the way I am  
10 even though some of the members of the extended family are against  
11 it. I grew up as a boy, doing things that boys do. I started dating  
12 in grade 3, my first girlfriend was Hope.

13 I have about 13 years living this lesbian life. At my primary  
14 school they did not want me to wear trousers but to wear a  
15 skirt. Then my mom went to school and explained to them about  
16 my life style. I was a ladies soccer captain at my primary school.

17  
18 I usually don't mind what people say about me. Most of the  
19 times when I walk around, people ask me that I am I a girl or  
20 a boy. Well I just ignore them, even if they are teasing me. People  
21 like to ask me silly questions and tell me that what I'm doing  
22 is <sup>not</sup> under ~~the~~ God's will, it's against it.

23 People, school learners and teachers don't accept us lesbians as we  
24 are. They judge us where else they don't know anything about our  
25 history and the way we were raised. They call us with names and  
26 they just don't like us, always talking behind our backs.

27 At some churches they dont want lesbians like some of the  
28 christians. The thing which surprises me is that, at my church  
29 they dont have a problem with me or with the way I live and I  
30 dress. People judge me with the way they are looking at me but were  
31 else they dont want to be judged.

32 They discriminate us like we not humans. I am proud of being  
33 a lesbian.

1 Name

2 I am . Am 17 years old, I was born on  
3 the 26<sup>th</sup> of April 1996. I am a female but lesbian.

4 I am a proud butch lesbian which represent "LGBTI" which means  
5 lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex. Though at first it was hard  
6 for people to understand what you I am. Always I would ask my self  
7 what am I? Cause I never knew what I was. Before knowing  
8 I was lesbian, I would be find gals girls attractive and pretty, I  
9 would fight with boys when they approach me. I wondered if I might be  
10 a lesbian, I wasn't sure. I would like to know if it was just a  
11 phase or if I was not really straight.

12 Because sometimes I would imagine myself dating or kissing even  
13 just holding hands with a sexy and attractive girls. All the things were  
14 fun and romantic. But when it comes to boys it would be disgusted  
15 and ridiculous and awkward then that's when I found out am  
16 lesbian. But though I didn't stop researching about being lesbian. Till  
17 I found out who I really am.

18 My family take it as a joke, they used to say am still young cause  
19 I was about 9 to 10 years old. They used to say its a phase "I will  
20 reach 16 years. Then I reached 16 and passed but still am still  
21 the same then my mother got used to it and accepted am lesbian.  
22 She even accepted my girl friend. But in many other families they don't  
23 but others those.

24 People claim its satanzine but its not. If ever they could understand  
25 what LGBTI is they could've accepted us they way we are. When I was going  
26 to school I was not free cause people would look at me  
27 and spread rumours about me, so it was not fun at all

28 Children at school would ask me questions. Some would laugh at me but  
29 Some would be friends with me. When it comes to other teachers they  
30 would tell me girls don't wear trousers ~~trousers~~ so it was hard for  
31 me so I went on wearing trousers. But there was this other teacher  
32 stood next to me and talked with the principle about me wearing a trouser  
33 She was very helpful and supporting.

34 Then it comes to the High School part. At first it was hard too,  
35 because some learners didn't understand what kind of person I am.  
36 Then to the teachers they would lecture me tell me about gods will  
37 ask me questions about my dad. They told me its because I grow up  
38 without a father. Then that would make me cry ask my self many  
39 questions.

40 It was hard for me to live with this thing that am lesbian but still  
41 today some how some where am not free. But am staying strong  
42 inside am strong. People may talk and talk but am proud to  
43 be a bitch lesbian proud to represent "LGBTI".

44 If people might realize the things that is happening outside the world  
45 maybe they'll accept us the way we are. Except that we have gifts,  
46 Cleverness, intelligent. At classes we clever, at work, sport, we have  
47 all those things that they have.

48 I would be happy if they would accept us as we are and love us  
49 like every body else. Yes we females with different hormones. Yes they  
50 male and females. But different even only one thing feelings. They  
51 don't like women and or man but Gays love Gays and Lesbians  
52 love girls. Why can't other people accept that. Why can't the world accept  
53 us the way we are.

54 If only people can feel the pain the fear we going and having they would  
55 accepted us they the way we are. I am lesbian and Yes am proud  
56 I could even stand were there is all the world all people I can stand  
57 and shout tell them that am lesbian and "les" am proud.

58 Why should people kill and assault us. No meaning "LGBTI" lesbians,  
59 Gays, Bisexuals, transgender, intersexual. people. Why? we have blood like  
60 Yours, we have private parts like yours. Yes you might say its sin  
61 But we proud to be lesbians, Gay, and others.

62 If people say its a sin Yes I admit my sin. But the question  
63 is do they admit there sins? ... You can Pray and do different  
64 things to me but you cant change the way I am they way I love  
65 Women you cant change the feeling thats how proud I am.

66 I repeat my name is Kurabo Pinky Risen Sebati Msimango I'm  
67 proud to call my self lesbian proud to represent "LGBTI" I stand tall  
68 Telling the hole world am proud. You can call me names, You can even  
69 assault me, You can even kill me I'll always be proud to be lesbian  
70 I'll die proud. And yes am a African I have freedom to be what I want  
71 to be cause I have a right and thats human rights cause am a  
72 human not an abiotic but biotic. I have breath, Soul, eyes, heart,  
73 feelings, legs, mouth, ~~being~~ tongue, teeth to show am human.

74 Being lesbian doesnt mean am not female I am female, a female  
75 who have breast, mind, virgine, hair, legs, butt, and others Yes I am  
76 a female and a proud one. But I love other women. And Yes women  
77 loves me too cause I have love to offer. I dont have feeling and  
78 potential love to offer guys. And I stand tall with a method of prandess  
79 a smile can show you all. Am proud Proud Lesbian I am



## How I feel . . . . .

- 1 If ever you could open your heart, mind, soul and eyes
- 2 You would know that you are my inspiration
- 3 You would know that I love you so much
- 4 That words can't explain this love am trying to show
- 5 ~~How~~ The joy inside my heart I have for you
- 6 When am at the weakest point your voice, your smile
- 7 Your look, encourages me to run the race of fighting
- 8 for what I want not to give up on it.
- 9 And so I can't truly say that you are the angel
- 10 Of my life. As a man say you are my world.
- 11 So am I saying you are my world.
- 12 My feelings are deeper than you think. My soul will
- 13 never rest in peace until I feel your hands holding mine
- 14 Not until I feel your lips on top of mine.
- 15 How long must I wait for you to see or realize
- 16 the love I have for you.

---

## Did You Know?

- 1 My feelings are deeper than the oceans, Deeper than you think
- 2 Which makes it hard to breath My mind keeps creating your face &
- 3 smiles, looks. I might say every moment and day that pass by.
- 4 How long do you still want me to wait for you to see that you
- 5 My queen mean the world to me. Yes I can say you are
- 6 beautiful indeed. Yes I have questions in my mind like how must
- 7 I express myself to you. Yes you did ask me the question "do you
- 8 love me" and yes I wish I could say yes 100 times and I or
- 9 say yes ones. But I love you but I become. unspeakable to
- 10 let you know that you mean the world to me. This is how
- 11 I feel about you. I wish you close your eyes and open it
- 12 find your self in my arms.

By

**DATE:** 3 September 2013

**PLACE:** Selected secondary school 1 (XXX)

**ACTIVITY:** Introductory and orientation meeting

**PARTICIPANT:** Principal and SBST coordinators of school

### FIELD NOTES

**Observations made in terms of the surroundings, people present, venue chosen by participant and non-verbal behaviour of participants (body language, tone of voice in responding to questions, responses to my actions:**

This meeting was attended by the principal and his two SBST coordinators in the principal's office. The principal seemed to be a man who highly regards his Christian principles. The other two individual present seemed totally neutral during our discussions and seemed to be waiting for the principal to make a statement with regards to the schools stance on allowing this kind of research in his school.

After I presented the nature and purpose of my research study to the meeting the principal seemed hesitant about allowing me to include a learner and a teacher from his school in the research study. After I presented the nature and purpose of my research study to the meeting the principal indicated that he wasn't sure whether the learner is lesbian or transgender because the learner's parents came to see him to inform him that she would like to undergo a sex change before the end of the year. Their concern was whether or not the school would allow her to come as a boy the following year.

From the principals body language and tone of I could tell that he was upset by this issue as if it is something that he would not want to allow at his school. He felt that the parents should have told him about the learner's sexual orientation before enrolling her. This would have allowed the school to make a more informed decision in this regard. According to the principal his main concern was the effect that her sex change would have on the other learners.

I reacted by quoting from the Constitution of South Africa and the South African Schools Act which allows all learners the right to basic education without being discriminated against because of their sexual orientation. In the end, after much discussion, the school indicated that they would allow me to speak to the identified lesbian learner if her parents will allow me to do so.

## REFLECTIVE NOTES

### **A reflection on what I experienced during this activity:**

This was my first meeting with a school principal and his SBST coordinator, as planned. The outcome of this meeting left me anxious because I realised that gaining access to possible learner participants would not be as easy as I thought. Our schools and teachers might not be ready to be open, accepting and supportive of the LGBT learners in their schools. Our parents might not be ready to accept and be open about their daughters' sexual orientation hence the schools fear of possible legal implications.

### **A reflection on my thoughts during this activity:**

I wondered what it could be that influenced the principal's thinking. Was it perhaps his age, race, religion or values that made him think like this? Did he not know turning the learner away next year because of a sex change undergone by the learner would be unconstitutional?

### **A reflection on what I felt (e.g. anxious, happy, sad) during this activity:**

I was irritated and somewhat angry and I had to concentrate in order not to lose my temper. I expected that the school will attempt to prevent me from seeing the learner, however I was still disappointed.

### **The most important thing I learned from this activity:**

I have learned that schools, institution and even individuals are weary of research studies especially if they believe that the topic of research might reveal issues that they do not want the researcher to see.

In order to objective one should not be guided by your values and perception but by policies and legislation that provides certain guidelines for addressing certain issues.

### **Do I regard the activity as effective? Why?**

Yes, it was important to fully inform the school about the nature and purpose of the research study in order for them to make an informed decision with regard to their own participation. There are issues such as legal issues that schools must take into consideration before committing themselves to such a study.

### **The most important decision I made during this activity:**

I decided not to include this learner in the research study. I did not feel comfortable with the conditions under which the school came to the decision to allow me to include a lesbian learner and a teacher from their school in my research study.

**DATE:** 5/09/2013

**PLACE:** Selected secondary school 2 (YYY)

**ACTIVITY:** Introductory and orientation meeting

**PARTICIPANT:** Principal and SGBT coordinator

### FIELD NOTES

**Observations made in terms of the surroundings, people present, venue chosen by participant and non-verbal behaviour of participants (body language, tone of voice in responding to questions, responses to my actions:**

This was is sport school that promotes excellence in sport. Most of the learners comes from all over Gauteng and lives in the hostels. The meeting was attended by the schools deputy principal and the SBST coordinator who indicated that there were lesbian learners enrolled at the school in the past. Unfortunately there were no lesbian learners in the school this year. I could tell from their body language that this might not be the truth but I accepted and honoured their decision.

### REFLECTIVE NOTES

**A reflection on what I experienced during this activity -**

**Introductory and orientation meeting of schools:**

My experience of this school was that they have already decided no to allow me to speak to any lesbian learner even if had lesbian learners in the school.

**A reflection on my thoughts during this activity:**

I thought that the school was not being truthful because of incidences that occurred with learners who were suspected of being lesbian in the past. The outcome of these occurrences must have left the school weary of being exposed with regards to the experiences of lesbians in the school.

**A reflection on what I felt (e.g. anxious, happy, sad) during this activity:**

My level of anxiety just kept increasing. If a sport school says that thy do not have any lesbians enrolled at the school what was the other schools going to say.

**The most important thing I learned from this activity:**

This topic is more sensitive then I anticipated. The school are afraid to get involved in such research. Such research needs to be made compulsory and should be conducted by the Department of Education.

**Do I regard the activity as effective? Why?**

Yes. All participants have the right to be fully informed about the nature and purpose of a research study in order to make an informed decision.

**The most important decision I made during this activity:**

I honoured the school's reason for not being able to participate in the research study.

**DATE:** 10/09/2013

**PLACE:** Selected secondary school 3 (ZZZ)

**ACTIVITY:** Introductory and orientation meeting

**PARTICIPANT:** SBST coordinator and bisexual teacher

**FIELD NOTES****Observations made in terms of the surroundings, people present, venue chosen by participant, non-verbal behaviour of participant (body language, tone of voice in responding to questions, responses to my actions:**

I met with the SBST coordinator and a lesbian teacher at the school. This was an Afrikaans school with more or less 1200 learners. What pleasantly surprised me about this school was that they seemed more open and supportive of the LGBT learners at their school. It also seemed as if the bisexual teachers provide support to most of the lesbian and gay learners at the school. According to the school there were 3 learners that they identified as being lesbian. This seemed promising unfortunately the school could not indicate whether or not these learners were self-identified lesbians because they identified them purely on their appearance and behaviour (short hair, boyish behaviour and interest in girls). In this situation I felt that it was more important to protect the SBST coordinator and the teacher who offered her assistance than to obtain participants. In order to prevent legal implication for the school the SBST coordinator and the educator involved I decided not to include the identified learners in the research study. The school was concerned that the parents might seek legal action if we approach their children and ask them if they are lesbian or not. They were also concerned that these learners' parents might not know that they are lesbian.

A lot of interesting aspects around the possible causes of lesbianism was discussed. The possibility of it being genetically based was greatly discussed. According to the bisexual teacher a study has been done that proves that homosexuality is genetically based. This made me wonder what the relation between genetics and homosexuality really is.

## REFLECTIVE NOTES

### **A reflection on what I experienced during this activity:**

This experience gave me hope that I will eventually find schools, learners and teachers that are willing to participate.

### **A reflection on my thoughts during this activity:**

I thought it was nice of them to want to be part of my research study but I felt it was too risky to include them in the study.

### **A reflection on what I felt (e.g. anxious, happy, sad) during this activity:**

I was excited because the educator seemed liked a suitable participant as she is very involved and supportive of the LGBT learners at the school. She is bisexual and according to her she is not fazed by differences in sexual orientation. They also gave me the contact details of a lesbian educator at Willow ridge high school which I will contact to see if she does not know any lesbian girls who are still at school. Unfortunately as there are no suitable participants from her school I will not be able to include her in my study.

### **The most important thing I learned from this activity:**

Selected school 3 was just as concerned with the legal implication that might result from identifying and labelling children as lesbian. This school gathers for clients that are on a higher socio-economic level. Parents are informed and vigilant about their rights and the rights of their children and will not hesitate to take action if their child's rights have been compromised.

### **Do I regard the activity as effective? Why?**

Yes. It is important to inform the schools about the nature and purpose of the study in order for them to make informed decisions regarding their response to your request.

### **The most important decision I made during this activity:**

Was to take the schools situation with regard to the legal consequences that they might face if I include learners identified by them as lesbian in my study.

**DATE:** 12 September 2014

**PLACE:** Selected secondary school 4 (XYZ)

**ACTIVITY:** Introductory and orientation meeting

**PARTICIPANT:** Principal and SBST coordinator

### **FIELD NOTES**

**Observations made in terms of the surroundings, people present, venue chosen by participant, non- verbal behaviour of participant (body language, tone of voice in responding to questions, responses to my actions:**

I was well received by the principal and the SBST coordinator and they were more than willing to participate in the study. Unfortunately the possible learner participant that they identified as a self identified lesbian could not speak English and she seemed cognitively impaired which meant that she was not a suitable candidate for this research study.