

CHAPTER 5

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I provide an overview of the research process I followed in conducting this study. I first discuss the research questions that informed the study, followed by the process of identifying and recruiting participants, conducting individual interviews and finally using discourse analysis as an approach to analysing the interview texts. My epistemological commitment to poststructuralist theory and feminism shaped the decisions I made during the research process and throughout this chapter I focus on explicating the implications of this commitment for the methodology I employed.

In assuming a reflexive approach it is necessary to be mindful of the extent to which participants' voices might be diminished by the presence of my own voice as the researcher in the study (Parker & Burman, 1993). At the same time, my comments and reflections form part of the research report and can add value by elucidating the personal context in which the study was constructed, data were created and analytical interpretations were made (Hollway, 1989; Willig, 2008). To this end I have include my own reflections throughout this report and in this chapter specifically, where I comment on my own positioning in this study as it relates to the research process.

5.2 The research questions

Willig (2008) notes that Foucauldian discourse analysis is orientated towards addressing research questions concerned with exploring the discursive worlds that participants inhabit, as well as the implications of discourses for participants' subjectivity. The following research questions, based on the aims and objectives formulated in Chapter 1, guided me in conducting the study:

- Question 1:** How is bisexuality constructed as a discursive object in the talk of participants when accounting for their gendered and sexualised identities?
- Question 2:** How is gender constructed as a discursive object in such talk of participants?
- Question 3:** What are the implications of discourses of bisexuality for participants' ways-of-being in the world? In other words, how is subjective experience shaped by the manner in which these discourses position participants?
- Question 4:** How do participants position themselves in relation to dominant discourses of sex, gender and sexuality available in society? What are the ways in which these dominant discourses are supported, resisted or subverted in the talk of participants?

Question 5: Moving beyond the context of the research interview, what is the relationship between the discourses produced (and drawn on) by participants during the interviews and the institutions (such as social, political and material structures) encountered in participants' context?

5.3 Recruiting participants

Considering the lack of female representation in discourses that resist heteronormativity, this study focuses on the experiences of women who self-identify as bisexual. As discussed in Chapter 1, there is a dearth of South African literature related to bisexual women, with the small body of local research that attends to bisexuality being limited to bisexual behaviour and HIV risk among men. Further to this, there is a lack of research both locally and internationally that explores how gender and sexuality binaries are treated in the accounts of women claiming self-aware bisexual identities. To attend to these oversights in local and international literature, the current study is focused on an in-depth and rich study of a group of self-identified bisexual women's accounts of their gendered and sexualised subjectivity. Potgieter (1997), in the context of researching South African lesbian identities, points out that studies that use self-identification of sexual orientation as a criterion for inclusion have been criticised for not necessarily including only "real" or "authentic" lesbians. She continues that social constructionist research does not aim to provide true or totalising representations of reality but instead aims to "understand how people construct, negotiate and interpret their experience" (Potgieter, 1997, p. 116). Similarly, in the present study I regarded self-identification of sexual orientation as adequate in identifying participants.

I initially aimed to include at least ten participants in the study. This was based on convention in other discourse analytic studies, where the labour-intensive nature of discourse analysis means that small samples are generally preferred (Willig, 2008). Further to this, discourse analytic research is not concerned with generalisability but instead with detailed context-specific descriptions (Shefer, 2009). This means that a large sample does not necessarily add value and can even hinder the process of analysis if the amount of data to be analysed is unmanageable. Following Wood and Kroger's (2000, p. 77) guideline, I continued interviewing participants until I felt that I had sufficient data - or "language instances" - to build and support my analytical claims. While a smaller number of interviews might have been sufficient I extended the sample to 13 participants to ensure a measure of diversity along racial identification, as the initial ten participants were largely homogenous, particularly in terms of this social signifier.

While numerous social signifiers influence how individual identity is constituted in discourse, gendered and sexualised subjectivity have been described as especially impacted on by signifiers such as race, culture, educational background and class (Boonzaier & Shefer, 2006; hooks, 1981). Pauw (2009, p. 135) cautions that “South Africa’s particular history of privileging some voices over others.... has particular effects in terms of the discursive structure” of meanings around gender and sexuality. She continues that a homogenous sample allows access to only “a limited number of available discursive repertoires” (Pauw, 2009, p. 135). With this in mind I aimed to, as far as possible, include participants from diverse positionings in terms of social signifiers such as race and culture. Similar to Pauw’s (2009) position, my intention was not to increase the representative nature of the sample or to generalise from the findings, as that would be inconsistent with the poststructuralist approach that informed my research. Instead, my aim was to widen the potential range of discourses represented in the interviews in order to increase the richness of the findings. A full description of the final group of participants is provided later in this section.

I recruited participants in two main ways, in an attempt to obtain a sample that reflects a measure of diversity in the experiences of bisexual women. First, I made use of convenience sampling to identify potential participants through my social network. Second, I enlisted organisations that are active in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) communities to identify additional participants, which as I will discuss below was met with limited success. After identifying initial participants through these two avenues, I used snowball sampling to further extend the sample. This entailed asking participants to introduce me to friends or acquaintances who might be willing to participate. My use of these particular sampling strategies was motivated by the widely reported difficulties involved in accessing LGBTI participants, where the marginalisation of LGBTI individuals in heteronormative contexts as well as a resistance to identification due to the risk of victimisation result in LGBTI individuals being hard to recruit for participation in research (Sullivan & Losberg, 2003).

My choice of sampling strategies was further motivated by the low visibility of bisexual-identified individuals in particular, making this an especially hard-to-reach group to study. As the literature review in Chapter 4 indicated, claiming a bisexual identity is complicated by a number of issues, including widespread marginalising stereotypes of bisexuality. For this reason, even individuals who embrace self-aware bisexual identities might be reluctant to publicly identify as bisexual. Consequently, bisexual individuals might be difficult to recruit even from spaces that are regarded LGBTI-friendly and the use of non-probability sampling methods such as recruiting from social

networks becomes more appropriate (Sullivan & Losberg, 2003). I elaborate on the sampling strategies used in the sections below.

5.3.1 Identifying participants through my social network

As a first strategy, I invited participants from my social network to participate in the study. Browne (2005) argues that the use of researcher social networks to recruit participants shapes not only the kind of participants that are included and excluded, but also influences the manner in which participants respond during the interview and what kind of information they share. Browne's (2005) comment about this constitutive impact of sampling on the research findings rung particularly true during the first four interviews. These four participants, recruited through my social network, were known to me only superficially but knew each other very well. This was to my advantage during the interviews where in certain instances having knowledge of participants' social networks and relationships was helpful since each interview expanded on my understanding of participants' social contexts. This also contributed to participants being at ease during the interviews and speaking freely about the research topic. At times I felt as if participants were perhaps "too open" in that they shared private information about relationships, affairs and soured friendships that related to other participants in the study. In these instances I felt as if I had to carefully guard these "confessions" as they were shared in confidence and could not be included in the findings in a way that would compromise any of the participants. To this end I made sure that identifying details, such as names of friends and lovers, were either altered or omitted in the presentation of the findings.

However, sampling from my social network became a disadvantage at a certain point where I felt that the range of discourses represented in the interviews was possibly being limited by my focus on participants known to each other. Further to this, sampling from personal networks can impose limits on the heterogeneity of the sample. Kitzinger (1987), referring to her research exploring lesbian identities, notes that recruiting participants from her social network resulted in a sample of women very similar to her. She continues that this was done at the expense of diversity in that her research failed to represent the "full richness of lesbians' experience, identities and ideologies" (Kitzinger, 1987, p. 255). I found that after the fourth interview it was valuable to recruit the rest of the participants from more diverse contexts in an attempt to access more varied positions to supplement those accessed in the first four interviews.

5.3.2 Enlisting LGBTI organisations to identify participants

In an attempt to widen the sample to include participants other than those in my social network, I turned to the second sampling strategy and contacted organisations active in LGBTI communities.

The organisations I approached were requested to communicate the study to potential participants and to facilitate contact. The materials used to advertise the study are attached as appendix C and include a description of the study posted on Internet forums⁸ of local LGBTI organisations, as well as a poster invitation distributed at LGBTI organisations, with an attending request for referrals of qualifying participants.

While I was aware of the potentially limited success of using LGBTI organisations to recruit participants, considering the reported lack of bisexual visibility in many such organisations, I was surprised when only one organisation was able to assist me in making contact with a participant. At this point, I was left wondering if the lack of response was indicative of some of the problems inherent to using LGBTI organisations in recruiting participants. The use of more traditional social science sampling methods, such as enlisting community-specific organisations and relying on snowball sampling has been critiqued as contributing to low diversity in samples when conducting research with LGBTI individuals. For instance, Moore (2006) describes the difficulties associated with recruiting diverse samples in conducting her research with black lesbian communities in New York, noting that recruiting black participants through public advertisements or postings at LGBTI organisations rarely yields a significant response. Had I been able to obtain a homogenous sample through these organisations (in terms of social signifiers such as race or class), this possibility would have applied to the current study. However, the near complete lack of response more likely points to low visibility of bisexuality in organisations working with LGBTI individuals, rather than an under-representation of diversity among bisexually-identified individuals served by these organisations.

The possibility of my low success in obtaining participants through LGBTI organisations being due to invisibility of bisexuality is lent further support by the general omission of bisexuality in materials produced by LGBTI organisations in South Africa. A review of prominent South African LGBTI Internet websites⁹ indicates that although bisexuality is included in the abbreviation “LGBT” (and in some instances “LGBTI”) used on these websites, the content of these websites predominantly refer to gay and lesbian identities, with very few references to bisexuality. Although I was unable to fully explore

⁸ Alexander (2002) notes that despite public perceptions to the contrary, gay and lesbian youth throughout Africa regularly access LGBTI Internet websites as a source of information, support and a sense of community. Consequently, recruiting gay and lesbian participants from such sites may prove a feasible strategy for other studies, although it was unsuccessful in identifying bisexual participants in this particular study.

⁹ The review included the following prominent local LGBTI websites: www.gala.co.za; www.triangle.co.za; www.mask.org.za; www.mambagirl.com; www.mambaonline.com; www.out.org.za

this in the context of the present study, it will be valuable for future research to study the extent of LGBTI organisations' engagement with bisexual individuals.

Following the identification of an additional participant through the assistance of an LGBTI organisation, the rest of the participants were identified through snowball sampling.

5.3.3 Description of the final sample

The final group of participants comprised of thirteen women between the ages of 20 and 29 – all of them living either in Johannesburg or Pretoria, in the province of Gauteng. All of the participants were young professionals and had either completed a tertiary degree or were in the process of completing one. The following table provides biographical information for the participants, with a more detailed description of each participant being provided in the next chapter:

Table 1: Biographical information for participants

Pseudonym	Age	"Race"	Home language	Tertiary education	Current employment
Astrid	25	White	Afrikaans	Yes	Musician
Liné	29	White	Afrikaans	Yes	Teacher, musician
Taryn	29	White	English	Yes	Musician
Nadia	25	White	Afrikaans	Yes	Journalist
Belinda	25	White	English	Yes	Management consultant
Cara	23	White	Afrikaans	Yes	Film maker
Jennifer	21	White	English	Yes	Postgraduate architecture student
Laetitia	25	White	Afrikaans	Yes	Postgraduate engineering student
Sibongile	20	Black	Zulu	Yes	Journalism student
Gemma	24	White	English	Yes	Marketing manager
Phindile	23	Black	Swati	Yes	Law student
Sonia	22	White	Afrikaans	Yes	Postgraduate psychology student
Nasiphi	21	Black	Pedi	Yes	Broadcasting student

Obtaining a diverse sample was not entirely successful as the final group of participants is homogenous particularly in terms of sharing a relatively privileged socio-economic status, having

access to tertiary education and residing in urban areas. In South Africa, 48.5% of the population live below the national poverty line (United Nations Development Programme, 2003) and 17.9% have no formal education (Statistics South Africa, 2003). Further to this, 43.7% of the population is rurally based (Statistics South Africa, 2003). In this sense, the present study excludes the voices of bisexual women from less economically privileged positions and with low access to education, as well as the voices of bisexual women living in rural areas. There are also other aspects of privilege such as age and being able-bodied that define the participants in this study; future research could benefit from exploring more diverse aspects of bisexual women's experience by including the voices of participants from a broader range of subject positions.

5.4 Interviewing

I conducted in-depth interviews to explore the discourses that construct the gendered and sexualised subjectivities of participants in the study, making use of a semi-structured interview guide to flexibly direct the interviews (attached as appendix A). The typical duration of the interviews was two to three hours, although one of the interviews extended up to four and a half hours, resulting in a total of 30 hours of interview material for analysis. I initially anticipated that the interviews would last approximately one to two hours but found that participants were generally keen to talk about the topic. In some interviews I attempted to terminate the interview out of consideration for participants' time but found that participants' were reluctant to end the interview. This is probably related to the timing of the interviews – most of the participants suggested a time where they would be relaxed and would not have other demands on them. None of the interviews took place at participants' place of work and the interviews generally had a comfortable feel with little or no time limit from the participants' side.

The majority of the interviews were conducted in English, with two interviews conducted in both English and Afrikaans and two interviews conducted in Afrikaans only. I am proficient in both English and Afrikaans and the language used depended on participants' preference. Considering that I am not proficient in Zulu, Swati nor Pedi, those interviews were, out of necessity, conducted in English; participants were however fully fluent in English and this was not a limitation to the data collection process. I translated the interviews that were conducted in Afrikaans into English, for the purposes of analysis. A research assistant (also proficient in English and Afrikaans) helped with this and confirmed the accuracy of translations. While the group of participants are linguistically diverse, English is the lingua franca in South Africa and participants were generally comfortable conversing in English, with the exception of the two interviewees who preferred conducting the interviews in Afrikaans.

Participants were requested to complete a brief biographical questionnaire (attached as appendix B) to limit unnecessary questions during the interview process. This was completed after the interview. In the following section I first discuss the feminist formulation of interviewing that informed my own approach in conducting the interviews, before proceeding to discuss the semi-structured interview guide and the process of transcribing the interview material.

5.4.1 Power and positioning in interviews

Feminist research attends very clearly to the manner in which power operates during the interview process. The more traditional hierarchical relationship between the researcher and the researched that previously dominated in social science research is rejected, as it is considered to be dehumanising and exploitative (Reinharz, 1992). Franklin (1997, p. 100) refers to this traditional approach to interviewing as the information extraction model, where the interviewer assumes an active role in eliciting “feelings, ideas, and/or knowledge” from the passively positioned interviewee. Within this highly structured relationship the researcher attempts to maintain objectivity and avoids sharing any personal information that might bias the participants’ responses (Franklin, 1997). Feminist researchers have critiqued this approach to interviewing, arguing that it suppresses spontaneity and creativity in participants’ responses (Franklin, 1997) and limits opportunities to explore unanticipated topics raised by participants (Burman, 1994b).

In the context of feminist research, this traditional hierarchical relationship is renegotiated to minimise power differences between the researcher and the participant (Reinharz, 1992) with researchers conceptualising the research process as doing research “with” instead of “on” participants (Burman, 1994b). Participants’ agency is emphasised and both the researcher and the participants are regarded as actively contributing to knowledge creation in the interview (Franklin, 1997). The interview is regarded as an “interactive encounter” (Burman, 1994b, p. 51) whereby the researcher inescapably participates in the construction of knowledge through negotiating meaning with the participant. There is a clear acknowledgement that power relations between the researcher and the participant will have an impact on “what is said and how” (Franklin, 1997, p. 104).

Feminist researchers such as Oakley (1981) suggest that non-hierarchical relationships can be promoted by the researcher sharing personal information with participants, similar to the manner in which participants share their stories with the researcher. This deconstructs the position of the researcher as the expert, and may facilitate the building of trust and therefore promote more open

disclosure during the interview process (Bergen, 1996; Oakley, 1981). Wise (1987) however warns that “in encouraging reciprocity and intimacy within the research relationship, Oakley may indeed be fostering the patronisation and exploitation that she seeks to avoid” (p. 166). Willig (2008) further notes that a researcher should not abuse the informal features of semi-structured interviewing, which may at times mirror a “normal” conversation, in order to urge participants to share more than they might feel comfortable with after the interview.

Tindall (1994) offers a response to this dilemma by stating that, as a researcher, one should disclose any information necessary to clarify one’s position in relation to both the research study and the participants, but that participants should be fully aware that they are in control of the extent to which they reciprocate. However, despite attempts to minimise the power differential between the researcher and participants, complete equality is not possible as it is the researcher who:

...is firmly positioned by participants as knowledgeable, who sets the process in motion, who decides on the initial research issue, which frameworks to use, which prospective participants to contact and what happens to the final product. In the final analysis it is the researcher’s version of reality that is given public visibility. (Tindall, 1994, p. 155)

With these issues in mind I had concerns about the ethical nature of sharing personal information in what can be considered a strategic manner, in order to elicit greater disclosure from participants. In the present study I generally did not spontaneously offer personal information, but when participants enquired about my own views and positioning I responded openly and honestly. I was particularly mindful of this during interviews where I knew the participants outside of the interview context, as I did not want to exploit the informal nature of our interaction. I found that certain unavoidable features of the interviews, such as the completion of informed consent forms and the presence of the recorder, helped to define these encounters as research interviews and not as normal conversations. However this did not diminish the more relaxed and comfortable feel of these interviews, which in my view contributed to participants speaking freely and sharing their experiences in richer detail.

5.4.2 Negotiating insider/outsider positions

Following from the feminist poststructuralist orientation towards research discussed in the previous section, I regard the interviews with participants as interactional contexts in which participant and researcher identities are “actively managed, negotiated and solidified” (Best, 2003, p. 897). Such a view implies that categories of identity are continuously shifting as identity is negotiated during the

research encounter. I was curious how my own positioning as a young (27-28 years old at the time of the interviews), white, cisgender, able-bodied feminist academic from a middle-class background would intersect with participants' identities in the interview contexts. In many respects I consider myself as similar to participants - I share participants' positioning as young and relatively privileged women with access to higher education. Further to this I knew some of the participants outside of the interview contexts and in that sense shared a social and relational context with them.

At the same time I am also different from participants in many respects, where I was often positioned during the interviews as an outsider in terms of participants' cultural contexts, their professional identities, their home language and so forth. I did not disclose my own sexual identification to all of the participants – in some of the interviews participants assumed that I identified as bisexual by virtue of my interest in the topic, while other participants either showed no interest in my sexual identification or questioned me directly at some point in the interview by asking if I identify as bisexual. This resulted in some participants framing my sexuality as a shared commonality while others presumably regarded it as either a point of difference or as unimportant.

In some instances during the interviews I was clearly positioned as an outsider also in relation to other aspects of participants' identities. One such instance was during the interview with Sibongile, where she spoke about her experience as a black woman who identifies as bisexual. She recounted the difficulties of being in a same-sex relationship and not being able to be physically expressive towards her partner when in public, due to the threat of violence and corrective rape. The full quote appears in Chapter 6 - I repeat only parts of it here to illustrate my argument:

I've never heard of a white lesbian being killed by a community. So just thinking about that, and in that frame of mind it is then different you know, to be a black lesbian, bisexual, whatever, because your reality is just a little different. Because we form part of larger communities. I'm not always here at varsity, I'm not always back home in my little suburb, I'm not always there. We form part of a larger community, when there are funerals or our families live in townships or things like that. So when we have to go there, you're gonna meet people who think they can straighten a woman by raping them.

Sibongile's use of the collective pronoun "we" and the manner in which she contrasts white and black women's realities function here to position me as an outsider in relation to her experience. She describes herself as forming part of a community – one that I do not form part of as a white woman - and emphasises that her reality as a black woman differs significantly from my reality. Interestingly,

in this excerpt Sibongile is also referring to the shifting nature of identities, where she considers herself as existing in different spaces that position her in different ways. She refers to an accepting space “at varsity” and “back home in [her] little suburb” where she can be more open in her expression of her sexuality. She contrasts this with more traditional spaces such as the “larger community” she forms part of, where her identity as bisexual is rejected and exposes her to the risk of violence.

In other instances I found myself included in participants’ realities, where I was discursively positioned as an insider and certain shared understandings were assumed. During the interviews participants often used what can be regarded as urban slang, such as when Astrid referred to “macking” to denote flirting with someone. While I was not consciously aware of this during the interviews, I later noticed when transcribing the material that I would often wonder how I could translate participants’ descriptions to clarify the meaning of the terms they used. During the interviews participants did not engage in a similar process of “translating” their talk for my benefit. They did not adjust their speech in order for me to understand what they were conveying – they assumed that I was familiar with the contextually specific meanings often associated with slang and that I would “get” what they were describing. In these instances in the interviews, where participants described their experiences using their own peculiar terms and phrases, I was assumed to be similar to participants and afforded insider status.

The shifts that occurred in my positioning as insider and outsider throughout the study illustrate the dynamic and contextually negotiated character of identity. Insider/outsider status is perhaps more productively conceptualised as a fluid and shifting process than as a static binary (Allen, 2010; Best, 2003; Merriam et al., 2001). Researchers often simultaneously inhabit both insider and outsider positions in relation to participants and are both constrained and advantaged by the boundaries of both positions (Merriam et al., 2001). During the interviews I found that being afforded insider status facilitated rapport and in those instances the interviews flowed with a comfortable ease. The sense of shared understanding allowed me to question participants on aspects based on my insider knowledge of their experiences and personal narratives. In instances where I was positioned as different from participants I was able to use my ignorance or outsider status to further explore participants’ constructions. I was able to ask naïve questions and elicit more detailed descriptions based on my own lack of understanding. In this manner my positioning in relation to participants contributed to the type of knowledge created during the interviews.

5.4.3 The interview guide

I used a semi-structured interview guide to direct the interviews. A semi-structured interview guide has the advantage of making the research agenda, or any prior assumptions that the researcher might have, explicit (Burman, 1994b). Instead of denying the impact of the researcher's questions on the knowledge created during the interview, the interview guide makes these questions clear and allows for interrogation of the contributions made by the researcher (Burman, 1994b). This co-creation of knowledge is "not a *problem*, but a *feature* of interviewing" which, if acknowledged, can result in greater understanding of the manner in which knowledge is constructed and negotiated in social interaction between people (Wilkinson, 1998, p. 120, emphasis in the original). Semi-structured interviews have the additional advantage of allowing an open and flexible approach, where I was able to adapt the questions in the guide according to each participant's own account and respond to and follow up on new areas raised by participants (Burman, 1994b). Using a semi-structured interview guide supports a feminist aim of promoting more equal research relationships - participants were able to influence the direction of the interviews and the kind of topics explored, and in that way could shape the research agenda.

The interview guide was loosely structured around three main themes. Firstly, I explored how participants constructed meaning around bisexuality. Secondly, I explored how they negotiated their identity as bisexual in relation to others, and lastly I was interested in how their gendered subjectivity as women intersected with their sexuality. I found that during most of the interviews these themes were addressed without too much direct questioning by me. I preferred to be guided by participants' contributions and to follow up on the topics they introduced, instead of rigidly pursuing the questions in the guide.

5.4.4 The research contexts

Participants were typically informed about the study by a friend or a participant I had already interviewed. If they were willing to participate, I made contact with them to further explain the nature of the study and to explain what their participation would entail. During this initial conversation I told participants that we could conduct the interview at any location where they would feel most comfortable. Some participants suggested their own home while others preferred a public space such as a restaurant or a coffee shop. When participants suggested a public space I checked with them whether they would feel comfortable talking about the topic in that context.

The majority of the interviews were conducted with only one participant present. I did however conduct three of the interviews with more than one participant present. The first joint interview was that of Astrid and Taryn, who were dating at the time of the interview. I interviewed them separately as well as jointly. The second joint interview occurred when Astrid introduced me to a participant, Liné, and we conducted the interview at Astrid's home. During this interview, Astrid was present for a small portion of the interview and participated in the research conversation. The third joint interview was with Cara and Jennifer, who were also dating at the time of the interview.

I initially did not intend to conduct joint interviews and at first aimed to interview all participants separately. My motivation for preferring individual interviews was to obtain full and detailed accounts from each participant – which I thought was more likely during separate interviews. Interestingly, Morris (2001) argues against a view of individual interviews promoting depth in data collection, stating that “a separate account does not provide deeper data but different data” (p. 556). Seymour, Dix and Eardley (1995) note that despite a researcher's intentions, social and practical considerations often result in a second person being present and contributing during an interview. This is even more likely when interviewing connected participants, such as friends or partners (Seymour et al., 1995). I found that I had to be flexible during interviews and also had a desire to respect the participants' decision to be interviewed with someone else present. In some instances the joint interview was entirely unanticipated and more a result of a natural outflow of the individual interview – for example, I interviewed Astrid individually and after concluding the interview, conducted a less formal joint interview with both her and her partner Taryn present. In other instances participants indicated from the start that they wanted to be interviewed jointly, as was the case with Cara and Jennifer's interview.

Feminist researchers such as Wilkinson (1998) argue that data collection methods that separate individuals from their social context do not adequately serve a feminist agenda as one-on-one interviews risk minimising participants' agency. The greater control that participants have in a joint or group interview, compared to an individual interview, can shift the balance of power by reducing the influence of the researcher and foregrounding the interaction between participants (Wilkinson, 1998). Situating data collection methods in a social context can also lessen the likelihood of the researcher imposing her own meanings on participants (Wilkinson, 1998). During the joint interviews my own role as interviewer was diminished and I found that I asked fewer questions than during the individual interviews. Participants often questioned each other, asking insightful questions based on their knowledge of the person outside of the research interview. Participants also challenged each

other in ways that I would not have felt comfortable doing. For example, in the following excerpt Astrid speaks about the rigidity of considering oneself as lesbian or straight, instead of assuming a more fluid approach to one's sexuality. Her partner, Taryn, interjects, stating that adopting a bisexual identity can come down to a similar fixing of identity:

Astrid: Just to be able to classify yourself as one thing, for fucking 80 years, how could you do that?

Taryn: Well, you classify yourself as a bisexual, so that's something as well?

Astrid: Hmmm, good point (laughs).

I found that conducting joint interviews in addition to individual interviews led to rich interactive data and contributed to greater equality during data collection. A disadvantage of interviewing more than one person at a time was that, similar to focus groups, there was some over-talk resulting in minor instances of indistinct text when transcribing the interviews.

5.4.5 Transcription of the interviews

I transcribed the majority of the interviews myself, adapting the transcription notation I used as I went along. Once I had refined the transcription notation, a research assistant transcribed the remaining interviews. In the instances where the research assistant transcribed interviews, permission for someone else to transcribe the recording was first obtained from the relevant participant.

The theoretical focus of the particular variant of discourse analysis used in a study influences the manner in which the interview material is transcribed, while the transcription notation used in turn enables and constrains the type of interpretations that can be made based on the data (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). Willig (2008) distinguishes between variants of discourse analysis that follow an approach informed by discursive psychology, and variants that follow a Foucauldian approach, such as the poststructuralist framework employed in the current study¹⁰. The distinction between these two versions of discourse analysis is seen in the emphasis in discursive psychology being on “*how* people *use* discursive resources in order to achieve interpersonal objectives in social interaction” while poststructuralist discourse analysis focuses on “*what kind of* objects and subjects are constructed through discourses and *what kinds of* ways-of-being these objects and subjects make

¹⁰ Many authors however blur the distinction between these two approaches and some argue for the value of integrating both approaches when conducting discourse analysis (Willig, 2008).

available to people” (Willig, 2008, p. 95-96, emphasis in the original). In discursive psychology the analysis is typically limited to the text that constitutes the data. Poststructuralist discourse analysis widens the scope of what can be attended to in an analysis as it also considers the influence of social and other structures outside of the text being analysed (Willig, 2008).

An implication of the differences between discursive psychology and poststructuralist analysis is that the former focuses more closely on detailed transcription of the mechanics of speech through inclusion of pauses, stutters, involuntary vocalisations and other “messy” aspects of speech (Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005). In comparison, poststructuralist discourse analysis typically adopts a denaturalised approach to transcription, where many of the idiosyncratic aspects of speech are removed (Oliver et al., 2005). The transcription notation that I used was aligned with a poststructuralist approach and, although I included contextual aspects such as hesitations and pauses, this was done in a denaturalised manner where the focus was on the accuracy of the “meanings and perceptions created and shared” during the interview, instead of capturing the full details of the mechanics of speech (Oliver et al., 2005, p. 1277). In assuming this approach to transcription, I also corrected grammar where I thought it would aid in the clarity of the transcribed material. Such corrections were however minimal and predominantly related to matters such as incorrect use of prepositions or errors in subject and verb agreement.

Despite excluding some details of speech during transcription, I remained mindful of retaining aspects of non-verbal communication in the transcripts. Dé Ishtar (2005) notes that:

While spoken language is a source of meaning, it is in those places beyond words that much knowledge is heard and expressed To reach this meaning, the feminist researcher draws on the language of the body. Spoken language cannot replace sensuous embodiment; it is but one element of human expression. (p. 363)

In assuming a position that discourse is not only linguistic but also embodied, I attended to non-verbal practices such as participants’ postures, gestures and facial expressions when transcribing the interviews, which I based on notes taken during the interviews as well as my own reflection immediately after conducting each interview. Including non-verbal communication during transcription allows for interview texts that can be analysed from a view that regards spoken discourse as intertwined with bodily experience and enriches the analysis (Dé Ishtar, 2005; Sampson, 1998a).

The transcription notation I used was based on the following conventions, which are also reflected in the manner in which I present excerpts from the interviews in the chapter detailing the findings:

I <u>really</u> hate it	Underline for speaker emphasis
....	Unrelated/off-topic text omitted
...	Sentence trails off
(over-talk)	Instances of overlapping talk
(interrupt)	Interrupted speech
(indistinct)	Indistinct speech
Rea-	Dash to indicate a sharp word cut-off
(laughs)	Non-verbal communication - such as gesturing or laughter

5.5 The discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is theoretically and methodologically diverse - researchers employing discourse analysis differ in terms of their theoretical focus as well as the analytical techniques they employ (Macleod, 2002). It is therefore necessary to clarify the theoretical orientations that informed my conceptualisation of discourse analysis, and also detail the analytical process I followed in conducting the analysis. The theoretical orientations that informed the study were discussed in Chapter 3. In the following section I consider the implications of these theoretical orientations for the analytical process.

5.5.1 A deconstructive discourse analysis

In the present study I make use of a deconstructive discourse analytic framework, drawing predominantly on the work of poststructuralists Derrida (1976) and Foucault (1969/1972, 1976/1990). Researchers who have employed such a framework in their analysis include Hepburn (2000), Macleod (2002) and Parker (1992, 2002). Although these researchers differ in the manner in which they employ deconstructive discourse analysis, their work provides useful guidance in how discourse analysis can be applied effectively in addressing particular research questions. Hepburn (1999b) notes, for example, that Parker's use of Derridean deconstruction is not as radical as the form of analysis for which she argues. Parker (1989, p. 4) himself states that he does not identify with the "fervent Foucauldians or derisive Derrideans" in their abolishment of the notion of ideology, which he argues has political utility. Despite these differences I found it valuable to base my own approach to data analysis on the guidelines proposed by these authors, and particularly the guidelines suggested by Parker (2002).

5.5.2 “Steps” in the process of analysis

In conducting the analysis I first read and re-read all the transcribed interviews, noting my initial impressions and personal responses to the material as I went along. I then analysed each interview separately, following Parker’s (2002) guidelines, before integrating the analysis across interviews. Parker’s (2002) suggestions for conducting a discourse analysis explicitly draw on Derridean and Foucauldian theory. He outlines seven criteria for identifying discourses, supplemented by three auxiliary criteria. It is important to note that the guidelines proposed by Parker (2002) were employed flexibly and did not always follow the sequence presented below. At times I moved between the stages proposed by Parker (2002), or left out stages that were not relevant to a particular section of text. The first seven criteria can be summarised in the following manner:

A discourse is a coherent system of meanings

Discourses map a certain picture of the world through sets of statements or metaphors (Parker, 1992, 2002). Parker (2002) notes that “the statements in a discourse can be grouped, and given a certain coherence, insofar as they refer to the same topic” (p. 146). What constitutes a topic will be informed by the culturally available understandings that circulate in any given context (Parker, 2002). Discourses have an underlying regularity in that statements cluster around systems of meanings (Parker, 2002). Such a description of discourse does not however imply that there are no contradictions in discourses, as will be discussed in subsequent sections (Parker, 2002).

A discourse is realised in texts

Everything in the world, as it is understood and given meaning by us, is textual (Parker, 2002). Discourses inhabit or are actualised in texts (Parker, 2002). After identifying which texts will form part of the analysis, a second step would then be to locate the texts in discourses (Parker, 2002). At this point a valuable part of the process of analysis is to engage in free association, where one explores “the connotations, allusions (and) implications which the texts evoke” (Parker, 2002, p. 148).

A discourse reflects on its own way of speaking

This criterion relates to the manner in which texts reflect on the world view proposed by the discourses operating in the texts. These reflections can be less obvious, such as through commentary on the terms used in the text and the use of phrases such as “don’t get me wrong”, or they can extend to detailed elaborations of the implications of the world view contained in the text (Parker,

2002). These reflections serve as confirmation for the discourse analyst that what is being described is indeed a discrete discourse (Parker, 2002). Parker (2002) notes that during this stage of analysis it is useful to ask “how are the contradictions in the discourse referred to, and how would another person (or text) employing this discourse refer to the contradictions within the discourse?” (p. 148-149).

A discourse refers to other discourses

In articulating a discourse, one necessarily draws on other discourses (Parker, 2002). Discourses “embed, entail and presuppose other discourses to the extent that the contradictions *within* a discourse open up questions about what other discourses are at work” (Parker, 2002, p. 150, emphasis in original). This links to the Derridean notion of the constant play between presence and absence in constituting meaning (Derrida, 1976). At this stage the focus is on the analysis of “implicit themes suggested by the absence of certain terms” (Macleod, 2002, p. 24).

A useful stage in identifying the manner in which discourses refer to other discourses is that of identifying contradictions in how different discourses describe objects. By contrasting discourses and the objects they constitute one can highlight the distinguishing features of discourses (Parker, 2002). At the same time, the interrelationship of discourses implies that one can also identify points of overlap between discourses, in that “discourses draw metaphors and institutional support from each other” (Parker, 2002, p. 150).

An implication of the interrelated nature of discourses is that theoretically, it is always possible for a speaker “to find a voice from another discourse, and even within a discourse they oppose” (Parker, 2002, p. 150). Parker (2002) emphasises that this is a theoretical possibility, and that in practice issues of power and ideology can limit this potential.

A discourse is about objects

In conducting a discourse analysis one inescapably engages in a process of objectification (Parker, 2002). It is possible to identify two such layers of objectification, with the first being the “reality” to which the discourse refers (Parker, 2002). This layer refers to the objects that are brought into being through the discourse. Foucault (1969/1972) describes discourses as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (p. 49). Following this argument that discourse is constructive, “the representation of the object occurs as previous uses of the discourse and other related discourses are alluded to, and the object *as defined in the discourses* is referred to” (Parker, 2002, p. 151, emphasis in original). During this stage of the analysis one would identify and describe the

objects that are referred to by the discourse, which may or may not exist outside of the discourse that constitutes it (Parker, 1992).

In addition to identifying and describing the objects that are constituted by the discourse, there is a second layer of objectification. This second layer of objectification is that of the discourse itself, where the talk, or set of statements, is in itself identified as an object (Parker, 1992). This stage of the analysis entails identifying the discourses in a text as objects that can be analysed (Parker, 1992).

A discourse contains subjects

One variety of object that discourse constructs is that of the subject, “who speaks, writes, hears or reads the texts where discourse lives” (Parker, 2002, p. 152). A discourse creates a space, or a subject position, in which the subject is assigned certain qualities and responsibilities through its positioning in discourse (Parker, 2002). Positioning, as used by Davies and Harré (2001) refers to “the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines” (p. 264).

Positioning can be interactive, where the discourse drawn on by a speaker positions another person in particular ways. Positioning can also be reflexive, where a person positions him or herself in particular ways (Davies & Harré, 2001). For example, a media discourse of bisexuality being equated with promiscuity makes a subject position available of “the promiscuous bisexual”. Such a discourse interactively positions bisexual women as necessarily promiscuous. Bisexual women can in turn reflexively adopt such positioning through engaging in the discursive practices that mark a subject position of “the promiscuous bisexual” and in that way can enact the discourse in their own lived narrative. Alternatively they can reflexively resist being positioned in such a way through positioning themselves as monogamous or faithful.

This process is then clearly not one of a discourse simply positioning subjects in particular ways; it also implies a measure of agency for the subject to adopt or resist certain positionings (Davies & Harré, 2001). During this stage of analysis one attends to the implications of discourse for subjectivity, i.e. how subjective experience is shaped by the manner in which a discourse positions a person and how subjects take up certain positions in discourse (Davies & Harré, 2001; Willig, 2008).

A discourse is historically located

Discourses are not static and change over time (Parker, 2002). Discourses are also situated in relation to other discourses and appeal to past constructions of objects as they were constituted at

various points in time (Parker, 2002). This stage of the analysis will entail locating discourses in history and describing “what those discourses meant as they emerged, and so what the present allusions actually ‘refer’ to” (Parker, 2002, p. 154).

Parker (2002) continues to suggest the following three auxiliary criteria to be considered when conducting discourse analysis, in order to attend to how discourses are positioned in relation to broader institutional structures, power relations and ideological effects:

Discourses support institutions

Discourses can be implicated in the structure of institutions, by either supporting or subverting them (Parker, 2002). Certain practices serve to validate or support a discourse and in doing so strengthen the material basis of an institution. Parker (2002) provides the example of medical institutions, where discursive practices such as giving an injection or operating on a patient are discursive practices that reproduce the institution. Other practices can deny a discourse and can subvert or attack an institution (Parker, 1992). During this stage of the analysis one would identify the institutions which are reinforced or subverted by the use of a discourse and describe the discursive practices that are employed to do so (Parker, 1992).

Discourses reproduce power relations

A discourse analysis should include an analysis of power relations (Parker, 2002). This would include identifying which categories of people would gain or lose from the promotion of a particular discourse, and considering who would want to advance or resist the discourse (Parker, 1992). However Macleod (2002) cautions against slipping into a view of the subject as transcendental, through references to “categories” of people that are assumed to have a fixed or rigid status in discourse. She suggests that one takes a stronger Foucauldian stance by acknowledging the contradictory status of the subject. Discourses entail multiple subject positions and it is necessary to question which construction of the subject is called upon when analysing power relations (Macleod, 2002). This stage of the analysis will focus on analysing how power operates in its multiplicity and will avoid a view of discourses as existing in opposition to each other (Foucault, 1976/1990).

Discourses have ideological effects

Foucault (1980) resists using the term ideology, preferring to speak of regimes of truth, as he considers ideology to imply that certain systems of truth are “more correct” than others. However Parker (1992) retains the use of the term ideology, arguing that its utility lies in its progressive political effects. He uses ideology to refer to a “description of *relationships and effects*” which can be

usefully employed “to describe relationships at a particular place and historical period” (Parker, 2002, p. 156, emphasis in original). He notes that one should avoid strict differentiation between discourses that are ideological and those that are subjugated (Parker, 2002). Discourses can be employed in varied ways and can function to subjugate certain world views in some instances, and can be empowering in others. This stage in the analysis would entail identifying how a discourse is related to other discourses that sanction oppression, as well as elaborating on how such discourses promote the narratives of dominant groups and prohibit subjugated discourses from participating in the interpretation of history (Parker, 1992).

The first seven criteria for analysis suggested by Parker (2002) are more directly related to the structural nature of discourses, while the last three criteria relate more to the deconstructive aspects of discourse analysis (Macleod, 2002). Parker (1989) elaborates on the utility of Derrida’s process of deconstruction in relation to three phases of analysis. Firstly, one can identify the opposition in a text and demonstrate how one of the terms in the opposition is dominant (e.g. heterosexual/homosexual). Secondly, one can subvert the opposition between the terms by destabilising the privileged position of the dominant term. This can be done through illustrating how the dominant term has been positioned as such through historically specific assumptions about the term (Parker, 1989). For example, heterosexuality has been constructed over time as the only natural expression of sexuality. Thirdly, one can sabotage the conceptual opposition between the terms. This can be done through extending the meaning of the term to include that which is considered the opposition of a subordinate term (Parker, 1989). For example, sexuality can be redefined to include varied expressions thereof. Alternatively, one could use a different term to prevent the reimposition of the opposition (Parker, 1989). In some contexts the term queer has been employed to this end, in order to avoid drawing on binary logic (Bower et al., 2002).

5.5.3 Reflections on the process of analysis

In analysing the data, I found it useful to first engage in Parker’s (2002) suggested process of free association where I read through the transcripts while noting my initial impressions and associations with the text. After engaging in this process, I re-read the transcripts while referring to the following distilled questions based on Parker’s (2002) guidelines for analysis, while also keeping my own particular research questions in mind:

- Which objects are referred to in this discourse and how are they constructed?
- Which subject positions are called on to make sense of this discourse? How are participants positioned in relation to this discourse?

- What are the points of overlap as well as the contradictions between this discourse and other discourses identified in the text?
- What is the historical positioning of this discourse? According to which interpretations of history has it been constructed and how has the function and structure of this discourse changed over time?
- Which institutions are supported or subverted by this discourse?
- How does power operate in this discourse? Which constructions of the subject gain and lose from the use of this discourse, and who would want to advance or resist this discourse?
- What are the ideological effects of this discourse?

I found that the process of analysis was largely circular. In reading and re-reading the transcripts my formulation of the discourses I identified solidified, but this formulation was also continuously challenged and altered. As I continued to identify and describe discourses, I often had to return to earlier descriptions of discourses and adjust my understanding in the light of more recent aspects of the analysis. In conducting the analysis I had a sense of the discourses I identified as acting upon each other, shaping and extending the other discourses identified in the text as well as my own understanding of the discourses, as I continued along the process of analysis.

I was continuously reminded that the process of analysis is never final and that any reading of a text can always be further deconstructed. I was always waiting for a moment where the analysis would come to a close, but that moment eluded me as I realised that my current view of the text is informed by a specific focus I bring to the analysis as well as my own positioning in discourse at that point in time – my reading of the text is never final and can always be challenged and extended. I was very aware of my own contribution to the process of analysis where discourses did not simply “emerge” from the texts but were actively shaped by my own particular approach to the data. While the discourses I identified in some ways assumed a level of reification and a reality of their own, I was also actively involved in decisions regarding the focus of analysis and also the point of termination. Macleod (2002) refers to this when discussing the boundaries of deconstruction:

The question thus arises as to where erasure ends, as the erased sign is brought to a new level of presence. The answer, it appears, is that deconstruction is never complete; it is interminable, unless terminated by the practical analyst. (p. 27)

I was also continuously aware of how power relationships influenced the process of analysis and the interpretations at which I arrived. Feminist research is particularly sensitive to the manner in which

power operates, not only during the process of conducting interviews but also during the analysis of the interview texts (Reinharz, 1992). I was mindful of the potential power differential between participants and myself where I was formulating interpretations of their experiences and their realities without their direct involvement in the process. Acker, Barry and Esseveld (1983) describe their own discomfort with issues of power during analysis when they state during the analysis they “found that [they] had to assume the role of the people with the power to define. The act of looking at interviews, summarising another’s life, and placing it within a context is an act of objectification” (Acker et al., 1983, p. 429).

In an attempt to address the power differential in the process of analysis and minimise instances of objectification of participants’ realities, I presented sections of the analysis to several of the participants in order for them to comment on and extend my interpretations. While it was not possible to canvas all of the participants’ responses within the timeframe in which I had to complete the dissertation, I found that the responses I did receive provided meaningful challenges to my particular approach to the data. I also include extensive verbatim quotes in the chapters detailing the findings in order to promote the visibility of participants’ voices and allow for readers to judge the credibility of my interpretations.

However, Gilbert (1994) warns that while measures aimed at reducing power differentials can add value to the analysis, the final “power of interpretation” remains with the researcher (p. 94). It is not possible to entirely erase power differentials between the researcher and the researched and the possibility of imposing meaning on participants’ experiences remains present. Further to this, it is important to recognise that participants also exercise power throughout the research process (Wilkinson, 1998). I found this particularly relevant at points where participants made decisions regarding the location and duration of interviews, what type of content they felt comfortable discussing, and whether they wished to refer me to other potential participants. It is inaccurate to simplistically portray researchers as powerful and participants as powerless – such a view runs the risk of only describing participants in relation to their identities as marginalised or subjugated, without considering participants’ agency (Butler, 1990; Parker, 2002).

5.6 Quality and rigour in discourse analysis

Validity and reliability as criteria to judge the quality of research have been problematised in qualitative research, as the goal of research is no longer to establish “true” accounts of experience as it reflects an external reality but instead to explore the subjective and multiple meanings attached

to experience (Sandelowski, 1993). This does not mean that qualitative research is not concerned with quality. Rather, in debates about quality and rigour in qualitative research, the traditional terms associated with quantitative inquiry have been reconceptualised in terms such as trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Kvale (1995) states that validity in qualitative research can be reformulated to move away from “correspondence with an objective reality to defensible knowledge claims” (p. 26).

Qualitative research is theoretically and methodologically diverse. Any criteria for evaluating the quality of qualitative research will therefore depend on the epistemological position that informs a particular study (Madill, Jordan, & Shirley, 2000). Considering that the present study is informed by a poststructuralist feminist epistemology, I found the following criteria useful in increasing the quality of the research process and the credibility of the analytical claims I formulated:

5.6.1 Grounding research in existing work

Parker (2005) suggests that one should ground one’s research in existing work. With an increase in discourse analytic studies it has become increasingly important to situate one’s study in relation to other discourse analytic research exploring the same topic (Willig, 2008). However Parker (2005) also notes that it is equally important to notice the absences in previous research – this was particularly relevant in the current study, where the literature review indicated that bisexuality has often been constructed as an object not only through explicit references to it, but also through its omission from dominant discourses.

5.6.2 Optimising internal coherence

A further consideration for increasing quality is the internal coherence of the arguments presented in this study. Internal coherence refers to “the extent to which the analysis ‘hangs together’ or is non-self-contradictory” (Madill et al., 2000, p. 13). Madill et al. (2000) point out that poststructuralist theory argues that texts are never entirely coherent and that meaning is unstable. However, the presentation of a research report benefits from following an argument that is accessible to readers and that increases understanding of the topic being researched (Madill et al., 2000; Parker, 2005). This does not imply that the account presented by the research is the only possible account – a research report can be subjected to further deconstruction by other analysts, similar to the deconstruction that the interview material in the research report underwent (Madill et al., 2000). Throughout this study, and particularly in the section detailing the findings, I aimed to

structure my discussion in a manner that is coherent and follows a clear and substantiated argument.

5.6.3 Sensitivity to participants' interpretations

As another technique to increase the quality of the study, Potter and Wetherell (1987) suggest that the analysis should take into account the participants' orientation. The focus of the research is on the distinctions participants make in their actual interactions and which have implications for the way they live every day; the analysis can therefore benefit from involving participants in commenting on the credibility of the findings. As I have mentioned, summaries of the findings were provided to interested participants during the process of analysis in order to continue the process of shared meaning making and to incorporate their comments on the summaries in the analysis. The use of this technique was not aimed at increasing the accuracy of my interpretations, in that I assumed a "true" underlying meaning to participants' accounts that I hoped to access through the process of analysis. Rather, in drawing on a poststructuralist approach to research, the aim of inviting participants' comments on the analysis was to challenge and extend my own reading of their accounts, as it was unavoidably informed and constrained by my own positioning in discourse. Involving them in this process allowed me to draw on interpretations outside of those allowed for by my own subjectivity.

5.6.4 Including aspects of investigator triangulation

Investigator triangulation, which can be described as illuminating the data from "different vantage points", involves checking one's own interpretations against that of other researchers (Tindall, 1994, p. 145). Including the perspective of someone else, preferably someone with different experiences and paradigmatic commitments, can enrich and extend the interpretations and in that way add to the thoroughness of a study (Tindall, 1994). In the absence of another researcher being intimately involved in the analysis in the present study, I engaged friends, colleagues and my study supervisor at various points in the research process to provide critical input and challenge my interpretations of the data (Tindall, 1994). Similar to my motivation for inviting participants' comments on the analysis, the aim of this was not to arrive at a closer approximation of participants' "true" meanings, but rather to extend my interpretation of the data as it is informed by my particular positioning in discourse.

5.6.5 Assuming a reflexive approach

A reflexive approach to research can contribute to increased quality throughout the research process (Willig, 2008). I assumed a reflexive orientation to the research in order to increase my awareness of my role in shaping the kind of knowledge produced. To facilitate and document this process, I kept a research journal where I reflected on how my political and social context, values, beliefs and experiences contributed to and impacted on the research (Rolfe, 2006; Willig, 2008). Wilkinson (1988) refers to this as personal reflexivity and argues that a feminist research paradigm will necessarily involve emphasising the centrality of personal experience. I comment in Chapter 1 in as well as in the current chapter on my own investment in the research topic and how my own identity, investments and ideological commitments have contributed to the research.

Parker (2005) states that one's theoretical position and the research process should be clearly detailed in order to increase the accessibility of the research report. This relates to what Wilkinson (1988) terms functional reflexivity. My identity and positioning in the research study also has implications for ontological, epistemological and methodological decisions I make throughout the research process. Functional reflexivity entails "continuous, critical examination of the practice/process of research to reveal its assumptions, values and biases" (Wilkinson, 1988, p. 495). Through clearly explicating the decisions I make and my motivations for these decisions, I allow the reader to evaluate the appropriateness and value of these decisions. My commitment to poststructuralist theory and feminism in particular is discussed at various points in this dissertation and greatly informed how I constructed the research process.

5.6.6 Creating opportunities for reader evaluation

Related to the above, accessibility of the report should ideally extend beyond transparency regarding research decisions to the presentation of the findings as well. Madill et al. (2000) note that providing excerpts of raw data can be seen as a form of grounding the analysis and increases the credibility of the analytical claims made by the researcher. This allows for readers of the report to evaluate the quality of the analysis and the conclusions reached (Madill et al., 2000). My intention with including direct excerpts from the interviews in the research report is then not only to increase the visibility of participants' voices in the research account, but also to allow for readers of the report to assess the adequacy of the analytical claims I make.

5.7 Ethical considerations in the study

The feminist orientation that informed my approach to this study had clear implications for ethical conduct. Ethical considerations were relevant throughout the research process and I commented on matters such as power relations during the interviews at various points throughout this chapter. In this section I elaborate on additional ethical concerns that have not been discussed in preceding sections of this chapter.

The study was granted ethical approval by the University of Pretoria Research Ethics Committee and was conducted according to the ethical guidelines stipulated for psychological research (HPCSA, 2006). In making contact with participants I first phoned each participant prior to the interviews to explain the nature of the study and what their participation would entail. During this conversation I emphasised that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw participation at any point. I also explained that their identities would be protected as their names would not appear in any of the documentation pertaining to the study or in the final presentation of the findings (I assigned pseudonyms to participants). I explained that anonymity will be further secured through omitting or altering identifying details such as names of family members and friends. This was particularly important as many of the participants had not disclosed their sexual identification to others.

At the start of each interview I again explained the aim of the study, confidentiality and anonymity. Participants also completed a written informed consent form and provided permission for me to record the interview; the informed consent form is attached as appendix D.

Participants appeared to enjoy the interviews and commented that they found it meaningful to explore their own views in such a focused manner. While many of the participants indicated that they often discussed issues around bisexuality with close friends, they felt that the interview was more structured and allowed them to explore their thoughts and feelings in detail. It was important that participants experienced the interviews as positive as I predominantly relied on snowball sampling to identify additional participants. If initial participants did not experience the interview as respectful and positive they would have been unlikely to refer friends or acquaintances to me as potential participants.

5.8 Summary

In this chapter I discussed the research process that I followed in the current study. I first provided an overview of the research questions, followed by a description of the sampling process and the final group of participants. Thereafter I provided an overview of the interviews I conducted with participants and the process of analysing the resulting research texts. I concluded with a discussion of quality and rigour in qualitative research, as well as the ethical considerations in the present study.

In the following chapter (Chapter 6), I provide a more detailed introduction to the research participants and present the first section of the findings from the discourse analysis, where I focus on how participants navigate dominant discourses of gender and heteronormativity. In the subsequent chapter (Chapter 7), I present the second section of the analysis, which is concerned with participants' accounts of delegitimising and silencing discourses, as well as the discursive resources drawn on by participants to reclaim bisexuality from such illegitimacy and silence. The final chapter (Chapter 8) concludes the study.

CHAPTER 6

NAVIGATING GENDERED DIFFERENCE AND (HETERO)SEXUALISED SUBJECTIVITY

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I introduce the discourse analysis of participants' accounts. I first provide a more detailed description of the thirteen women that participated in the study, as well as further discussion of the interview contexts. This is followed by a presentation of the findings related to how participants construct their identity as bisexual women, in a discursive context in which normative constructions of sexuality and gender are salient.

6.2 The participants

In this section I introduce the participants and contextualise the research interviews. My aim here is to provide a somewhat fuller picture of the interviews and the nuances in the data. During the process of analysis, many details of the interview contexts, participants' particular orientation to the interview, as well as my own responses in my role as co-constructor of the interview data may get lost (Hardin, 2003; Morrow, 2005). Hardin (2003) notes that a poststructuralist position regards the interview as "a social performance for both interviewee and interviewer, who are simultaneously the authors, characters and audiences of the stories being constructed" (p. 540). She goes on to say that "story presentations are always sculpted by the context in which they are told", emphasising the need for the inclusion of more detailed accounts of the context in which interviews are constructed (Hardin, 2003, p. 536). Including physical and contextual details of the interviews also facilitates an embodied account of the research process (Pauw, 2009). In this section I aim to introduce some of these details into the research report.

Astrid

The first participant, Astrid, is a 25 year old white English/Afrikaans speaking woman. She is a musician and lives with her girlfriend of the past three years, Taryn, who also participated in the study. I recruited Astrid from my own social network and she enthusiastically supported the study from its inception. We had not discussed the study in depth until the interview, which resulted in Astrid being keen to share her views when we finally met for the interview.

The interview took place in the evening after work at Astrid's home and lasted two and a half hours. Upon arrival she introduced me to her partner, Taryn, and the three of us chatted for a while. Astrid and I then proceeded to their living room where she poured us each a glass of wine before we started the interview. Astrid seemed very comfortable during the interview and the fact that we

knew each other outside of the interview context facilitated rapport. Being friends, I was mindful of not making the conversation too formal and I shared my own thoughts with her at points. This felt appropriate since, as friends, it would have increased the artificiality of the interview if I did not reciprocate at times, particularly where she explicitly asked for my own view. The first part of the interview, however, was mostly focussed on her, as she was talking freely and I did not want to interrupt her, apart from probes at certain points. It was only about an hour or so into the interview that her pace of talking slowed down a bit and I started participating more in the conversation.

Liné

Liné is 29 year old white Afrikaans speaking woman and a teacher and musician. At the time of the interview Liné had just ended her first serious relationship with a man, after predominantly dating women, and was single. She was living on her own. I identified Liné through snowball sampling in that the first participant, Astrid, told her about the study.

We conducted the interview at Astrid's home and the interview lasted two hours. Liné was relaxed throughout the interview, although she had experienced emotionally taxing events in the preceding days and appeared a bit drained at times. Astrid joined us at some points during the interview, but the majority of the interview was conducted with only the two of us present.

Unfortunately a ten-minute section of the interview was lost because the recorder stopped working at one point. I wrote down what I could remember from this section immediately after the interview. At the end of the interview Liné indicated that she enjoyed talking to me and that although she often spoke about this topic with friends, she felt it was different having it "documented" in this manner as she felt she had to present her thoughts more clearly. She came across as mature, confident and sure of how she felt about her sexuality.

Taryn

Taryn, Astrid's partner, is a 29 year old white English speaking woman and a musician. Taryn initially did not want to participate in the study, despite being generally supportive of it. She explained during the interview that she was reluctant because she felt that despite claiming a bisexual identity, she was not outspoken about it and generally preferred to avoid labelling her sexual orientation. She said she changed her mind as she felt the interview would be a positive experience and looked forward to exploring her own ideas in such a focused manner.

The interview took place in the morning at her home and lasted just over an hour. She made us coffee before we went and sat outside to conduct the interview. Taryn appeared comfortable and relaxed. She was very articulate and discussed her views with a calm ease. Since we did not know each other very well we adhered to the structure of an interview more than my interview with her partner. The focus of the interview remained on the research topic, with limited informal conversation before and after the interview.

Nadia

Nadia is a 25 year old white Afrikaans speaking woman with a career in news and media. At the time of the interview she had just ended a long-term relationship with a woman and was dating a man. She was living on her own. I made contact with Nadia through snowball sampling.

I arrived at Nadia's home in the early evening after she had returned from work. We sat down in her sunroom where the entire interview took place, with neighbours coming and going through the garden in front of the sunroom and at times briefly stopping to greet us. The interview lasted four and a half hours. The atmosphere was very relaxed as Nadia was warm and talkative right from the beginning. The interview went off topic several times, but this allowed for a more natural conversation. Nadia did, however, remain aware of the interview "status" of the conversation throughout, and would at times gesture to the recorder when speaking, indicating that she was framing what she was saying in relation to being an "interviewee". I asked minimal questions, as she spoke freely and addressed most of the themes in the interview schedule without my prompting or guiding.

Belinda

Belinda is a 25 year old English speaking white woman and was single at the time of the interview. Belinda is a management consultant and indicated through a mutual friend that she would like to participate in the study. I initially wanted to interview her friend, but despite being interested at first, she later declined participation. I met Belinda one evening at a social event where her friend was also present. Belinda was interested in the study and asked me questions about it, and later indicated that she would be willing to participate.

The interview took place at my home, suggested by Belinda, and lasted just over an hour. The atmosphere was relaxed but conformed more to a structured interview context than most of the other interviews – this was most likely because we did not know each other well outside of the

interview context, which meant that the purpose of our meeting remained very salient. Belinda spoke freely but I also had a lot of opportunity for direct questioning. The interview was focused and brief compared to the other interviews. We concluded the interview once I felt we had covered all of the themes I had in mind.

Cara and Jennifer

Cara and Jennifer were dating at the time of the interview and I conducted their interview together. Cara is a 23 year old white Afrikaans speaking woman and lives with her sister. She is a film maker. Jennifer is a 21 year old white English speaking woman. She is a postgraduate student and lives with her parents and siblings. I made contact with Cara through a mutual friend and when I spoke to her over the phone to arrange the interview she said that her partner was also willing to participate, as she also identifies as bisexual.

The interview took place at an LGBTI friendly coffee shop, suggested by Cara, and lasted just over three hours. Cara arrived about 40 minutes before Jennifer, which allowed me to interview her first, before conducting a joint interview with both her and Jennifer. The atmosphere was informal, also due to the setting, but it did take a while for both Cara and I to relax and for the conversation to flow more freely. The first half an hour or so of the interview was characterised by me asking questions and Cara responding with to-the-point answers. This meant that by the time Jennifer arrived I had asked Cara all the questions I had formulated in advance.

Upon Jennifer's arrival I discussed the study with her, as well as issues around confidentiality and informed consent. I then proceeded to ask her similar questions to those I had asked Cara. I did however emphasise that Cara could respond to anything at any time, and it soon became a joint interview with both participants joining in the conversation. It was valuable to have both participants present as they often questioned each other on aspects I did not think to enquire about. They also contrasted their experiences throughout the interview – Jennifer would, for example, talk about her challenges with her family and would compare it to Cara's experiences, which resulted in richer and more detailed descriptions. The interview was pleasant and very interactive towards the end – I had the impression that Jennifer in particular enjoyed discussing the topic and it became a very lively discussion.

Laetitia

Laetitia is a 25 year old Afrikaans speaking white woman and a postgraduate student. She was dating a woman at the time of the interview and living with a friend. I made contact with Laetitia through

snowball sampling where a previous participant introduced us. We conducted the interview at a restaurant at the university where she is a student and it lasted just under two hours. Laetitia had a reflective and spiritual approach to her interactions with others, and also to her sexuality, and I enjoyed exploring her views.

Sibongile

Sibongile is a 20 year old English/Zulu speaking black woman and a university student. She was single at the time of the interview and was living with her sister. Sibongile responded to a request from an organisation active in LGBTI communities inviting interested participants to contact me via email. The interview took place at the university where Sibongile is a student and we sat outside on the lawn in a quiet area. It lasted approximately two and a half hours. Sibongile presented as self-assured and comfortable with herself – she had clearly articulated views and seemed to have thought about her identity and sexuality at length. The interview flowed easily and I had the impression that she enjoyed talking about the topic.

Gemma

Gemma is a 24 year old English speaking white woman and a marketing manager. She was single at the time of the interview and living with her parents. I made contact with Gemma through snowball sampling where a previous participant told her about the study. We conducted the interview at a restaurant and it lasted approximately two hours. Gemma presented as enthusiastic and warm. She treated her experiences with a lot of humour and I found that I was often laughing during the interview. I appreciated her warm and easy-going approach and enjoyed the interview.

Phindile

Phindile is a 23 year old English/Swati speaking black woman and was finishing her law degree at the time of the interview. She was single and shared a house with two friends. The interview took place at Phindile's home in the evening and lasted an hour and a half. I enjoyed the interview immensely as she had clear opinions on the research topic. Phindile's views on gender and her thoughtful resistance to dominant expectations of traditional femininity challenged me and left me thinking about the interview for days afterwards. She apologised a number of times during the interview for not expressing herself clearly, but I experienced her as articulate and thought that she spoke about her views with a poetic quality.

Sonia

Sonia is a 22 year old Afrikaans speaking white woman and a postgraduate university student. At the time of the interview she was single and living with a friend. The interview took place over lunch at a

restaurant and lasted three and a half hours. Sonia and I have known each other superficially for a number of years and upon hearing about my study she indicated that she was interested in participating. I enjoyed the interview as Sonia spoke with passion and shared her experiences very openly. I felt that I identified strongly with Sonia's experiences and we shared a similar view on matters around sexuality and gender; I often felt as if I had to "hold back" during the interview to avoid engaging in a more conversational manner where I reciprocated with my own views. I wanted to maintain the focus on her in order to explore how her views were not only similar to mine, but also how they differed. The interview lasted longer than anticipated but I had the impression that Sonia appreciated the opportunity to speak openly about her sexuality as she indicated that she did not have many opportunities to do so.

Nasiphi

Nasiphi is a 21 year old English/Pedi speaking black woman and was single at the time of the interview. She was identified as a participant through snowball sampling where a previous participant introduced us. The interview took place at a pub in the early afternoon and lasted just under two hours. Nasiphi was initially hesitant to participate, as she was concerned about the interview questions being "too personal". I explained the focus of the study and the type of questions I would like to ask, and also emphasised that she could choose to not respond to questions if she found them intrusive or uncomfortable. After providing more information she said that she felt comfortable participating. During the interview I was mindful to remind her again that she did not have to answer questions that made her uncomfortable. I felt nervous during this interview, perhaps because I was aware of her initial reservations to participate. The interview was somewhat stilted at the beginning, but after a while I started to relax and Nasiphi also appeared more comfortable.

6.3 The discourse analysis

My broad focus in analysing the interview texts was on how bisexuality is constructed as a discursive object in the talk of participants. I was particularly interested in how the various constructions of bisexuality that were drawn on in the text function, which I explored through considering the different ways in which they position participants and impact on their subjectivity. In addition to this broad focus I also focused on how gendered subjectivity intersects with participants' identity as bisexual. During the analysis I paid particular attention to variations in the discursive positions occupied by participants. Poststructuralist theory regards the subject as constituted through discursive practices and as occupying varied and at times contradictory positions (Henriques et al.,

1984). This is evident in the analysis where participants often assume complex and contradictory positions in negotiating their identities as bisexual.

I decided against the academic convention of separating the presentation of the analysis from a discussion of the findings. Instead I present an integrated account of the discourses identified during the analysis and my discussion of these discourses in this and the subsequent chapter. My motivation for this is that in discourse analytic work it can be difficult to present the findings without commenting on the implications of discourses or contrasting the discourses with other discourses circulating outside the text (such as discourses in academic literature or in popular media). Willig (2008) argues for the value of merging analysis and discussion sections in discourse analytic research, stating that “a meaningful presentation of the analysis of data can only really take place within the context of a discussion of the insights generated by the analysis” (p. 103). Morison (2011), Mama (1995) and Potgieter (1997) use a similar approach where they integrate the analysis and discussion of their research.

I discuss the findings through presenting the discourses identified in the interview texts in a framework of eight groupings or clusters of discourses. This structure was to some extent influenced by the literature I reviewed. Bower et al. (2002) discuss their findings according to a framework that includes three components - the cultural unintelligibility of bisexuality, delegitimising discourses and normalising discourses. I found that during the analysis, aspects of this framework also applied to the findings in the current study, in that the discourses identified seemed to cohere along a similar structure. However, I also found that some of the features identified as forming part of the components of the framework by Bower et al. (2002) were not reflected in my findings. Further to this, I identified additional components that were not present in the framework proposed by Bower et al. (2002). This is due in part to these authors posing different questions to their data – they did not, for example, include a specific focus on gendered subjectivity. The framework used here is then only partly informed by that of Bower et al. (2002).

I acknowledge that there are many other ways of organising the data as my reading of the interview texts was informed by my own subjective positioning in discourse and the particular research questions I posed. During the analysis I was also mindful to avoid “forcing” the data to fit into a specific framework. I adapted the framework, as well as the individual discourses, continuously throughout the analysis as different (and sometimes contradictory) insights arose. The eight main

groupings, as well as the various discourses subsumed under each grouping, are outlined in the table below.

Table 2: Analytical framework

Chapter 6: Navigating gendered difference and (hetero)sexualised subjectivity	
Discursive groupings	Discourses subsumed under each grouping
Sexuality as identity	“And then the last thing is that you’re bi”: The intersectionality of identity
	Post-apartheid South Africa and a resistance to identity politics
Discourses of gendered difference	“Gender is a random criterion for me”: Rejecting gendered difference
	Romantic androgyny: Attraction to a person, not a gender
	“I have to give him a chance to be a man”: Relationships with men as gendered
	“It’s easier to free-style with a woman”: Relationships with women as sites of resistance
Bisexuality and a butch/femme dichotomy	Heterosexism and the traditional female beauty ideal
	The constitutive outside: Evoking the butch dyke
	“People will judge you”: Policing the boundaries around butch and femme
Heteronormativity and bisexuality	“You have this image ready-made”: Marriage and family discourse as familiar
	“You’re always up against a husband and children”: Bisexuality as competing with marriage and family discourse
	“It isn’t any kind of option for having a good life”: Bisexuality as incompatible with marriage and family discourse
	“Family is important to me”: Rearticulating marriage and family discourse

Chapter 7: Dismissal, delegitimation and re-appropriation of bisexuality	
Discursive groupings	Discourses subsumed under each grouping
The unintelligibility of bisexuality	An inability to construe sexual desire as “going both ways”
	“Was that a phase?” Bisexuality as indecision
	The incitement to choose
Delegitimising discourses	The hot-bi-babe: Bisexuality as an eroticised heterosexual male fantasy
	“You’ve gotta have both”: Bisexuality as equated with promiscuity
Silencing discourses	Same-sex sexuality as un-African
	Same-sex sexuality as sin
Normalising discourses	“A little bit of bisexuality exists in all of us”: Claiming a universal bisexual potential
	“I don’t think it’s a choice”: Bisexuality as biologically predetermined

6.4 Sexuality as identity

In this first section I focus on how participants engage with a discourse of sexuality as identity. While many of the participants construct their sexuality as not being central to their identity, the discursive context in which they manage their identity is one in which sexuality, and particularly non-heterosexual sexualities, is privileged as denoting something about who they are as a person. Such an essentialist construction views sexuality in terms of different sexual “types”, where a person’s sexual identification is considered as revealing a set of characteristics that defines them (Hicks, 2007). Hicks (2008) emphasises that such fixing of sexuality as defining one’s identity occurs mostly in relation to gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals. Heterosexuality, in contexts where it is the norm, escapes such fixing of identity as it is taken for granted and not noticed as something that is worthy of comment. Instead, homosexual and bisexual individuals are more often reduced to their sexuality through statements such as “she is bisexual so she must be...” (Hicks, 2007). Such references

become categorical statements about sexual types that cement into place specific characteristics associated with the individual in question.

In the discussion that follows I describe two main ways in which participants engaged with a discourse of sexuality as identity. Firstly, participants assumed resistant positions where they challenged such discursive fixing of their identities. Secondly, participants drew on notions of post-apartheid resistance to identity categories in support of their resistance.

6.4.1 “And then the last thing is that you’re bi”: The intersectionality of identity

Participants drew on a discourse of the intersectionality of identity, in resisting a discursive fixing of their identity according to their sexual orientation. Participants referred to a discourse of sexuality as identity as restrictive. Sonia described this as others discursively reducing her identity to her sexuality through references to “that girl who is bisexual”. In that way, her identity as bisexual becomes primary and all other references to her are filtered through a focus on her sexual orientation. Such a discourse of sexuality as identity is constructed by participants as a barrier to disclosing their sexual identification as bisexual. In coming out to others, they fear that they will be seen as different and that their identity, as constructed by others, will change. Belinda refers to her fear that some of her friends will not see her in the same way if she had to come out to them as bisexual:

My concern is that if I came out a lot more openly to some of my friends, that it would somehow change the friendship. That is a concern. That somehow they’ll see me as different than who I am. But I’m still me. It’s just who I am attracted to at that stage, you know.

Participants generally resisted a discourse of sexuality as identity as they did not consider their sexuality as being central to their construction of who they are. Participants spoke about other signifiers of identity as more comfortably describing their identity. In such a construction the self is construed as comprising of numerous strands of identity. Multiple categories of identity contribute to identity and sexuality is but one aspect - one that is generally downplayed by participants. This intersectionality of identity contributes to what Phindile describes as a sense of being “a whole human” and not a “sexual being with an element of humanness”. She elaborates on this in the following way:

People get offended that I don’t define myself by my race, or my culture, whatever, my sexuality. I don’t use those as barometers to measure myself, of my self-worth, or anything

like that.... Like, I am female, I'm black, I'm South African, all those things are equally important.

Participants also drew on a construction of bisexuality as a preference to minimise the contribution that sexuality makes to identity. They did not consider sexuality to be void of meaning, but constructed their attraction to men and women as one of many nuances of their identity, just like any other inclinations they might have. Within this construction, bisexuality is given less weight. It is regarded as significant but not as something that should change how others view them. Laetitia and Phindile refer to this when they state the following:

Laetitia: Some people like coffee and other people drink green tea all day and other people just like water. Understand, for me it's just like another choice - it's a preference.

Phindile: I don't like broccoli, but I'm not going to hold a press conference about it.

In the above comments participants use what can be described as trivial examples, in order to show up how arbitrary they consider a focus on sexuality as identity to be.

The salience of a discourse of sexuality as identity places participants in a position where they have to manage their identity in a way that does not reinforce other's positioning of their bisexuality as primary to their identity. This is described as having to put in work to avoid others seeing them as bisexual only. Sonia speaks about this as a constant process of weighing up what she can and cannot share in every context in which she finds herself. She states: "It's incredibly tricky, and that's why I'm saying that it's almost like this kind of skill just to function as someone who is not straight". This identity work is enacted in different ways. Participants referred to delaying identifying themselves as bisexual in order for people to construct meaning around who they are without drawing on their sexual orientation as a reference point for all the other strands of their identity:

Sibongile: It's not like when I first meet a person I say 'hey', you know. They get used to me the person first, and they get to like that person so when eventually it does come out it's almost like 'okay, I really like you so that doesn't matter. You haven't changed as a person, you're still very loud and talkative and bubbly', you know.

Gemma refers to another strategy to downplay her sexuality, through presenting herself as vibrant and engaging enough to "overshadow" the knowledge of her bisexuality in others' construction of

her identity. She describes how she has to overcompensate to ensure that others remember her for her “personality” and not as “the bisexual”:

But my whole thing is that your personality should carry you through life, not who you choose to date. It shouldn't be an issue. If you have a personality, if you have a presence if you walk into a room, people know you as this person who works in this industry, or as a nice best friend or whatever. And then the last thing is that you're bi.

Managing their identity in this manner – deemphasising their sexuality – is seen by participants as contributing to a discursive context in which sexuality becomes less salient in constructing identity. It functions as an act of resistance in a context marked by a heteronormative incitement to categorise gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals as “types of people”. In this way, it contributes to transforming the discursive context to one where sexuality is given less importance. Taryn refers to this when, speaking about different categories of sexual orientation, she states: “I just think that all these questions and categories, that hopefully at some point we will let go of all of them”.

From the discussion so far it appears that participants resist identifying as bisexual in contexts where their sexuality will be assigned primacy in constructing their identity. However, identifying as bisexual was considered as less likely to fix their identity in relation to their sexuality than identifying as lesbian would. Many of the participants initially identified themselves as lesbian, based on their feelings of attraction to or intimate encounters with women. Participants described how over time they grew uncomfortable with a lesbian identity and presented as bisexual instead. This was partly related to a desire for specificity in sexual identification. Identifying as lesbian excludes a part of their lived reality – the fact that they are open to dating men as well as women. However, it was also related to a resistance to the clearly defined and regulated identity they associate with the signifier lesbian.

Sibongile refers to identifying as lesbian as “another form of imprisonment”, with a set of discursive acts that should be performed to support one's homosexuality. Compared to bisexuality, homosexuality has a longer history of essentialist treatment as a “type” of person with certain identifiable characteristics (Plummer, 1998). Identifying as lesbian is then not considered as freeing up one's available subject positions in dominant discourse. Instead, participants regard it as trading the fixed position of heterosexuality for yet another fixed position within a discourse of homosexual

identity. Sibongile described this by stating that “you are now subscribing to another world”. She goes on to say the following:

And you find everyone acting the same (in gay and lesbian spaces)... When you’re in a space like that I think you are unconsciously trying to align who you are and how you do things, how you speak and how you walk, to everyone else, so that you fit in. So we’re still trying to fit in, in a sense.

Perhaps because of the general marginalisation of bisexuality, there is not yet a clearly defined construction of what the term bisexual means. It is therefore somewhat easier to assume a more flexible identity. While homosexuality is constructed as rule-bound, bisexuality, in contrast, is constructed as open and less strictly defined. Here bisexuality functions as resisting the fixing of identity associated with “lesbian” or “straight”.

This downplaying of their sexuality in construing identity can be better understood when considering the context in which participants are managing their identity. The next discourse relates to how race is treated in relation to identity in South Africa and the implications of this for participants’ constructions of their sexuality.

6.4.2 Post-apartheid South Africa and a resistance to identity politics

A history of oppressive treatment along socially constructed lines of difference in South Africa has contributed to participants’ rejection of such categories. In South Africa, race and political discourses around its construction remain influential in policing strict boundaries around identity. Participants were critical of such fixing of identity in terms of race and extended this critical view to their own treatment of their sexuality. Phindile refers to how race functions as a marker of identity in prescribing certain behaviours as “black” behaviour and “white” behaviour. She describes how, as a black South African, she is expected to value her racial identity and act in ways that support it. In the following statement she refers to a conversation she had with her mother when she was a young child:

My mom said to me, she was getting very frustrated with me and my brother, and she said ‘why are you acting so white?’ I can’t remember what we were doing, we were doing something wrong, something not socially accepted in black circles.

Phindile's statement highlights the performative character of identity, where certain discursive acts contribute to the construction of blackness, described by her as "having black thoughts, doing black things, speaking in a black way". Being black is construed as significant and one has to perform one's blackness continuously. For Phindile, moving in "white" spaces reinforced the notion that race was important. At a predominantly white school she had to downplay her blackness to fit into the "white world", where blackness was considered a threat to the white norm. Transitioning between these different discursive contexts, heavily marked by constructions of race as being a significant category of identity, sensitised her to the effects of strictly defined categories:

Phindile: So I think at some point you just stop fighting, you just stop seeing the importance of it, because it's really draining to keep... I don't know, it was a constant struggle I guess. And at the end of it I was like it's really not worth it. Race is not that important. It's important in so far as how long it takes until I get sunburnt, kind of thing (laughs).

In a similar way, other participants recounted the impact of transitioning between different cultural contexts. In conservative spaces in Afrikaner culture, such as during their schooling, white participants found themselves in discursive contexts marked by the racialised ideology of apartheid. In participants' accounts, this oppressive ideology was associated with constructing rigid lines of difference and assigning people to categories based on those lines of difference. Astrid describes this as a sense of being "indoctrinated" into a certain "school of thought". In such contexts, notions of identity that fell outside of the nationalist heteronormative apartheid agenda were depicted as other. It is in relation to this political discourse that participants consider strictly defined categories of identity to be oppressive.

Contrasted to this were contexts where participants could question the effects of strictly circumscribed categories of identity. Taryn refers to growing up in South Africa, where at that time one of the most vociferously policed constructions in apartheid South Africa was the prohibition of what was then termed miscegenation (Posel, 2004). Constructions of race and gender as naturalised were used as strategies during apartheid to preserve the (white) heterosexual nuclear family (Kaufman, 2000). Constructing racial differences as biological boundaries that should not be tampered with ensured the preservation of a "pure" white race. Taryn contrasts this with her experience of attending high school at an international school overseas where her first boyfriend was black:

There the race thing was not an issue. My first boyfriend was a black guy, and it was just way more liberal in that sense.

Forming part of a discursive community where race was not treated in the same manner as in apartheid discourses, created a space in which to question the essentialised treatment of categories of identity for participants. If socially constructed boundaries around race can be stepped outside of, then other socially constructed differences such as gender and the heterosexual norm can also be questioned. Taryn comments on how sexuality, similar to other strictly defined categories of identity, function in support of oppressive ideology:

I think until we learn to let go of our discrimination and the things we hold on to in terms of identity, we'll never move forward as a race. We'll continue to fight and find reasons to fight. And sexuality is just another aspect of that.

Participants' disavowal of strictly defined categories of identity and their reluctance to privilege their sexual orientation as primary to their identity, is then to a large extent informed by their political positioning. In post-apartheid South Africa, participants consider rigid boundaries along socially constructed differences, such as race and sexuality, as oppressive.

In this section I discussed discourses that relate to how participants engage with a discourse of sexuality as identity. Participants generally resisted a construction where their sexual orientation is given primacy in defining their identity, through drawing on a counter-discourse of the intersectionality of identity. Such resistance to fixing their identity along strictly defined categories of identity was to a large extent informed by their political resistance to reified categories of identity. In the following section I shift the focus of the analysis to intersections between gender and sexuality.

6.5 Discourses of gendered difference

In this section I present various discourses that relate to how participants make sense of gender in relation to their sexuality. Despite a number of authors commenting on the potential of bisexuality to disrupt the traditional gender binary through a refusal to orientate to one gender only (such as Däumer, 1992; Garber, 2000; Sedgwick, 1990) there is a lack of literature exploring how gender is constructed in the accounts of bisexual women. A monosexual configuration of sexuality posits that sexual desire is directed at *either* men *or* women. Bisexuality confounds this binary through resisting a choice between these oppositional categories (Däumer, 1992). At the same time, a poststructuralist approach warns that it is not possible to entirely escape binary logic since any term that attempts to disrupt a dominant binary would necessarily draw on the binary in defining itself as resistant (Derrida, 1976). Bisexuality then relies on the monosexual and gender binaries for its

meaning, even in attempting to transgress these binaries (Namaste, 1994). It is then possible that bisexual discourse can at times unsettle the traditional gender binary, but might also in some instances act in support of the binary.

Guiding questions for this section of the analysis included exploring how bisexual women construct gender and how they treat maleness and femaleness when talking about relationships with either men or women. The analysis indicates that participants assume varying, and at times contradicting positions in relation to gender. Throughout the presentation of the findings, I consider how binary constructions of gender are negotiated and potentially disrupted in participants' accounts.

6.5.1 "Gender is a random criterion for me": Rejecting gendered difference

The first position identified in the text, in participants' engagement with gendered discourses, is one in which gender is constructed as an arbitrary signifier of identity, much like any other physical differentiation between people. Dominant discourse assigns particular qualities to individuals based on their gender. Such a discourse of gendered difference is based on normative regulatory practices that support the dominant male/female binary and marginalise other gendered identities (McIlvenny, 2002). Through a discourse of gendered difference, men and women are positioned as categorically different and similarities between these two genders are downplayed (West & Zimmerman, 1992). Further to this, the oppositional but complementary configuration of the gender binary posits heterosexual attraction as normal and natural (Butler, 1990). This first position assumed by participants, is one in which they are critical of such a discourse of gendered difference. Grouping people according to gender is considered as erasing other differences between people and for participants, attraction to someone based on their assignment to one of these groups is constructed as nonsensical. In this sense, participants show up the vulnerability of gender as a social construct by stripping it of its discursive power. Phindile describes this as follows:

I don't think that often people are attracted to a group. For instance, it's very rare to find someone who says 'well, I'm attracted to people with long toes', or whatever. I understand why they would locate it in gender, cause it's such an easy thing, if you think of reproduction. But for someone like myself, reproduction plays absolutely no role in choosing who I want to be with. So gender then is a random criterion for me.

Participants reject gender as a basis for sexual attraction and do not regard it as informing their choice in partners. Phindile constructs gender differences as "random" and equates the notion of gender as informing sexual attraction to basing attraction on a quality such as people having "long

toes”; in this way she posits a discourse of gendered difference as absurd. Phindile’s reference to reproduction as informing gender as the basis for sexual attraction points to the above-mentioned construction of gender as oppositional and complimentary – in a discourse of gendered difference men and women are constructed as binary opposites and as supplementing each other in what the other lacks (Butler, 1990). Such a configuration clearly implicates heterosexuality as regulating gender differences, in what Butler (1990) describes as the heterosexual matrix. In drawing on such heterosexual complementarity of male and female bodies, gender differences are naturalised (Butler, 1990). Phindile however distances herself from this “logic” of gender differences by stating that for her, “reproduction plays absolutely no role in choosing who [she] want[s] to be with”. In this manner, her account of gender differences as absurd and arbitrary remains unchallenged by dominant discourse.

Taryn similarly positions herself as critical of a discourse of gendered difference as informing sexual attraction:

I feel like I’m a being who goes through life and meets and attaches with certain people for reasons that I might not even know or understand. And sexuality and gender being like the very last considerations in that. I feel like it’s part of our journey to experience certain people and experience relationships with certain people, because we need to learn. There are reasons behind it, which go much further than gender.

In rejecting a discourse of gendered difference, participants question why gender is considered a significant marker of identity and as informing the structure of social life. In their statements they regard gender as having been assigned disproportionate meaning in dominant discourses in society. Assigning individuals as male and female, and the subsequent positioning of individuals within gendered discourses, becomes a socially constructed process that participants consider to be arbitrary. Participants question the utility of the categories male and female with Phindile and Nasiphi noting:

Phindile: Maybe I’m being more and more radical in my approach, but I realise that I don’t see, other than roles and for control, why there needs to be a distinct separation (between male and female).

Nasiphi: I really just want to rather have a box of ‘people’ and not ‘male’ and ‘female’. If I even have to have a box at all...

Participants relate their dissatisfaction with categories of gender to the manner in which such categories are used in dominant discourse. They are critical of the patriarchal organisation of the gender binary, where a discourse of gendered difference privileges male over female. Phindile comments on this when discussing how gendered positioning of women often function to position women as inferior to men:

I mean, why must the man be the head of the house? I know a whole range of women who would do a better job leading, than men. So it just doesn't make any sense. But I guess I understand why it's like that – because it's easier, it's convenient, especially for men, etcetera. But ja, I just don't agree with it.

Phindile goes on to explain that she feels constrained by the incitement of dominant discourse to act and feel in certain ways because of her own gendered positioning:

It's one of the most frustrating things... I don't understand, in fact I do understand, I just don't agree, I don't agree with structuring our society strictly down gender lines. I think it's really silly, to be quite honest, but it's also very frustrating. It's like 'you're a girl, girls do this'. And I've had a problem with that my whole life... I mean what about my being a girl compels me to wash the dishes? Or why can't I run around outside?

In the above two excerpts Phindile makes references to how a discourse of gendered difference assigns men and women to discrete categories and prescribes different sets of normative practices in support of these categories. This constrains the range of actions available to participants. Cara expresses her irritation with structured gendered identities and practices in that she wants to be able to move between "male" and "female" practices without censure. She constructs this as a sense of frustration at being restricted in the range of behaviours she can engage in because certain practices are not regarded as "feminine":

I know many men have told me that I am intimidating, or exes have told me that it's difficult to approach me. But it's not about me looking like I am going to hit them or something, it's just that I am perhaps the one who fixes the light bulb. See, it's stupid to me because I can, it's not like women are pathetic. I have met women in my life who have literally built their own houses, why do we have to be subordinate? I am by now so completely over that whole thing of 'man' and 'woman'. I don't know, maybe I will morph into a single cell organism one of these days.

In ^{the} above excerpt Cara indicates an awareness of the manner in which gendered subjectivities are often employed in ways that disempower women when she states "it's not like women are

pathetic” and poses the question “why do we have to be subordinate?” This criticism of the gender binary is however almost apologetic. Phindile refers to her unease with patriarchal constructions of gender as a “radical” view, and later in the interview when speaking about not wanting to get married, defends herself from sounding like a “washed-out feminist”. Assuming a feminist position is regarded as something that others will see as unreasonable or extreme, and that one should preempt such criticism through statements that distance one from such a position. Cara, in her earlier statement about morphing “into a single cell organism” is also positioning her view as extreme and as one that is so radical that it is not generally accepted by others. She compares her desire to eliminate gender categories and the incitement to act in support of such categories to existing as the least differentiated form of life. In this way, her position is depicted as so extreme that it is unsustainable. In a sense this reinforces how firmly entrenched gender is in dominant discourse – in that participants consider their resistance to dominant discourse as so radical that it is almost untenable.

6.5.2 Romantic androgyny: Attraction to a person, not a gender

Instead of structuring their sexual desire along gendered lines, participants draw on a construction of attraction to a person, and not to a gender. This echoes the description offered by Kitzinger (1987), where she refers to bisexual women as describing their same-sex and opposite sex desire as being about the person they fall in love with, and not as a response to a particular gender. Kitzinger and Stainton Rogers (1985, p. 182) refer to such a “person and not a gender” construction as “romantic androgyny” where attraction is not linked to gender. Participants’ use of such a construction of romantic androgyny is in part a legitimising move, in that participants construe their attraction as less restricted than that of heterosexual or homosexual individuals. Astrid refers to such a view of bisexuals as less restricted in their focus on gender and bodies than monosexuals when she says the following:

It’s quite crazy for me, but I guess it’s not like I look down upon gay people, but for me, I also don’t get that. I don’t get how anyone can say ‘I will never love these people, over here. These people with penises or those people with vaginas’. It’s like, wow, is that all you see? There’s a mind in that body and there’s a soul in that body, you know.

In constructing bisexuality in this manner, it is positioned as privileged over monosexualities, as bisexuals view attraction as transcending gender categories, while monosexuals are construed as limited in their focus on the gender of the person they are attracted to. As discussed in the literature review (in Chapter 4), evoking a bisexuality/monosexuality binary functions to normalise bisexuality

as unrestricted in object choice, while monosexualities are pathologised through an association with a rigid preference for only one gender (Ault, 1996). Within this construction, bisexuality is then constructed as being about more than sexuality - it is considered as part of a resistance to strictly defined categories of identity such as gender. In a reconfiguration of the heterosexual/homosexual binary, bisexuality is privileged over monosexuality (Ault, 1996). Monosexuals are reduced to a sexual or physical interest in either “penises or vaginas” while bisexuals are constructed as having a deeper interest that cannot be reduced to material bodies.

A consequence of such a legitimising move is that it reverts to employing yet another sexual dualism, where monosexualities are marginalised and positioned as the other (Ault, 1996; Bower et al., 2002). By collapsing homosexuality and heterosexuality under the category monosexualities, participants deny the specificity of gay, lesbian and straight sexualities, a discursive move that assigns these categories “to a common margin, establishing the bisexual as legitimate, normal, and central against a newly constructed and now stigmatised collective other, the monosexual” (Ault, 1996, p. 459). In this manner monosexuality becomes the abject other to bisexuality (Butler, 1990).

It can be noted at this point that participants’ accounts thus far, where they assume positions that are critical of a discourse of gendered difference, indicate some slippage between “gender” and “biological sex”. There are several instances in which participants use the term “gender” when referring to classification as male or female based on physiological characteristics, such as when Astrid refers to gendered attraction as based on “penises and vaginas” or when Phindile equates classification based on gender to grouping people according to the length of their toes. In drawing on references to physiological differentiation, participants conflate gender with biological sex and it can be argued that their rejection of gendered difference is really a rejection of biological sex.

Of course, rejecting the notion of biological sex as informing identity and directing sexual attraction certainly challenges dominant discourses that link sex, gender and sexuality (Butler, 1990). If biological sex no longer directs attraction then the automatic coupling of these constructs in the heterosexual matrix is unsettled. However, rejecting biological sex does not necessarily disrupt the salience of gender in positioning subjects along a male/female binary. In dismissing identification as male or female as informing their attraction to a person (through aligning themselves with a position of romantic androgyny) participants are not escaping the fact that they and their partners *are* gendered. They deny the importance of partners’ having either “penises or vaginas” and in that way reject the notion of reducing one’s attraction to only one gender, but such an account is still

oriented to *two* genders – a naturalised male (men with penises) and naturalised female (women with vaginas)¹¹.

I return to this point in the final chapter, when I consider the extent to which bisexuality functions as a challenge to the gender binary.

6.5.3 “I have to give him a chance to be a man”: Relationships with men as gendered

A further position assumed by participants, in engaging with gendered discourses, is one in which relationships are constructed as gendered. In the previous section participants clearly distance themselves from gender (or sex) differences as wielding any influence in their positioning within dominant discourse. Participants reject the influence of assignment as male or female in structuring sexual desire or romantic connections with others. However, participants also draw on a different construction – one where gender is constructed as impacting greatly on the manner in which participants interact with either male or female partners, and how they perform their own gendered identity in relation to their relationship being either same-sex or opposite sex:

Sonia: I'm very aware of the gender; I just don't always care what it is. I mean because of it your relationship with either guys or girls is different, sexual development is different, emotional development is different, commitment is different, it's different. So it's not the same for me in dating the one or the other.

Participants describe their relationships with men as structured along gendered lines to a greater extent than their relationships with women. They draw on a construction of traditional masculinity when discussing their gendered positioning in relationships with men. Here masculinity is constructed as men being in control, as having more power in the relationship, and as being positioned as the provider and protector in the relationship. This resonates with constructions of normative or hegemonic masculinities cited in literature (e.g. Mosse, 1996; Ratele, 2006). Participants relate such a construction of hegemonic masculinity to them feeling compelled to act in ways that support the performance of this version of masculinity when in a relationship with a man:

Sonia: With guys I often also have to be careful... it sounds weird but I have to be more feminine. I should sometimes give him a chance to be a man.

¹¹ Some theorists of bisexuality have responded to critiques of bisexuality as transphobic (in orienting to an attraction to men and women only, effectively erasing non-binary sexes and genders) by describing bisexuality as an attraction to *more than one* sex or gender, instead of an attraction to *both* genders (such as Ochs, 2007).

Taryn: My previous boyfriend was very chauvinistic. And I was so aware that I was playing into it and changing my own personality to accommodate his insecurities as a man.

Phindile: With guys, I guess it's not just us in the relationship.... Perhaps it's the roles that I have myself associated with girl-guy relationships, that I play into, or I try to resist... I definitely feel that pressure more with guys, I'm just not sure why.

Participants refer to the gendered positioning associated with a relationship with a man as limiting because it invites them (as women) to assume a traditional female subjectivity. Such a traditional construction of female subjectivity entails assuming a deferring role in relation to men and exhibiting passivity and helplessness (Crawford & Unger, 2000). It requires the relinquishing of women's agency in order to bolster a construction of male authority and competency. In this manner, the traditional male/female binary compels participants to perform their femininity in ways that support their partner's masculinity and they see this as a betrayal of who they are and how they would prefer to act. This points to how the terms in the traditional gender binary seemingly function as complete and independent, but are instead reliant on each other for meaning (Derrida, 1976).

6.5.4 "It's easier to free-style with a woman": Relationships with women as sites of resistance

In contrast to how relationships with men are constructed, participants construct relationships with women as entailing greater flexibility regarding gendered positions in the relationship. Same-sex relationships are constructed as allowing for a form of resistance to traditionally structured gendered relationships. Unlike the firmly entrenched normative relationship model of heterosexuality, same-sex relationships do not entail such a well-developed construction of gendered interaction or subjectivity. Because a same-sex relationship defies what is prescribed by dominant discourse, it allows for the creation of participants' own "rules" where they can "make it up" as they go along, instead of having to act out a strictly defined gendered subjectivity that is imposed on them:

Astrid: With women it's just easier because there aren't pre-defined roles. I usually tell people that it's more fun. It's more fun for me to figure out who's good at what.

Sibongile: As much as I'm attracted to both males and females, I see myself settling down with a female rather than a male. I just think settling with a guy comes with all these boxes almost, because

of how things should be. With a woman there's nothing to break down. Between the two of you, you just establish how you guys are gonna make things work and how you relate.

Sibongile goes on to describe a relationship with a woman as playful and free, contrasted to a relationship with a man as more rigidly structured:

I think most of the time you find that straight guys are generally in that mind-set. You know what I mean, like this is my role and, so I don't know. I don't think... I don't want to do that. I'm not a rigid person in that sense, I just like free-styling as I go on. And I think it's easier to free-style with a woman because there aren't any set ways of doing things, you know...

Similar to many lesbian women, participants construct their same-sex relationships as free from gender-specific roles and as more egalitarian (Riggle, Whitman, Olson, Rostosky, & Strong, 2008). In blurring the strict allocation of gendered roles in their same-sex relationships, participants trouble the heterosexual organisation of the gender binary. The assumed asymmetry between men and women evident in the heterosexual organisation of the gender binary, and the subsequent hierarchy that follows from this, becomes irrelevant in their same-sex relationship and participants can adopt a playful approach to their gendered interaction with their partner (Delphy, 1993).

In summary, participants' gendering of relationships denotes an awareness of the fact that they do exist in discursive communities where gender *is* salient. In dominant discourse masculinity and femininity are constructed in particular ways and assigned meaning in relationships. This is especially the case for the gendered interaction that is normalised in heterosexual relationships. When in a relationship with a man, participants are "unable" to resist the incitement of heterosexual discourse to act in ways that support traditional notions of masculinity and femininity. In this manner gender and sexuality are performed in relation to the regulative discourse of heterosexuality that prescribes what is considered as acceptable acts in support of the coherence of the category female. Even in identifying as bisexual, and resisting gender as a social marker or as the basis of sexual attraction, the powerful influence of heteronormativity cannot be entirely escaped when in a relationship with a man. Relationships with women then become sites of resistance where traditional female subjectivity can be rearticulated and the gendered interaction in a relationship can be questioned.

I now turn to a discussion of participants' treatment of their own gendered identity as it intersects with their identification as bisexual.

6.6 Bisexuality and a butch/femme dichotomy

In this section of the analysis I focus on how participants construct their gendered identity as women in relation to their identification as bisexual. To this end I explore how participants treat notions of femininity in their talk about sexuality and sexual identities. One of the main ways in which participants refer to femininity and sexuality during the interviews is through reflecting on a butch/femme dichotomy, with bisexual women generally described as “femme” and lesbian women described as “butch”. I first describe how participants draw on traditional beauty ideals in constructing a femme identity, followed by a discussion of their evocation of the “butch dyke” in support of their own identity as femme. Finally, I discuss the functions of evoking the butch dyke, as it occurs in participants’ talk.

6.6.1 Heterosexism and the traditional female beauty ideal

Many of the participants describe themselves as tomboys and mostly distance themselves from patriarchal heteronormative constructions of femininity. For example, Sonia describes herself as always having been “a real tomboy” and Phindile, in talking about her frustration with fixed gender roles, states “I’ve had a problem with that my whole life because... I guess I’m a tomboy”. In aligning themselves with a construction of a tomboy, participants position themselves as different from widely prescribed female gendered norms. However, in their gendered presentation participants appear to conform to a traditional beauty ideal and also express this in their own reflection on their gendered and sexualised identities - they consider themselves as visually presenting as “conventionally” feminine (Nadia). The traditional female beauty ideal, as a socially constructed normative standard to which women are expected to conform, has been described as interwoven with heterosexuality. Enacting an appropriate gendered identity entails conforming to what is regarded not only as a viable woman, but also a viable “*heterosexual* woman” (Rich, 1980, p. 642, emphasis in original). In this manner, “messages about femininity and heterosexuality become imprinted upon the female body in the form of the cultural ideal of female beauty” (Pitman, 1999, p. 134). In constructing their identities as femme, Jennifer and Nadia draw on such a beauty ideal when reflecting on their appearance:

Jennifer: A lot of people that I know, if I say that (I am) bisexual then they look at me strangely. Because I wear a dress, I have long hair, I wear makeup, and you know I have long nails, it doesn’t make sense.

Nadia: If you didn't know me at all, you didn't know my background and you weren't asking me these things, and you see me with a man, you would have thought 'this chick is straight', because I don't look like a dyke. I don't look like I've even been with a chick.

Through references that link their visual presentation with their appearance as "straight", participants reinforce the heterosexist assumption of traditional female beauty ideals. In the above excerpt, Nadia emphasises this when she says that based on her appearance, I would have thought, "this chick is straight". Jennifer also describes her sexual identification as surprising to others, based on her visual presentation as femme, when she states that she is met with disbelief when she discloses as bisexual. This notion of bisexual women visually "passing" as straight is supported by Clarke and Turner (2007), who note that bisexual visual identities generally do not appear to be rigidly bound to lesbian/gay appearance norms. This is in contrast with lesbian and gay individuals expressing that their way of dress and visual presentation centre on lesbian/gay appearance norms (Clarke & Turner, 2007). Taub (2003) in turn describes how some bisexual women adopt aspects of lesbian appearance norms through dressing and styling themselves in ways that are more consistent with a stereotypically lesbian image. It seems that participants in the current study however do not readily integrate aspects of lesbian appearance norms. Instead, in aligning themselves with a femme identity, participants construct a visual presentation that supports the enmeshment of heterosexuality with traditional female beauty ideals.

6.6.2 The constitutive outside: Evoking the butch dyke

Participants' own gendered identity as femme is contrasted in the interviews with references to lesbian women as butch. Participants referred to lesbian women who do not conform to traditional notions of femininity as "hardcore dykes" or "butch dykes". The butch dyke is constructed through different discursive practices that are considered transgressive of the traditional female beauty ideal. Participants describe these practices as dressing and walking "like a man", having short hair, having piercings and presenting an "unkempt" image, echoing stereotypical constructions of a butch identity in dominant discourses (Eves, 2004). Drawing on a construction of the butch dyke creates a butch/femme dichotomy where bisexuality is privileged as supporting a femme gender identity, while a lesbian identity is marginalised as supporting a non-traditional butch gender identity. In this manner, the butch dyke supports participants' identities as femme through functioning as the constitutive outside to the gender norm (Butler, 1993a).

Drawing on the discursive contribution of bodies to the performance of gender, participants' talk serves to naturalise gender. The manner in which men and women discursively perform their gender

becomes rooted in physical and bodily cues that are “supposed” to reflect one’s biological sex. The butch/femme dichotomy constructs women who defy this “fit” between gender and physical bodies by adopting a more masculine presentation, as transgressing an almost sacred natural order. Such a naturalised construction does not allow for an awareness of how feminine and masculine presentations are socially constructed – instead women who present a butch identity are seen as appropriating something that “naturally” belongs to men. Gemma refers to this when she describes butch lesbian women in the following way:

It’s like a façade, like using this man exterior to hide a deep hurt inside of you.... It’s like they hate being a woman so much.

Sibongile similarly describes lesbian women as rejecting their femininity:

I love the aspects of my femininity. I don’t want to be a man, I’m not a man. I’m just a woman who happens to be attracted to other women. Ja, I like the femininity, the softness, the curves, the breasts and all of those things. It’s part of the larger picture of who I am. I don’t feel like I’m a man at all. I don’t understand that, I mean how do you feel like you’re a man if you don’t even know how men feel? That’s weird. That’s a little weird...

Similar to Gemma, Sibongile equates a lesbian identity to a disavowal of femininity. In this view, lesbian women are all assigned as butch and more so, as “denying” their (natural) femininity. They “hate being women” (Gemma) and therefore reject the “softness, the curves, the breasts” (Sibongile) that are regarded as naturally constituting a female identity. Gemma’s reference to the butch dyke as “using this man exterior to hide a deep hurt” indicates an attempt to explain such rejection of femininity as a result of previous traumatic or painful experiences with men. This constructs the butch dyke as psychologically scarred or damaged. Assuming a butch identity is seen as a response to “a deep hurt” (Gemma) and in that way is positioned as abnormal and pathological. Gemma continues this othering strategy when she uses the phrase “those sort of people”, to position the butch dyke as deviant:

There are a few hardcore dykes out there, but I’m not friends with those sort of people. I’d never date one of them, I don’t think I’d want to be seen in public with one of them.

Gemma’s discussion of women who defy traditional notions of female attractiveness is accompanied by a strong emotional response. Similarly, Sibongile’s adamant assertion that while she is attracted

to women, she does not align herself with a lesbian butch identity – “I don’t feel like I’m a man at all” – functions to distance herself from a butch identity. Both Gemma and Sibongile explicitly distance themselves from a construction of lesbian women as butch or masculine and instead align themselves with a femme gender identity. Taub (1999) describes a similar strategy in her research about bisexual women’s engagement with appearance norms, when she notes how some bisexual women resist a traditional butch lesbian look in an attempt to “hold on to some of (their) femininity” (p. 30).

6.6.3 “People will judge you”: Policing the boundaries around butch and femme

This vehement policing of the boundary between butch and femme relates to participants’ desire to protect their own discursive positioning. A butch/femme dichotomy implies that participants are constructed as more easily accepted in heteronormative spaces, as long as they conform to an idealised construction of femininity. Bisexual women are therefore positioned as more “acceptable” than “hard-core lesbians” who dismiss patriarchal beauty ideals. Bisexuality is constructed as not disrupting femininity to the same extent as a lesbian identity does. The butch dyke is constructed in participants’ accounts as troubling the “natural” gender order and participants’ precarious position in discourse, where they themselves are sexual “others” who do not conform to heteronormativity, is threatened by the butch dyke’s disruption of the normalised female script. Participants regulate these troubling moments through denigrating statements of butch dykes as “weird”, “damaged” and “unfeminine”. In this way the gender trouble produced by the butch dyke is managed in participants’ accounts and the primacy of a traditional female gender identity remains intact (Butler, 1993a). Gemma illustrates this when referring to the image of two feminine-looking women as less likely to rouse disgust and more like to rouse curious interest, compared to the image of two “hardcore dykes”:

I think people are very judgemental on people’s exteriors. So if you had to be a hardcore dyke, and your girlfriend was a hardcore dyke, then people would judge you. But if you and I had to walk around together, they wouldn’t really notice unless they looked very closely, and then they’ll be like ‘oh, those two are together, wow’. It would just kind of be a ‘wow’....

In policing this boundary between butch and femme, participants preserve their relative acceptance in dominant discourse. If constructions of femme bisexuality and butch lesbian merge, then bisexuality’s relative protection from social censure, at least as far as gender non-conformity is concerned, will be threatened. Sonia articulates this fear of marginalisation through associations of bisexuality with the butch dyke construction in the following manner:

Like my mom is afraid that I will become this terribly butch dyke who is going to wear Buffalo shoes and shave my hair off and you know... like get hundreds of thousands of piercings and walk like I have testicles and things like that. And that's not what it is, you know, they have this warped idea of 'oh hell I will have to be ashamed of walking with you soon'.

This relates to how sexual difference is “punished” more harshly by society if one strays from what is acceptable regarding one’s gendered identity. More specifically, in many African and South African contexts, deviation from the heterosexual norm, through for example having same-sex relationships, is tolerated as long as one fulfils other aspects of one’s gendered identity, such as bearing children and being in a heterosexual marriage (Epprecht, 2006). Conforming to traditional female beauty ideals in being feminine enough to still be desired by men means that transgressing sexual norms through relationships with women is met with less intolerance. If participants can pass as straight in their gendered presentation they can avoid some of the discrimination that comes along with a non-heterosexual orientation. Pitman (1999) notes that an awareness of the consequences of not conforming to the “correct” gendered and sexualised identity might be particularly salient for women who are stigmatised due to their sexual orientation, in that such women might have more at stake in not conforming to beauty norms. Subsequently, they might also respond with more hostility when other women do not conform to normative gender scripts. Participants’ relative protection is of course compromised when they are in a publicly visible relationship with a woman, but presenting visually in a manner that supports heteronormative notions of female appearance remains a mechanism for participants to preserve their position in dominant discourse.

In this section I focused on how participants treat femininity in relation to constructing their own gendered identity as bisexual women. The discussion of the findings illustrated participants’ attempts to preserve their relative protection in dominant discourse through ascribing to a femme bisexual identity, as opposed to what they construct as a marginalised and othered butch lesbian identity. In the following section I consider participants’ engagement with heteronormative discourses.

6.7 Heteronormativity and bisexuality

Heteronormativity refers to the privileged position associated with heterosexuality, where certain idealised constructions of gender and sexuality are valued and act to inform social life in pervasive ways (Jackson, 2006). Normative notions of heterosexuality function in two ways through not only regulating “those kept within its boundaries” but also through “marginalising and sanctioning those

outside them” (Jackson, 2006, p. 105). Heteronormativity then has implications not only for heterosexually-identified individuals, but also structures subjectivity for individuals positioned as marginal in relation to a heterosexual norm. Gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals construct their identities and their relationships in relation to a heteronormative discursive context, even when resisting such a norm.

A central way in which heteronormativity is constructed and maintained as a powerful societal discourse, is through evoking the institution of heterosexual marriage as normal and socially valued. Intertwined with this is the notion of creating a traditional nuclear family, in the context of a heterosexual union. Heterosexual marriage, in its current cultural form, can be described as heteronormative in that it works to permeate a specific arrangement of sexual and gendered practice with a “tacit sense of rightness and normalcy” (Berlant & Warner, 1998, p. 554). This extends beyond a particular marital configuration to the normalisation of certain types of sexualities, genders and family configurations (Fumia, 1997).

In the following section I consider how heteronormativity functions in the accounts of participants, particularly as it relates to their evocation of a “(heterosexual) marriage and family” discourse. This heteronormative discourse appears to impact on participants’ subjectivity in varied ways and functions as a meta discourse around and through which the lives of the bisexual women in this study are shaped. This influence is exerted despite the fact that none of the participants are married or intending to marry in the immediate future (either in an opposite-sex or same-sex configuration). The prevailing influence of this discourse illustrates its taken-for-granted nature – despite positioning themselves as outside heteronormativity through identifying as bisexual, participants still engage with a marriage and family discourse in shaping their subjectivity, their romantic relationships and their notions of family. The discussion that follows is structured to describe four different ways in which participants, as bisexual women, engage with this discourse.

6.7.1 “You have this image ready-made”: Marriage and family discourse as familiar

The first position that could be identified in the text is one in which participants align themselves with an idealised version of marriage and family discourse. Despite indicating an awareness of how not all traditional heteronormative families fit this idealised description, participants’ talk reflected romanticised notions of marriage and family – what one participant, Taryn, refers to as “that picture idea of what a family is”. This idealised version of marriage and family discourse is described as a normative expectation that cannot easily be questioned or resisted. Jennifer refers to this when she

describes how, when growing up, she was certain that she will “end up” married to a man and will have children in a conventional way: “In my head it was ‘I’m going to get married to a man, and have children, and done’. Cause that’s what your parents say, and that’s what you see around you, that’s what’s expected of you”.

Jennifer’s statement draws on the dominant heterosexist belief and expectation that “everyone is or should be heterosexual” (Yep, 2002, p. 167). Her sexuality is assumed by others and by herself to be heterosexual until “proven” otherwise. Going against this normative expectation requires resisting a powerful societal assumption positing heterosexual marriage as normal, natural and universally desired (Richardson, 1996).

While Jennifer describes this normative expectation as a sense of being pressured to conform to heterosexism (when she states “that’s what’s expected of you”) this construction also allows for a predictable, familiar and clearly outlined life-course. Liné refers to this when she says that “getting married with kids is kind of where you are supposed to go. It’s the easiest way for everyone”. Taryn refers to the familiarity of this discourse by stating “if you think about marriage with a man it’s a straightforward notion... You have this image ready-made that you can just slot in there”. In this construction, heteronormative marriage and family discourse acts as a widely familiar blueprint with clearly outlined life stages through which compliant subjects can proceed. It depicts heterosexual marriage as uncomplicated, comforting and socially valued. Part of the appeal of this idealised marriage and family discourse is then the sense of safety and acceptance it affords subjects who can conform to its requirements.

While this position generally reflects an idealised version of heteronormative discourse, participants at times assumed resistant positions where they commented on the coercive nature of such a discourse, hinted at in Jennifer’s framing of this discourse as an expectation held by others. The familiar “ready-made” nature of this discourse is seen as constraining individual choices that might differ from dominant discourse. Liné describes this in the following way: “I think in that mind-set [of getting married to a man and having children] you don’t have to think for yourself, so then you just go down that route along with all the other sheep”. The hegemonic nature of this discourse functions to limit participants’ agency and their ability to choose the type of life they would like to have. While a marriage and family discourse might provide a romanticised and “uncomplicated” subject position, participants also position themselves as critical of the lack of autonomy implied in this discourse.

6.7.2 “You’re always up against a husband and children”: Bisexuality as competing with marriage and family discourse

Identifying as bisexual has implications for how participants position themselves in relation to a heteronormative marriage and family discourse. Participants drew on a construction of bisexuality as competing with an idealised marriage and family discourse. Several participants spoke about how marriage and family discourse is seen as a threat to their same-sex relationships, particularly so if their partner also identifies as bisexual. Astrid describes how, in her relationship with her bi-partner, she has a sense of always being in competition with the romanticised construction of marriage and family that is dominant in society. She goes on to talk about her sense of helplessness in not being able to provide her partner with the normalcy and social acceptance that the marriage and family discourse provides heterosexual subjects:

Astrid: It doesn’t matter how much I love my girlfriend, I can’t give her a child, that is our child. So it’s a big issue. And I have to understand that if she wants that child, biologically, and she had to leave me because she wanted that ideal family, I could never resent her... You can make your own family and obviously there’s lots of ways to do it, but there’s a romantic idea about family.

Ingrid: Ja, that you compete with in a sense.

Astrid: You do, of course you do. I would say that’s the toughest thing about bisexuality.

Identifying as bisexual and being in a same-sex relationship means that participants cannot conform to the idealised image of marriage and family depicted in a heterosexual relationship. Heterosexual marriage is constructed as resulting in “that ideal family”, which Astrid describes as a “romantic idea about family”. Contrasted to this, a family resulting from a same-sex union is (by implication) constructed as not having the same value as a heterosexual family union, which can provide for a biological child that is “their child”. As long as they are in a relationship with a woman, participants do not have access to the normalised subject position offered by marriage and family discourse. This echoes lesbian women’s experiences of a heteronormative rendering of same-sex families as “artificial”, “wrong” or less “real” than heterosexual families (Clarke, 2001; Saffron, 1994). Astrid however adds that this is “the toughest thing about bisexuality”, implying that the notion of choice differentiates bisexuality from lesbian experience in her account. She draws on the perception that bisexual partners are considered as having the option of having a “normal” heterosexual relationship that is accepted and rewarded in heteronormative contexts – an option which lesbian women do not have:

Astrid: And I think with bisexuality for me and with being with women, there's always that, you're always up against the life picture. You're always up against a husband and children. It's a big fucking picture, even for myself. It's the way we all, or 90% of people want to end up, you know, in a family.

In this construction, if a bisexual partner highly values and desires the normalised subject position provided by marriage and family discourse, she could choose to be in a relationship with a man instead of a woman. Liné speaks about this in the context of dating a lesbian woman, and the fear her partner had that she will leave the same-sex relationship to “get married and have babies”, something that is not easily provided for in the same-sex relationship:

And the lesbian [that I dated] also thought, you know, that I will cheat. Or the fear was that I will meet the man of my dreams and get married and have babies. Because getting married and having babies is, for example, something that she cannot give me.

It is interesting to note that while participants resist the notion that bisexual women cannot be monogamous or commit to a long-term relationship, their reflections on their own relationships indicate a sense of being co-opted by dominant discourse where they doubt their partner's commitment in the relationship. Their constructions of being in a same-sex relationship, as bisexual women, reflect a continued presence of uncertainty in that their partner might leave the relationship for a socially valued heterosexual relationship with a man. In this sense they draw on the terms provided by dominant discourse in constructing meaning in their relationships. Bisexuality is constructed here as a threat to the permanence and value of the same-sex relationship. Further to this, Astrid's comment that she “could never resent” her partner if she chose a normalised heterosexual relationship points to a resigned acceptance of this risk as part of identifying as bisexual.

6.7.3 “It isn't any kind of option for having a good life”: Bisexuality as incompatible with marriage and family discourse

A third position assumed by participants, in engaging with heteronormative marriage and family discourse, is one in which bisexuality is not considered as competing with such a discourse but is instead regarded as *incompatible* with its normalised developmental narrative. This occurs mainly through evoking a widely circulating construction of bisexuality as customarily equated with promiscuity, briefly referred to above. In such a construction bisexuality is equated with non-monogamy and loyalty to one partner is considered unlikely or impossible (Eadie, 1996; Klesse,

2005). Participants referred to how they often encounter responses to their sexual identification that position them as hypersexual and promiscuous. Sonia describes this when she states “that’s how bisexuality often gets portrayed, [that] these girls can’t get enough sex from guys so they get it from girls too... That is the common conception of what it is... [People are] just like, okay, so you sleep around a lot”.

In such a construction, where bisexuality is equated with promiscuity, identifying as bisexual does not allow for a committed monogamous relationship and therefore cannot provide the “ideal” outcome of the marriage and family discourse. Through evoking such a construction, bisexuality is positioned as inconsistent with the kind of stable and fulfilled life that is depicted in the marriage and family discourse. Jennifer speaks about her parents drawing on a construction of bisexuality as incompatible with a marriage and family discourse: “My dad just wants the best for me, and he doesn’t think that [lifestyle] is the best. He doesn’t see it as being any kind of option for having a good life, with children, a stable family, kids...”

This construction of bisexuality as incompatible with a monogamous relationship also serves to destabilise the normalised life-course depicted in a marriage and family discourse. In identifying as bisexual, participants sacrifice the familiarity and predictability of the marriage and family discourse, since bisexuality is constructed as incompatible with a stable, long-term relationship. This has the implication that bisexual women do not have access to the clearly defined developmental narrative depicted in the marriage and family discourse. The marriage and family discourse is constructed as a linear developmental process where one proceeds through various pre-determined and socially prescribed stages, part of which includes getting married (to a man) and creating one’s own family. Gemma refers to this when describing her “straight friends” as being “on that path - they’ve all been dating their boyfriends for the past two or three years, they’re going to have a ring on their finger, or they’re married or they’re gonna be pregnant soon, that kind of thing”. As bisexual women, participants do not share in the normalised developmental narrative of a long-term relationship, implied by heteronormative marriage and family discourse.

In addition to defining heterosexual marriage and the subsequent creation of a family as part of a “natural” and normative developmental course, heteronormative marriage and family discourse also provides a well-developed structure for what is considered a successful heterosexual relationship. Acts like cohabiting, getting married and ultimately having children not only signify a socially sanctioned developmental path, their achievement also constructs relationships as requiring a

progression through these stages. It is not considered adequate to settle at an earlier stage in this developmental sequence – a successful relationship should be “moving forward” or progressing towards certain points (which participants mainly described as getting married and having children). In identifying as bisexual, this normative expectation of their life course (settling down and having children) as well as the construction of their relationships as progressing towards something (where a successful relationship entails reaching certain milestones such as getting married) are disrupted. As Astrid notes: “You don’t feel like there’s this natural progression to things. You know, straight people just have a child and naturally progress”.

Participants’ accounts indicate that they do not share in the mapped out narrative widely available in dominant discourse. They sacrifice the certainty that a heterosexual subject position affords where, as Astrid describes it, “you still take it relationship by relationship”. Such a description posits bisexuality as inconsistent with a stable, long-term relationship with the “ideal” outcome of marriage. This stands in contrast to a normalised heterosexual relationship, which is assumed to progress through a process of serial monogamy culminating in marriage. It also stands in contrast to a normalised lesbian relationship model that prescribes a long-term, monogamous union. Social science accounts often describe a hierarchy of monogamy starting with lesbian couples at the top, followed by heterosexual couples and lastly by gay men (e.g., Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983) with Bebkco and Johnson (2000, p. 414) referring to the commonly held stereotype of lesbian couples as “psychologically fused” or as “enjoying a greater capacity for closeness” than either heterosexual couples or gay men. Constructions of bisexuality as equated with non-monogamy serve to exclude bisexuality from a narrative that depicts a committed long-term relationship and render it as incompatible with marriage and family discourse, either in a same-sex or an opposite sex union.

6.7.4 “Family is important to me”: Rearticulating marriage and family discourse

A heteronormative construction of marriage and family excludes same-sex relationships, yet many of the participants in the study positioned themselves as resisting such exclusion. They drew on a transformed notion of family where it can be achieved in a same-sex relationship as well. Taryn describes this as follows:

Family is important to me. But I guess I’ve realised that if you’re with a woman it doesn’t mean that you have to let go of the notion of family, and you don’t need a husband to achieve that... I’ve kind of let go of that picture idea of what a family is, you know. Cause it’s not always that way... Who is to say two women won’t do the same if not a better job?

Sibongile, in expressing her desire to have children, describes her preference for this to happen in a same-sex relationship:

I just know it (having children) won't be in the conventional way, you know. Like I was saying earlier - as much as I'm attracted to both males and females, I see myself settling down with a female rather than a male....

However, even in rearticulating the marriage and family discourse to accommodate same-sex family configurations, participants emphasised a sense of loss that they associate with achieving a family in a non-traditional way. As Taryn noted, she had to “let go of that picture idea” of a romanticised notion of family. In rearticulating her position in marriage and family discourse, she had to give up a narrative of herself having a family in a socially valued way and “accept” that she will do it in a non-traditional way. Similarly, Sibongile differentiates a same-sex family from what is regarded as “normal” when she says, “I do want children, they just won't grow up in the normal - what is considered normal – sense”.

Along with this sense of loss, participants also constructed achieving a family in a same-sex union as requiring work. They spoke about particular challenges in achieving a non-traditional family, such as it being costly and for many participants, out of their financial reach. Astrid, speaking about having children in a same-sex relationship, states: “People are always like, “there are ways”, like yeah, if you're a fucking millionaire (laughs wryly)”. She goes on to say:

It's heart breaking not being able to say that because we love each other we can make a baby... [When in a relationship with a woman] you feel like you really have to work hard to build that family. You have to be financially extremely well off, for in vitro or adoption.

It can be highlighted that participants' rearticulation of heteronormative marriage and family discourse is in relation to being in a relationship with a woman. Participants rarely commented on how they would negotiate having children with a man, as bisexually identified women, and also did not speak about how this discourse can be rearticulated to accommodate bisexuality more generally. Instead they focused their discussions on how same-sex relationships can be accommodated. When participants did speak about the marriage and family discourse as it related to marrying and having children with a man, they referred to it as if they are then reverting to heterosexuality. In these instances they spoke about this traditional configuration as “straightforward” (Taryn), “uncomplicated” and “life made easy” (Nasiphi). In a sense,

heterosexuality is regarded here as having a persuasive pull against which one actively struggles when in a same-sex relationship (where Astrid states that you “have to work hard”). It functions as the “normal” position from which participants have to actively dissociate through the continuous assertion of their sexual identification when in a same-sex relationship, but to which they are easily returned when not.

Such self-positioning as either lesbian or heterosexual seems to erase the possibility of a more enduring bisexual identity, as it relates to marriage and family discourse. This inability to adapt marriage and family discourse to accommodate bisexuality might be due to a more general lack of discussion of bisexuality as it relates to long-term relationships and notions of family. As discussed in the literature review, debates that challenge heteronormative constructions of marriage and the family have been predominantly framed in relation to gay and lesbian identities. Bisexuality has typically not been drawn into these debates, possibly due to its general marginalisation in LGBTI issues (Namaste, 1994; Stein, 1992), and participants therefore only have recourse to a same-sex model for challenging heteronormative notions of marriage and family.

In this section I identified four different positions assumed by participants, in engaging with heteronormative marriage and family discourse. From their accounts it appears that participants take up different and shifting positions in relation to such a discourse - at times supporting this discourse, at other times enveloped and restricted by it, and also in certain instances resisting this discourse. Significantly, despite claiming self-aware bisexual identities, the influence of heteronormative discourse in structuring sexuality along a heterosexual/homosexual binary remains influential and participants’ own accounts in many instances reflect this binary. This was evident in how they constructed two main options in engaging with marriage discourse - in order to gain access to marriage and family discourse, participants are either positioned as being in a same-sex relationship (conforming to a lesbian relationship model) or a heterosexual relationship (conforming to an “uncomplicated” heteronormative relationship model). An integration of their identity as bisexual is not articulated as a valid option in securing access to a marriage and family discourse. This points to the continued erasure of bisexuality from the terms used in dominant discourse to construct individual subjectivity, notions of relationships, and notions of family. Participants’ accounts convey a lack of a language to articulate bisexuality as an identity that remains relevant regardless of the gender of the person they are in a relationship with, when engaging with marriage discourse. In this manner, their accounts indicate a sense of being invisible, as bisexual women, in

marriage and family discourse. I take up the notion of bisexual erasure, as enacted through heteronormative marriage and family discourse, more fully in the final chapter.

6.8 Summary

In this chapter I focused on the findings from the discourse analysis that relate to participants' engagement with discourses of gendered difference and (hetero)sexualised subjectivity. I discussed a discourse of sexuality as identity, which was described as reducing participants' identity to their identification as bisexual. I also discussed participants' resistance to such discursive fixing of their identity, where they drew on a counter-discourse of intersectionality of identity. In presenting the findings related to discourses of gendered difference it was apparent that participants' assume varied and contradicting positions in relation to the dominant male/female binary. This ranged from positions that are critical of the gender binary to those that reinforce it. I concluded the chapter with a discussion of participants' engagement with discourses related to heteronormative marriage and family discourse. I now turn to second and final section of the analysis.