

CONSTRUCTIONS OF DISCLOSURE BY BLACK LESBIANS IN SOUTH AFRICA

By

Glodean Qondile Tintswalo Thani

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Glodean Thani

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SUPERVISOR

Ms Ingrid Lynch

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my late father Simon Msongelwa Thani, for your love, support and unwavering faith in me. I will be forever thankful.

I love you Dad.

Acknowledgements

This has been a journey of discovery, of my own capabilities. I now know my own strengths and weaknesses and I have you all to thank for always being there to pull me up when I was down.

The Lord God Jehovah, all praise to the Most High God.

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Thank you for trusting me with your stories and for letting me share in a part of your lives.

Abstract

The dominant belief about homosexuality in South Africa is that it is un-African. There however, are reports within literature that allude to the presence of homosexual relationships between women. This belief results in intolerance towards lesbians in South Africa. Some constructions focus on homosexual relationships among sangomas and the relationships of mummy-baby relationships in Africa. These constructions conceal same-sex sexuality as individuals do not necessarily identify as being lesbian in these contexts.

The individuals who claim a lesbian identity in modern times have to find a way to exist within a patriarchal society that is often judgmental towards those who do not conform to predetermined gender roles. As questions regarding future plans of nuptials and children surface they are faced with the challenge of disclosure. The act of disclosure confirms that an individual ascribes to a lesbian identity. This qualitative study explored the experiences of disclosure by five black lesbians in Pretoria, South Africa, using a social constructionist lens. The sample was obtained using snowball sampling. Using a semi-structured interview guide to obtain the data the study focused on the participants' disclosures of their sexual orientation as well as the reactions that these disclosures evoke. The meanings that the participants have attached to these reactions are explored in relation to the impact that these reactions have on the individual's life.

Using thematic analysis, the research discovered that disclosures were difficult for black lesbians as a result of the social climate of intolerance and patriarchal expectations of conformity to pre-determined gender roles. The prospective disclosures are marred by fear of rejection and of violent reactions by community members who threatened the participants with corrective rape. The culture of homo-negativity encourages social rejection of lesbians and confines them to certain spaces where they are accepted. Thus the decision to disclose is often a difficult one for the individual, with many choosing non-disclosure. The researcher concluded that there was an inclination for participants to disclose to friends as they predominantly refrained from disclosing to their families due to fear of the perceived permanency of their sexual orientation. This affirmed the constructed nature of sexuality in that some participants acknowledged that their sexuality was not permanent but that it changed according to their needs. This was also illustrated in their associations with both male and female relationships as well as in the way some participants described prospects of marriage to males as part of predetermined gender roles.

Keywords: disclosure, social construction, lesbian, identity, black.

Table of Contents

Dedication	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
<i>Abstract</i>	iv
Prologue.....	viii
Chapter 1: Introduction to the research	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Problem formulation	2
1.2.1 Research Question.....	2
1.3 Research Problem.....	2
1.4 Aims of the Study	2
1.5 Objectives of Study	2
1.6 Motivation.....	2
1.7 Methodology.....	3
1.8 Overview of the chapters in the study.....	3
Chapter 2: Theoretical framework and literature review.....	4
2.1 Introduction	5
2.2 Social constructionism.....	5
2.2.1 Principles of social construction.....	5
2.2.2 The development of social constructionism	6
2.2.3 The construction of 'reality' in relation to social identity theory.....	7
2.2.5 Dominant construction between heterosexual and. homosexual orientations	8
2.3 The social construction of gender.....	9
2.3.1 Understanding sex	9
2.3.2 Gender identity	9
2.4 The social constructions of lesbian identities	10
2.4.1 Society's perceptions of same sex sexuality in South Africa.....	11
2.4.2 Dominant constructions of lesbian identities	13
2.5 The social construction of disclosure	15
2.5.1 Self-acceptance as a precursor to disclosure	15
2.5.2 Exploring disclosure	15
2.5.3 Disclosure in South Africa.....	18
2.6 Conclusion	19
Chapter 3: Methodology	20
3.1 Introduction	20
3.2 Qualitative Research	20

3.2.1 Principles of Qualitative Research	20
3.3 Sampling	23
3.3.1 Criteria for participation	23
3.3.2 Sample description	24
3.3.3 Snowball sampling	24
3.4 Data collection	25
3.4.1 Semi-structured interview	26
3.5 Data analysis	26
3.6 Ethics	29
3.7 Conclusion	30
Chapter 4: Findings and discussion	32
4.1 Introduction	32
4.2 Biographical information of the participants	32
4.3 The researcher's reflection on each of the interview participants	33
4.3.1 Interview participant 1: Andile	33
4.3.2 Interview participant 2: Buhle	34
4.3.3 Interview participant 3: Celiwe	35
4.3.4 Interview participant 4: Delile	35
4.3.5 Interview participant 5: Eleanor	36
4.3.6 Overall impression of the interview participants	36
4.4 Findings and discussion	37
4.5 Category 1: Awareness of same-sex attraction	39
4.5.1 Theme 1: Dominant constructions of identified lesbian identities	39
4.5.2 Theme 2: Identifying same-sex feelings	45
4.5.3 Theme 3: Perceived permanency vs. the fluidity of lesbian identities	47
4.6 Category 2: Experiences of disclosure	48
4.6.1 Theme 1: Initial disclosure	48
4.6.2 Theme 2: Disclosing to family	51
4.6.3 Theme 3: Disclosure as relating to identity and lifestyle	53
4.7 Category 3: External perceptions as a deterrent to self-acceptance	55
4.7.1 Theme 1: Homosexuality as being un-African	56
4.7.2 Theme 2: The nature of associations with other lesbians	58
4.7.3 Theme 3: Threat of corrective rape	60
4.7.4 Theme 4: Prudence for tolerance	61
4.8 Discussion of results	61
Chapter 5: Evaluation and recommendations	67
5.1 Introduction	67

5.1.1 Overview of categories and themes.....	67
5.2 Evaluation	70
5.2.1 Stability: Consistency	71
5.2.2 Credibility: Authenticity	71
5.3 Critique of the current study.....	72
5.4 Recommendations for future research.....	72
References.....	74
Appendix A: Interview Guide	i
Appendix C: Interview Transcriptions	ix
Appendix D: Reflexive Journal	lxiii

List of Tables

Table 1: Summary of participants' biographical information.....	33
Table 2: Categories and themes identified in the analysis.....	39

Prologue

Homosexuality is not well understood by many in South Africa (Nel & Joubert, 1997). As a result many lesbians live with uncertainty in their identity, as there are often acts of violence perpetrated by members of society against them. These violent acts are largely a result of the lack of insight into homosexuality, more specifically lesbian identities. Corrective rape is not an uncommon experience for lesbians in this 'social climate'. Corrective rape is the act of sexual assault towards a homosexual individual with the aim of 'making' them heterosexual (Herek, Cogan, & Gillis, 1999). In South Africa, this act is dominant within black communities, predominantly those in townships. Lesbians have been raped and murdered as a result of their sexuality.

During apartheid South Africans endured human rights abuse at the hand of an oppressive government (Retief, 1993). South Africa has developed one of the most progressive constitutions on the continent post-apartheid, yet lesbians still fall victim to social, physical and sexual abuse. Lesbians who fall victim to abuse suffer secondary victimisation at the hands of the police who have been tasked with protecting them.

Homosexuality is believed to be un-African and does not have a place in the so-called 'black culture'. It is therefore not observed as a viable sexual practice within some black communities. It is often viewed as a product of the west, for westerners. African leaders and gatekeepers of traditions condemn same-sex sexuality as it opposes patriarchal expectations of procreation (Murray & Roscoe, 1998). They therefore do not support the right of people as stipulated by the Constitution of South Africa that takes into consideration the right of same-sex couples to a civil union, which is equivalent to a marriage, again a first in Africa.

Lesbians have been described as being invisible; they are treated as if they are invisible (Blyth, 1989,). The research aims to bring some understanding about lesbians to light. It therefore delves into their experiences of disclosure that take place against this backdrop of intolerance.

There is much to be done to educate South Africans about same-sex sexuality and respecting the rights of others. Democracy translates to people respecting diversity not just racial diversity or religious diversity but also taking into consideration that diversity within itself is diverse. Sexual diversity is no different (Nel & Joubert, 1997).

Chapter 1: Introduction to the research

1.1 Introduction

This chapter is the introduction to the research study aimed at exploring the experiences of disclosure by black lesbians in Pretoria, South Africa, through a social constructionist lens. The chapter serves as an outline of the study's problem question, the motivation, goals and objectives as well as a brief introduction to the literature. The qualitative methodology will also be introduced and briefly explored.

Social constructionists explain that the development as well as behaviours of human beings cannot be understood in a cultural vacuum but rather that it is understood through the meanings given to different outcomes via personal, social and cultural perspectives (Schaller, 2002). Social construction also holds that sexual orientation is not essential or innate but rather that it is constructed from a cultural framework (Broido, 2000). Through understanding the meaning attributed to disclosure which is perceivably one of the most significant steps of a homosexual person's life society may begin to unfold what it means to be a black lesbian living in Pretoria (Coleman, 1982).

Coleman (1982) identified that gay men and women who do not disclose their sexual orientation have feelings of diminished self-worth. They may experience anxiety and guilt. Mental health professionals have identified disclosure as important for developing a positive gay identity and achieving psychological well-being (Coleman, 1982).

Considering the importance of disclosure on the quality of life of homosexual individuals, not much research has been conducted on the topic in South Africa. Butler (2008) conducted a study exploring the coming-out process in South Africa where he proposed a multidisciplinary study into homosexuality in South Africa, encouraging the use of a more representative sample. The most important reason for studying homosexuality and engaging around the topic is to ensure that young people are emotionally prepared, allowing them to assume a positive gay identity. He expressed that there is a need for in-depth understanding and cultural sensitivity toward research on homosexuality (Butler, 2008).

This research therefore explored the meanings given by the individuals to their experience of coming out. Researchers often point to a uniform process to coming out as will be illustrated in the literature review. Social construction as a theory is more interested in the meaning that people create within their social contexts. This research has therefore challenged this

perceived uniformity of coming out to identify the unique experiences of individuals and their ascribed meanings to their individual coming out experiences (Burr, 1995).

1.2 Problem formulation

1.2.1 Research Question

How do black lesbians construct the experience of disclosing their sexual orientation?

1.3 Research Problem

The research aimed to explore the coming out experiences of black lesbians in Pretoria, South Africa. There is a need for research into various aspects of homosexuality in order to educate South Africans about diversity within sexual orientation and subsequently promote tolerance. The study employed a social constructionist framework to explore the experiences of black lesbians in South Africa.

Individual accounts of disclosure were explored to unpack the identity of black lesbians in South Africa as well as the meanings that black lesbians construct around disclosure.

1.4 Aims of the Study

The aim of this study was to explore the construction of the experience of disclosure by black lesbians.

1.5 Objectives of Study

- Explore the meanings of disclosure to the participant;
- Formulate conclusions and recommendations based on the outcomes of this study.

1.6 Motivation

There are dominant constructions suggesting that “there is no Homosexuality in Africa” (Amory, 1997, p. 5). This is the general sentiment held in Africa. Amory (1997) identified homophobia as the perversion and not homosexuality. There are accounts of the practice of same sex relations as reported by colonialists as well as missionaries (Armory, 1997).

As a result of such views lesbians are raped in South African in the attempt to revert their sexual orientation. This type of rape of lesbians is termed “corrective rape”. This term will be unpacked in the following chapter. Black lesbians are abused and killed in retaliation of their perceived disregard for African tradition and culture. Black lesbians are victims of hate crimes and yet until recently nothing was known about them (Smith, 2004).

This study aims to take a glance at what it means to be a lesbian living in South Africa. The focus of the study is on how lesbians have constructed their experience of disclosure and the implications that the disclosure has for each individual against this backdrop. This research will delve into the different meanings that lesbian women attach to their sexuality as well as the ways in which they disclose their sexual orientation and the support or lack thereof that it brings. It aims to shed light on black lesbians and pave the way for more research to be done into this topic.

1.7 Methodology

This study was a qualitative study which employed a semi-structured qualitative interview guide to collect data. The reason this research engaged in a qualitative investigation was because of the ability of interviews to illicit in-depth information from the participant (McIntyre, 2005).

Employing snowball sampling the participants were initially going to be accessed with the assistance of a gay and lesbian organisation in Pretoria, OUT Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transsexual Wellness Centre (OUT LGBT). This was largely to ensure that the sample was obtained without difficulty resulting from the invisibility of the lesbian population. However, this method did not materialise due to logistical problems. The sample was eventually collected through the assistance of an associate.

The recordings of the interviews were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis. The data were then coded into themes that emerged through studying the data as was being analysed (McIntyre, 2005).

1.8 Overview of the chapters in the study

The study will consist of five chapters outlining different aspects of the study. These will be briefly discussed.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces the study providing an overview of the different aspects of the study including motivation, aims and objectives as well as an overview of each of the chapters of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature review and review of theoretical paradigm

The literature will explore Social Construction Theory in the context of sexual orientation and the meanings that societies construct around sexuality. The construction of reality is unpacked using a Social Constructionism paradigm. Literature on black lesbians in South Africa is minimal. The chapter will also define concepts relating to the formation of one's sexuality (lesbian identity). The constructions surrounding lesbian identity in the South African context are discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The chapter on methodology explores the use of qualitative methods to obtain in-depth data for this study. It also discusses the sampling methods used in the study including the advantages as well as the disadvantages of snowball sampling. The chapter covers the data collection instrument and the benefits and challenges encountered while using the interview guide.

Chapter 4: Findings and discussion

Thematic analysis is discussed as the analysis method of choice for the study. The outcomes of themes that developed as the data were being analysed is discussed. This chapter discussed the outcomes of the data analysis as well as the implications of these.

Chapter 5: Evaluation and recommendations

The final chapter of the dissertation includes the overview of the research process, including my experiences of the research process. Recommendations pertaining to future studies on the topic are made regarding the gaps that still exist in the literature on this topic.

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework and literature review

2.1 Introduction

The current chapter looks at the theoretical framework employed in the study as well as literature pertaining to the research topic. This discussion will first explore the paradigm of social construction as a point of departure. In this section I will be taking into consideration the principles of social construction, how it developed and also explore its relevance to this study. Thereafter various constructions of gender and sexuality will be explored. The discussion will then focus on lesbian identities and how these are constructed and their impact on disclosure. The discussion will conclude by focusing on disclosures.

2.2 Social constructionism

The point of departure for this study is the paradigm of social constructionism. I believe that this paradigm is appropriate as the experiences of individuals are constructed within their social groups of interaction. This notion supports the idea that individual experiences of 'coming out' are socially constructed.

2.2.1 Principles of social construction

According to Burr (1995) social constructionism is based on four main principles: a critical stance should be taken on knowledge that is taken for granted; knowledge is historically and culturally specific; knowledge is sustained by social processes; and knowledge and social action go together. These are briefly discussed below.

Critical stance towards taken for granted knowledge

Social constructionism questions conventional knowledge based on objective, unbiased observation of the world. As a result it is often seen as being critical of empiricism and positivism. Social constructionism begs us to be cautious and ever suspicious of 'known truths' (Burr, 1995).

Historical and cultural specificity

According to social constructionism understanding the world is based on categories and concepts that are historically and culturally specific. The topic that one hopes to understand can be understood differently depending on where and when in the world one lives (Burr, 1995).

Knowledge is sustained by social processes

Knowledge of the world is constructed by people between themselves. It is through the daily interaction of our social interactions that knowledge is fabricated. The daily interactions are viewed as the practices during which shared versions of knowledge are constructed (Burr, 1995).

Knowledge and social actions go together

Negotiated understandings could take a wide variety of different forms and we can therefore talk of numerous possible social constructions of the world. Each different construction however, also invites a different action from human beings (Burr, 1995).

Taking these principles of social constructionism into consideration, I will briefly map out the development of this paradigm and identify key players in its development during the 20th century.

2.2.2 The development of social constructionism

Many authors have contributed to the development of social constructionism. This section focuses on reviewing some of the main developments in social constructionism as a paradigm.

According to Burr (1995), Mead's (1934) *Mind, self and society* was one of the main contributors towards the formation of social constructionism during that era in sociology as he identified how we each create each other's identities through our everyday interactions. It was however, only in the 1960s that social construction was coined by Berger and Luckman (1967), when they formulated concepts underpinning the social construction of reality (Burr, 1995).

Owen (1992) adds that social constructionism as an early branch of sociology was founded on the works of sociologists such as Marx and Mannheim, labelled the sociology of knowledge (Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 1980; Stark, 1958). Marx's documents relating to social existence and consciousness are believed to be the basis for social constructionism (Marx, 1972). Owen (1992) goes on to reconcile that social constructionism is the relationship between ideology and social structure in society as it exists.

According to Lynch (1997) social constructionism is based in linguistics and social sciences. He adds that knowledge is constructed through the linguistic and cultural resources of a particular social context. As mentioned above he also adds that social construction theory suggests that there is not a single form of objective knowledge that exists, only local knowledge representing the commitments and resources of particular cultures.

Social constructionism has been used in psychology as well as in other disciplines in order to discuss various topics (Lynch, 1997). Social constructionism has been equated to postmodernism since both approaches deny the existence of a universal knowledge (Neimeyer, 1998).

Social constructionism has been developed through the interactions of multiple disciplines. Due to its diverse nature, social construction has developed into an important tool in the development of knowledge. When knowledge is understood as a negotiation between people then certain damaging 'truths' can be reconstructed allowing new realities to be constructed.

2.2.3 The construction of 'reality' in relation to social identity theory

According to Berger and Luckman (1967) the social construction of reality consists of anti-essentialist accounts of how people create and sustain all social phenomena through social practice. This can be achieved through three main stages, namely externalisation, objectification and internalisation. These will be explained using an analogy of a lesbian who wants to disclose her sexuality.

Externalisation

When an individual has an idea or thought about disclosing her sexuality she would verbalise this thought to either a friend or family member. The process of verbalising the thought is when the thought or idea is externalised.

Objectification

When she and her friends or family begin to talk about her sexuality, the verbalised idea now takes a form of its own and becomes an object of consciousness for people in society.

Internalisation

As the story of her disclosure exists in her friends and family's life-world they internalise it and it becomes a part of their consciousness, as a part of their understanding of the nature of the world.

The construction of reality as pointed out by Berger and Luckman's (1967) three stages of externalisation, objectification and internalisation begins within the individual. It then comes into the domain of society when it is shared with others. This constructed truth then takes shape and becomes a point of reference for others observing it.

2.2.5 Dominant construction between heterosexual and. homosexual orientations

According to social constructionism, reality and truths are created through mutual consent in a social context. What we perceive to be 'truths' are a result of shared social constructions and the need to conform to socially shared views. Constructions can be viewed as dominant conversations or discussions that are shared about a certain topic (Burr, 1995). Taking this into consideration, the decision to disclose is often influenced by the expectation of social rejection as most decisions that we make are influenced by the people around us. Individual subjectivity is shaped in association with our affiliations with certain groups. It has therefore been suggested that who we become is shaped by what society propagates, or put differently, by the dominant constructions in society. For example when a young woman becomes aware of her sexual orientation, it is often not easy for her to disclose. This is because homosexuality does not conform to society's hetero-normative expectation, resulting in feelings of discord within the young woman, based on society's predetermined gender roles (Festinger, 1957).

Some of the expectations that society may have projected, could have included fantasies of her getting married to a man and bearing him children. Thus fulfilling her socially constructed role based on her physical and biological predisposition. However, this begs the question of how heterosexuality became the norm and who decided that this form of sexuality is superior to any other. By understanding the social construction of gender roles we may begin to understand how sex and gender dictate who and what we are 'allowed to be' (Lorber & Farrell, 1991).

2.3 The social construction of gender

According to Lorber and Farrell (1991) both sex and gender are socially constructed categories. These labels are sometimes used interchangeably however, for the sake of clarity; these constructs will be defined and briefly discussed below.

2.3.1 Understanding sex

Sex is the term used to describe a presumed biological category describing what is viewed as natural and cannot be changed (Fausto-Sterling, 1985). Teifer (1995) adds that 'sex' is a social construct that is seen as natural and includes aspects that involve our biological selves, as well as our biological behaviours. This perception of sex supports that people are sexual beings, who do sex (have sex), implying that in the naturalness of sex, sex is aimed at ensuring reproduction. Hence reaffirming that heterosexual sex is natural and the link to gender construction along these lines. Males and females are assigned gender according to their biological predisposition (Teifer, 1995). However, this simplistic categorisation of male and female is being challenged as individuals who do not fall into these predetermined biological sex and gender categories exist; for instance individuals who are 'intersexed'. The categories of male and female that were previously viewed as opposites and mutually exclusive categories are no longer viewed in this way. The study is now faced with understanding what the social implications are for those who do not fall within these predetermined categories (Teifer, 1995).

According to Butler (1990), sex is as socially constructed as gender. This assertion it would appear, views the body as not having a pre-given essentialist sex. This is to say that "bodies are rendered intelligible through gender and cannot be said to have significant existence prior to the mark of gender" (Butler, 1990, p. 8).

2.3.2 Gender identity

According to Gagnon and Henderson (1985) gender identity encompasses psychosocial development, learning social roles and shaping sexual preferences. A crucial element to gender identity is socialisation. Butler (1993) states that gender is a 'performative' function as sex and gender are socially constructed. As previously mentioned, bodies are rendered intelligible through gender (Butler, 1993). She adds that bodies become gendered through continual performance of gender, which would mean that gender is not our inner essence

but rather a performance. Hence to be feminine is to perform feminine acts and forms of visual presentation and vice versa (Butler, 1993).

Linguistics has also been identified as playing a role in gender performance. By the utterances used, they bring the words used into existence. This can be illustrated by the example of a priest who says, "I pronounce you man and wife". The same is true for when a child is born and announced by saying "it's a boy" or "it's a girl" (Butler, 1993, p.19). Sex is therefore materialised by such aforementioned citations.

According to Lindemann (1997), gender is a sociological concept in that it focuses on males and females in a social context, instead of their natural categories. It also offers the hierarchical relationship between males and females that often perpetuates hetero-normative views while marginalising homosexuality (Delphy, 1993).

The word gender is used more widely than sex because the word sex has a more ambiguous meaning. It also relates to the erotic practices that take place. This, according to Jackson and Scott (2002), is part of the naturalistic construction linking "genitals with our social position (as women or men) and with our sexual practices, which define femininity and masculinity as 'natural' and privileges heterosexuality as the only normal and therefore legitimate forms of sexuality" (p.20).

Sexual preference and choice of sexual object are linked to gender identity. Thus sexuality is seen as being gendered and it is used to maintain gender divisions and it is also sustained by normative heterosexuality. However, Scott and Jackson (2002) warn that sexuality and gender should not be conflated as this would reduce gender to a sexuality which would deflect from elements of gender that are not about sexuality. This then points to the social construction of gender as part of the social construction of sexuality involving sexual feelings, sexual preferences and sexual practices (Greenberg, 1988; Stein, 1989).

2.4 The social constructions of lesbian identities

Kitzinger (1987, p.90) defines a lesbian identity as "a woman's subjective experience or intra-subjective account of her own lesbianism". She also reminds us that the identity of a lesbian is based on the story of her subjective experiences that she is willing to share with the researcher. The researcher otherwise has no insight into these experiences. Taking this into consideration the research will be exploring some of the constructions of lesbian identities in South Africa.

2.4.1 Society's perceptions of same sex sexuality in South Africa

In African societies sexuality is used to maintain gender structures by patriarchal bodies (Tamale, 2003). There is a dominant perception that homosexuality is un-African, as previously mentioned, and as such there appears to be limited available points of reference for young black lesbians. This perceived invisibility of black lesbians can be observed, back to the apartheid era, when sexuality was strictly controlled by the then government. Potgieter (1997) highlights that, the apartheid government outlawed male homosexuality as well as interracial relationships as they were both seen as an abomination. However, female homosexuality was not outlawed. This begs the questions as to whether it was due to the perceived insignificance of lesbian identities, that the laws passed by the apartheid government excluded them. It would appear that they were being denied the right to an identity (Potgieter, 1997).

Taking a look at the literature available about black lesbians in South Africa as well as Africa as a whole, we uncover dominant constructions around same sex sexuality. In Africa the above mentioned constructions centre on mummy-baby relationships as documented by Kendall (1998) as well as Ancestral wives and female husbands as briefly discussed. Mummy-baby relationships are relationships of intimacy between a young girl and a more mature young woman. These relationships are characterised by the older woman nurturing the younger girl into womanhood. This could be viewed as a rite of passage into adulthood. These relationships were rumoured as having elements of lesbian activities, however, the author does not explicitly produce any of these in her literature (Kendall, 1998).

Ancestral-wives and female husbands documented by Nkabinde and Morgan (2006) highlighted homosexual relationships among sangomas. These relationships are inspired by the female diviner who is possessed by a male spirit, who requests the sangoma to then take a wife. Among these sangomas, same sex feelings emerge, resulting in same sex relationships (Nkabinde & Morgan, 2006).

Other constructions involve the plight of NGOs to promote equality for LGBT communities. Sexuality and sexual expression in Africa are confronted by many challenges, such as gender based violence, risk of HIV/Aids infection as well as reproductive health. In literature same sex sexuality in Africa is often viewed in relation to pathology. Authors who have ventured into research on same-sex sexuality have written on what Matebeni (2010) calls 'homo-social' interactions, taking away the sexual elements of the same-sex interaction between lesbians. She challenges the views reported by Gay (1985) and Kendall (1998) who

both focus on the nurturing relationship between a pre-adolescent girl and young women in the mummy-baby relationship as previously mentioned (Matebeni, 2010). The research conducted on these women appears to take away the elements that would render such interactions synonymous to those ascribing to a lesbian identity. Furthermore the discourse of ancestral-wives and female husbands appears to be specific in its context and does not include others outside the cultural group of spirit diviners (Nkabinde & Morgan, 2006).

The constructions and debates around same sex sexuality appear to be touching on the surface of the topic. However, more direct research relating to the constructed realities of the perceived 'invisible' black lesbian identities needs to take precedence. There are numerous authors that have addressed same-sex female sexuality in the South African context (Gevisser & Cameron, 1994; Kendall, 1998; Matabeni, 2009; 2010; Nkabinde & Morgan, 2006; Potgieter, 1997). They have addressed same-sex sexuality from different angles and created a partial picture of lesbian identities in their various research studies.

The authors mentioned above- discuss some of the debates in their literature. I perceive Gevisser and Cameron (1994) to be ground breakers in discussing same-sex sexuality early in South Africa's young democracy. They highlight the presence of homosexuality across the board introducing homosexuality as an actual sexuality. They explore stories of same-sex sexuality across racial lines as well as gender barriers and the challenges faced by these marginalised groups. Their literature illustrates that black lesbians exist in South Africa (Cameron & Gevisser, 1994).

Potgieter's (1997) research also ventures into understanding lesbian identities where she explores the invisibilities and silences that accompany lesbian identities of the time. Others include Ruth Morgan's work with both Saskia Wieringa (2005) and Zandile Nkunzi Nkabinde (2006). The research she conducted with Wieringa focuses on the experiences of females in same-sex relationships honing in on the masculine female identity in Africa. As previously mentioned, Nkabinde and Morgan (2006) also contribute by exploring same-sex sexuality within the boundaries of South African spirit diviners, where Nkabinde observes same-sex sexuality within the culture of spirit diviners. She expressed that this practice has occurred for many generations of sangomas, thereby dispelling the myth that same-sex attraction is un-African (Nkabinde & Morgan, 2006).

The above-mentioned research has illustrated that although same-sex sexuality among females may not necessarily be labelled as a lesbian identity it has a strong presence in Africa as a whole. There appears to be a sincere interest but a lack of explicit insight into

South African lesbian identities. The literature often portrays women in South Africa and perceivably Africa as a whole, as not being sexual beings capable of 'sexual involvement'. There is a bio-medical focus on sexuality that occurs at the expense of understanding female sexuality holistically, especially when relating to same-sex sexuality (Matebeni, 2010).

Even so, most women who identify as being lesbian do so based on their sexual attraction to other women (Holmberg, Blair, & Phillips, 2010). Matebeni (2010) proposes that a strong relationship exists between sexual behaviour and sexual identity.

2.4.2 Dominant constructions of lesbian identities

The international construction of lesbian identities does not differ from the South African accounts. Kitzinger (1987) acknowledges that documented accounts from members of marginalised groups, such as lesbians, are most likely to accept stereotypes ascribed to them. This results in lesbian identity accounts reflecting lesbian identity as pathology, sinful and a 'sorry state'. Kleinberg (1977, p. 77) has reported that some lesbians view their homosexuality as a "weakness".

Hart and Richardson (1981) also added that this perception, results in lesbians having to interject "a sick model of their identity and behaviour" Against a backdrop of disapproval, lesbians have to find meaning in their identity (Hart & Richardson, 1981, p. 64).

According to Doyle (1995) the term 'lesbian' holds different meanings for different people. To some, being lesbian means engaging in same-sex practices, while to others it means remaining celibate. To others being lesbian may be less defined and could mean engaging in sexual relations with women or men (Doyle, 1995). Therefore, being lesbian cannot be defined by a single component, such as sexual orientation but is a more holistic identity. This identity encompasses a host of influences ranging from social, emotional and political influences. Identity is defined as the meaning attributed to self by others and by self and is therefore socially constructed (Stone, 1962; Taylor, 1999). Consideration should be given to how a homosexual identity is maintained as a response to the perceived permanency of this sexual identity. Hart and Richardson (1981) argue that lesbian identities should be viewed as socially constructed and maintained through social interaction. According to Hart and Richardson (1981) there are several perceived 'dominant constructions' of lesbian identities that assist lesbians with constructing their identity. Due to a lack of role models, lesbians often depend on these cues to construct an identity:

The lesbian image

The manner in which science and the media portray lesbian women is responsible for how most lesbians construct their identity as well as how they are treated by society. Lesbians are often negatively portrayed in the media, literature and theoretical explanations. For instance in novels lesbians are often portrayed as sick and unhappy people. The relationships are portrayed as disastrous and often doomed to fail. The lesbian character either dies tragically by committing suicide or is saved by a man with whom she falls in love, marries and bears him children returning to what is socially a heterosexual role (Hart & Richardson, 1981).

Lesbians as pseudo males

In this view a woman identified as being lesbian, would be expected to be masculine and 'wanting to be like a man'. This view is reinforced by the stereotypes of the butch lesbian, or dyke. This construction of lesbian women is characterised by physical features of short or cropped hair and a masculine dress sense. She would also assume interests that are traditionally associated with 'male roles' (Hart & Richardson, 1981).

Lesbian sexuality

Internationally, heterosexual practice is generally ignored whereas lesbian sexual practices are often exaggerated and over emphasised. This is illustrated in pornographic content where lesbian sexuality is often viewed as fantasy for heterosexual men (Gagnon & Simon, 1967). This view of lesbian sexuality is contrary to the view of black lesbians in the African context as previously stated by Matabeni (2010), where sexual practices between women are de-emphasised in the available literature.

Lesbian identity perceived as a permanent condition

A general belief exists among influential institutions such as the church, the law, scientific and popular explanation that homosexuality is a permanent characteristic. This characteristic is perceived to remain stable over the lifespan or rather after adolescence and the early adulthood stages of development. Identifying as lesbian is then viewed as a constant, never changing quality of the self (Hart & Richardson, 1981).

The above mentioned perceptions predominantly represent international views of 'lesbian identities'. These are largely based on western perceptions of 'lesbian identities' which have been reasonably documented. These perceptions cannot however, be generalised to the South African populace. Views of lesbians internationally are often met with excitement as heterosexual males are enticed by the fantasy. Black lesbians however, are not viewed in the same light as their international counterparts as they are often marginalised to the extent that they are positioned as invisible (Potgieter, 1997). This study will contribute towards understanding the identities of black lesbians through engaging with them about their experiences of disclosure.

2.5 The social construction of disclosure

Disclosure is defined by Collins and Miller (1994, p. 457) "as the act of revealing personal information about oneself to another." It often involves stigmatising or surprising information such as criminal activity, marital infidelity or sexual orientation. The lesbian's decision to disclose her sexual orientation is often influenced by internalised stigma as well as 'homo-negativity' which is defined as the acceptance of heterosexist society, or society's negative attitude towards gay people (Reilley & Rudd, 2006).

2.5.1 Self-acceptance as a precursor to disclosure

While others accept their homosexuality, others reject it and often view it as flawed and inferior to heterosexuality. Ryff and Keyes (1995) emphasise the importance of self-acceptance as one of the major dimensions to psychological well-being. The importance of self-acceptance is emphasised in gay and lesbian individuals as it is associated with better mental health and coping skills in dealing with prejudice (Bohan, 1996; Garnet, Herek, & Levy, 1990; Herschbeger & D'Augelli, 1995). Savin-Williams and Rodriguez (1993) also found that this correlates with the length of time that one is 'out'. Two authors are of the opinion that self-acceptance is a precursor to disclosing one's sexuality to others (Bohan, 1996; Coleman, 1982).

2.5.2 Exploring disclosure

There are different views expressed by the various researchers about what disclosing sexual orientation means. According to Hooker (1967), coming out is not a single event but rather an on-going development process. The process is characterised by the individual

questioning his or her sexuality, whether they are heterosexual or homosexual. Some individuals will publicly acknowledge their same sex attraction to others while some will only inform close associates of their sexual identity. Others will keep their sexual orientation private and not publicly acknowledge it. The individual's decision to disclose his or her sexual orientation will depend on the perceived advantages and disadvantages of revealing this information (Hart & Richardson, 1981).

The process of coming out is questioned by Kus (1985) who states that it is not so much disclosing to others outside of oneself, as it is of accepting one's gayness in a positive light. Coming out, in essence, is viewed as adopting a non-traditional identity, restructuring one's self-concept and re-adjusting one's relationship with others in society (Taylor, 1999). Disclosure is perceived as possibly the most significant step of a homosexual person's life. Coleman (1982) agrees that gay men and lesbians who do not disclose their sexual orientation have feelings of diminished self-worth. They may experience anxiety and guilt because they are afraid of rejection and discrimination. Goldfried (2001) adds that lesbians are often rejected by family and friends. However, mental health professionals maintain that disclosure is important for developing a positive gay identity and achieving psychological well-being. Therefore individuals who are prepared to embark on the process of disclosure should be assisted to accept their homosexuality as well as their ability to manage society's reaction (Hollander, 1989). The developmental model proposed by Cass (1979) holds that homosexual identity formation progresses in stages. These stages are self-labelling, self-disclosure and finally developing a positive gay identity. In her Homosexual Identity Formation (HIF) model, Cass (1979) mentions that there are six stages of coming out. These are identity confusion; identity comparison; identity tolerance; identity acceptance; identity pride; and identity synthesis. Going through these stages is motivated by the individual's desire to establish congruence between self-perception and the environment.

Festinger's (1957) cognitive dissonance theory proposes that if individuals are made aware of attitudes and behaviours which are not consistent with perceived societal expectations the individual will attempt to modify attitudes and behaviours to reduce tension and dissonance. This theory further suggests that people are rational conforming beings. This means that when non-conformity is recognised it causes discomfort, resulting in the individual's attempt to realign thoughts, attitudes and behaviours in a conforming way. An individual experiencing same-sex feelings, may initially feel confused. This occurs as an attempt to resolve dissonance between societal norms and the individual's own feelings as illustrated by his or her confusion during the transition stage. When the individual accepts homosexuality or if they identify with a group where homosexuality is a norm, consonance can be achieved.

Constant contact with 'homosexual sub-cultures' can validate and normalise homosexuality as a way of life for the individual. Therefore homosexual identity should be viewed in a social context and not solely at the individual level, confirming identity through social construction (Cass, 1979).

Some aspects of 'coming out' have been explored by various researchers. These include awareness of same-sex feelings, attraction, initial homosexual encounters, participation in homosexual or gay subcultures, labelling oneself as gay and disclosing the identity to significant others (Lee, 1977; Shafer, 1976; Troiden, 1979). Researchers have attempted to organise and interpret experiences of coming out experiences in relation to homosexual identity formation (Cass, 1979; Shafer, 1976; Troiden, 1979).

There are some however, who do not support the view that disclosure is necessarily best. There is a general devaluation of gay men and lesbians, locally and internationally. Individuals who disclose their sexual identities risk being shunned socially and abused in society (Broach, 1998). Some lesbians have developed strategies to avoid unnecessary disclosure and subsequent abuse or ill-treatment because of their sexuality. These are briefly discussed next.

Strategies for disclosure

Teimann, Kennedy, and Haga (1998), in their study of rural lesbian women's access to healthcare, identified four main protective strategies for disclosure, they are: screening; planned disclosure; unplanned disclosure; and non-disclosure. These strategies are briefly discussed below.

Screening is the first strategy applied. The purpose of this strategy is to identify someone (in this instance a healthcare practitioner) who is sensitive to lesbians should they intentionally or accidentally disclose their sexual orientation. This strategy employs two main techniques: the first is to gain information from other lesbians about their experience with the particular individual, to establish if they are "safe" to approach. Secondly they would obtain a referral from a 'lesbian-friendly' individual for advice for someone they think may not discriminate against them. Eliason (1995) adds that lesbians at times are not even aware of other lesbians around them, unless the lesbian decided to reveal their sexual orientation, due to their similarity to heterosexual women. She also comments on the isolation that these women face, especially in rural communities.

Unplanned disclosure is described as being risky. This type of disclosure occurs unexpectedly and is prompted or triggered by an event during an interaction with an individual. An example would be if a lesbian is asked about contraception, she would probably provide a response that may reveal her sexuality. The response to unplanned disclosure may not always be to the advantage of the lesbian. She may find herself rejected by a member of society, who may then further disclose her sexuality to others (Eliason, 1992).

Planned disclosure is employed when the individual believes that it is necessary or desirable to disclose their sexuality. Similar to the screening the woman has to determine how a particular healthcare provider would react when confronted with the revelation of her sexual orientation. She would screen the individual, by consulting others, before revealing her sexual orientation to the healthcare provider (Eliason, 1995).

Non-disclosure is the strategy where the individual withholds revealing their sexual orientation to people around them. The decision will depend on the individual's residence; in some areas when people are suspected or known to be lesbian they may get killed.

One of the main reasons for these strategies being developed by lesbians is to ensure that they are not rejected by community members. As they are often gossiped about, shunned and ostracised. They are encouraged to leave and often face acts of violence (Teimann, et. al., 1998).

The above-mentioned processes are well researched however, they imply a 'uniform process' to coming out or refusal to come out. Social constructionism as a theory would focus more on the meaning that people create within their social contexts. This research will challenge the above-mentioned sequences of coming out to explore the unique experiences of individuals and their ascribed meanings to their individual coming out experiences (Burr, 1995).

2.5.3 Disclosure in South Africa

Butler (2008) conducted a study exploring the coming out process of South African youth noting the effects of the political climate on the coming out process. He discusses defence mechanisms that young people adopt in order to survive in a society that is often intolerant of homosexuality. The negative responses by families and their communities make it difficult for young people to openly express their homosexuality. Butler (2008) identifies the defence

mechanisms as denial, avoidance, compartmentalisation, suppression, compensation, sublimation, undoing, displacement, rationalisation and intellectualisation. Butler (2008) concedes that his sample did not represent both gay and lesbian experiences adequately as he employed purposive sampling with a total of 16 male participants and only two female participants. His reason for the unbalanced sample was that lesbians were less forthcoming, thus contributing to the invisibility of lesbians in research accounts in South Africa. He proposed a multidisciplinary study into homosexuality in South Africa, encouraging the use of more diverse samples. One of the reasons for studying homosexuality and engaging the topic is to ensure that young people are emotionally prepared, thereby allowing them to assume a positive gay identity (Butler, 2008).

I will emphasise that individuals who do not disclose their sexuality are often viewed in a negative light. Social construction would argue why it is that homosexual individuals have to disclose their sexual orientation when heterosexual individuals do not. Both constructs are socially constructed but why is it that those belonging to the one orientation feel compelled to disclose (Burr, 1995). This study is not aimed at advocating that all homosexual individuals disclose their sexuality but rather that when they decide to, they are not discriminated against for doing so.

Internationally there appears to be a growing body of literature on disclosure. In South Africa however, much research has to be done in order to facilitate an understanding of lesbian identities in order to promote tolerance towards black lesbians.

2.6 Conclusion

The study has clarified that constructs such as sex, gender and sexuality are socially constructed. Through this understanding the meanings that have resulted from these interactions are also socially constructed. It has therefore provided the insight that highlights these meanings as being time and culture specific. Perhaps with time, stigma and homophobia may cease to exist when new meanings are constructed around same-sex sexuality, allowing people to disclose sexuality without pre-empted fears.

Participant selection, data collection, as well as data analysis will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This current chapter will explore the research methodology employed in the study. It will begin by describing the characteristics of qualitative research that necessitated its use in the current study. The focus will then shift to the methods of sampling, data collection, data analysis as well as the ethical issues in the study, all embedded in social constructionism as the theoretical framework in the current study.

3.2 Qualitative Research

Social construction questions conventional knowledge based on objective, unbiased observation of the world. As a result it is often seen as being critical of empiricism and positivism (Burr, 1995). A qualitative method has therefore been employed in the current study as it complements social construction theory. Qualitative research aims to obtain subjective knowledge that will be relayed by the participants in their experiences of disclosure. The relevance of qualitative research lies in the need to move away from objective descriptions of measurable and static realities offered by quantitative methods. Social construction is embedded in the construction of realities within the relevant contexts in which they occur. Studying phenomena in the context in which they occur is one of the core principles of qualitative research (Flick, 2009). The principles of qualitative research will be discussed below.

3.2.1 Principles of Qualitative Research

Flick (2009) elaborates on the principles of qualitative research; these are briefly discussed below:

Appropriateness of method

Quantitative research may often restrict the researcher from studying certain topics due to the rigidity with which it is associated with. Social phenomena such as the one currently being studied cannot be quantified as is required in empirical research. Empirical methods often require phenomena to be studied in a controlled environment. This cannot be guaranteed when studying social phenomena as the study subject is better understood when

studied in their natural environment. Opportunely, qualitative research supplies me with the tools to collect rich data as well as methods to analyse the data. For instance this study has employed semi-structured qualitative interviews to collect data. I conducted the interviews in locations where the participants felt comfortable being interviewed. The data was analysed using thematic analysis (Flick, 2009). The researcher has been a part of the knowledge construction and my presence also informed the outcomes of the research study which is consistent with social construction theory; where knowledge is created through a series of negotiated meanings in social interactions (Burr, 1995).

Perspectives of the participant and their diversity

According to social constructionism, understanding the world is based on categories and concepts that are historically and culturally specific. The topic that one hopes to understand can be understood differently depending on the location and era of one's existence (Burr, 1995). Qualitative research takes into account the diversity of phenomena and views them holistically. This involves being aware of the different subjective perspectives and social background related to them. In so doing it informs other disciplines and allows for the constructions of wider reaching interventions on a subject matter. This in social constructionism relates to the various contributors to knowledge construction. In this instance lesbian disclosures when being unpacked may also expose other related but independent factors that influence the life of lesbians. For instance the sexual health of lesbians can be addressed without them being exposed as being lesbians, if health care practitioners standardised certain health examinations to encompass all sexualities. The data obtained in qualitative research includes additional information that would otherwise be overlooked (Flick, 2009).

Reflexivity of the researcher

In qualitative research the researcher is viewed as part of the knowledge construction process. The researcher's presence is as well as the impact of actions and observation are acknowledged as part of the research process and not omitted. How the researcher feels, his or her impressions and irritations all become part of the meaning and interpretations of findings (Flick, 2009).

Reflexivity refers to the ability of the researcher to be aware of the impact that he or she may have on the research. This includes feelings, emotions, as well as the researcher's subjective views towards the research process. The documenting of all these feelings and

thoughts adds to the authenticity of the research process (Flick, 2009). Mruck and Breuer (2008) discuss the importance of the influence the researcher has on the research process. The interactions that take place between participant and researcher as well as how these impacts on the research process and therefore the outcomes are discussed. The attempt of social researchers to objectively conduct research is questionable. My interaction with each participant has had an impact on the research. My culture and values form part of the research process (Mruck & Breuer, 2008).

As I have previously mentioned my presence and interest in the topic being studied has undoubtedly impacted on the outcomes. Prior to the research taking place I was already aware of the possible impact that my sexual orientation could have on the study. Being a heterosexual black female conducting research on homosexual black females already carries implications for the dynamics of the study as these constructs are often viewed as opposites. There are preconceptions that I have about invisible 'tensions' that exist between heterosexuals and homosexuals. These and all other encounters have been documented in my research journal aimed at capturing how I reflect on my feelings during the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

Variety of approaches and methods in qualitative research

Qualitative research is not based on a unified theoretical and methodological concept. It employs various theoretical approaches and the methods involving intensive discussions of the research practice. Flick (2009) identifies three theoretical approaches to qualitative research that informs the specific methodological focus of a study. The first theoretical approach focuses on subjective viewpoints. The second theoretical approach focuses on the making of the research studies and course of interactions between the theory, paradigm and subject matter. The third theoretical approach focuses on reconstructing structures of the social field and the meanings of dormant practices in society, which due to time and changes in culture become dormant. The current study employs the initial approach of focusing on the subjective viewpoints of the participants who share their subjective experiences of their lesbian identity and their experience of disclosure. Social constructionism has been used to understand the construction of disclosure and the meanings attached by the participants (Flick, 2009). I will briefly discuss the approach of subjective viewpoint in relation to the current study.

Subjective viewpoint

Subjective meaning in research can be understood as meanings that individuals attribute to their activities and their environment. This concept has subsequently been coined as symbolic interaction by Blumer (1962). He focuses on three main premises that are the foundation to this approach namely:

“human beings act towards things on the basis of the meaning that the things have for them...the second premise is that meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of the social interaction that one has with fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters” (Blumer, 1962, p.2).

Using social constructionism I attempt to acquire subjective meanings in the construction of knowledge about the experiences of black lesbians in Pretoria. These meanings will take into consideration disclosure in relation to social interactions with friends and families and society. These subjective meanings will also be analysed in relation to their universality and uniqueness to the participants, which will speak to a collective construction of realities and meanings as prescribed by social constructionism.

3.3 Sampling

This section will focus on the sampling method employed in this study as well as the challenges that I encountered during the selection of participants. It will first focus on the criteria for selection and the sample description. It will finally focus on snowball sampling and the challenges involved in obtaining a sample.

3.3.1 Criteria for participation

The research was conducted in Pretoria, in various locations where participants felt comfortable meeting. Research participants have self-described as being lesbians and are willing to speak about their experiences of having disclosed their sexuality to either friends or family members and what these experiences have meant to them.

3.3.2 Sample description

The participants were selected according to their race, sexual orientation and should have disclosed their sexuality to either friends or family. These are the basic criteria for qualification for participation. I approached a local gay and lesbian organisation requesting consent and assistance with recruitment of participants for the study (refer to Appendix D).

I have interviewed a sample of five black females, who either self-identified as being lesbian or are at least involved in a relationship with other women within the age range of 20-21. Two of the participants were from a common peri-urban area while the other three were from suburban areas. Participants were from upper to middle-class families, having pursued or in the process of pursuing a tertiary education. Participants will be discussed more in detail in chapter 4. The sample size has been sufficient as it allows for ample information about the relevant themes to reach a point of saturation in the data.

3.3.3 Snowball sampling

I had perceived that my sample would be difficult to locate. I therefore employed snowball sampling as a sampling method in the current study. Snowball sampling is often employed when the sample being studied is hidden, either as a result of low numbers or due to the sensitivity of the topic. The participants were also invisible, because they are not validated by society (Browne, 2005).

Snowball sampling entails the recruitment of participants through the use of social networks. An associate may introduce the researcher to potential participants and then the participants introduce interested potential participants to the researcher until the sample is saturated (Browne, 2005).

As a result I enlisted the assistance of Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transsexual (LGBT) organisation (see Appendix D) with the recruitment of participants. The gay and lesbian organisation helped me establish contact with participants, however, they were either unwilling to participate or they did not meet with the requirements for the sample of the current research study. Where the sexual orientation transgressed dominant heterosexual codes, like in the current study, sampling of participants is often met with reluctance from the participants (Faugier & Sargeant, 1997). As a result of the reluctance of the participants I had to use other social networks of interpersonal relationships to obtain the required sample (Browne, 2005). I resorted to requesting assistance from a friend who was employed at an

HIV research organisation. She was acquainted with lesbians because of the interactions during certain conjoined campaigns.

I obtained the first participant's information from this associate who subsequently referred me to other participants. These participants through snowball sampling resulted in all my participants finally being recruited. During my search for participants I understood what was implied by the invisibility of lesbians. Browne (2005) identifies that heterosexism as well as genderism are culprits in isolating women, where women's subjective experiences of alternative lifestyles are being studied. She cites that these dominant constructions make women feel inferior about their sexualities which often oppose heterosexual gender norms (Browne, 2005).

In her study Browne (2005) identified advantages to snowball sampling. She identified that snowball sampling within a network assisted snowball sampling, was advantageous in that it avoids certain biases associated with "categorisation of groups" (p. 49). This meant that women did not associate with a certain social group, hence there was no bias or unified philosophy. The challenge however, is that the participants do not necessarily identify as being lesbian, they are non-heterosexual. Three participants are not out and proud. Similarly the sample that was obtained in the current study shares similar traits with those mentioned in Browne's (2005) research in that the participants had their own views about their sexuality often unique to the individual. They did not share in politics often assumed by individuals who affiliate to a certain social group. Snowball sampling within networks allowed for the study to obtain a different sample from what would have been provided by the LGBT organisation as initially planned. The organisation would have provided a sample that was possibly more comfortable with their sexuality, having certain philosophies about sexualities which are often indoctrinated within such organisations.

3.4 Data collection

Knowledge of the world is constructed by people between themselves. It is through the daily interaction of our social interactions that knowledge is fabricated (Burr, 1995). This study has employed the use of qualitative semi-structured interviews to collect data (see appendix A for the interview guide). The qualitative interviews have allowed me to engage with the participants whilst it has also provided me with visual information. This in-depth qualitative method of data collection has allowed me to obtain rich data pertaining to the participants' experiences, which would not be easily afforded by other non-qualitative methods (Flick,

2009). The participants were a part of the knowledge construction process. They allowed me access to their subjective experiences during the interview (Kitzinger, 1987).

3.4.1 Semi-structured interview

One of the primary motivations for conducting semi-structured qualitative interviews was to allow the participants to share as much of their experiences without any interference of structure that has the potential to break a participant's train of thought.

There are four main reasons that I derived from Burman (1994) for conducting interviews as a data collection tool. These are briefly discussed. Interviews have allowed for participants to relay subjective meanings about their experiences of disclosure which would not be possible on a questionnaire due to its limiting nature. The process has also allowed me to explore social issues that would otherwise be difficult to quantify in quantitative methods, for instance experience is considered to be an abstract construct that cannot be quantified but through the interview I have been able to gain insight into the participant's subjective experiences. Finally the interviews allowed me to see the extent of the influence that I had on the complete outcomes of the research in terms of the power relations within the research in relation to whether the participants feel intimidated by the researcher or vice versa. Having access to the participants subjective knowledge allowed me to tap into what they were thinking at the moment and capitalise on issues relating to the subject matter that were not necessarily being questioned (Burman, 1994).

The interview process allowed me to interact with the participants. I saw their reactions when answering questions and they saw my reactions to their responses. There is often an attempt to maintain the flow of the interview during a structured interview which is often interrupted by questions posed by the participants, or even issues that the participant raises of which the researcher is not aware. Due to the semi-structured interview I was able to be flexible and welcome questions from participants. I was also able to pose additional questions that were not necessarily on the schedule in response to what a participant may have said (Burman, 1994). The interviews have been captured on tape for the transcribed interviews (see Appendix C).

3.5 Data analysis

The present research embedded in social constructionism uses thematic analysis to analyse the data. The thematic analysis allows for the themes that arise from the constructed reality relayed by participants to be captured and relayed in the research findings. Thematic

analysis therefore requires an understanding of the content provided by the transcribed interviews. Thus I have familiarised myself with the transcripts. By repetitive reading of the transcripts, I identified common themes within the data. With the themes having been identified they have been categorised in a manner that served to provide comprehensible interpretation. Themes that did not align with the aims of the study are discarded.

As data were being reviewed, through the testing of themes in the data, headings were generated through merging correlating categories. This was followed by the searching of relationships between categories and then linking them to produce a holistic picture of the experiences of disclosure by participants (Aronson, 1994).

The above mentioned steps towards the analysis of the data will be unpacked below:

Step 1: Familiarisation and immersion

Having transcribed the recorded interviews, I read the transcribed interviews repeatedly allowing me to become familiar with the data. I then immersed myself in the data so that I could make sense of the data provided by the participants (Aronson, 1994).

Step 2: Thematising

The data begins to develop into themes, related to the aim of the study. These themes were labelled in sentences that I clustered together (Aronson, 1994).

Step 3: Categorisation of themes

Having compiled the themes I grouped similar themes together forming categories. These categories were appropriately labelled, clearly defining each one. This made it possible to identify the meaning units that belong in the category as well as those that did not. These categories were then combined to form broader categories that provide a more comprehensive depiction of the participants' views and attitudes. This involved a process of induction where concepts are developed from the data and raised to higher levels of constructs which described interrelationships in the data (Aronson, 1994).

Step 4: Elaboration, reliability and validity: stability and credibility

Elaboration

During this phase I explored the themes that were generated along with the separated and combined categories within which themes were closely grouped. This involved a process of refinement, during which themes and categories that did not belong together were regrouped, sub-issues were also explored in great depth. This allowed me to gain new perspectives and deeper meaning than in the initial analysis of the data. This required that changes be made to the grouping of certain data.

At this stage I revisited the transcripts and engaged in the process. I interacted with the participant's background I also engaged with my supervisor and colleagues regarding the accounts that had developed in the data. I reflected on my own feelings, my assumptions as well as my understanding of the insight gained from the literature and the data. The value of the reflexive journal was particularly notable as it allowed for systematic evaluation of my contribution to the analytic conclusions that were reached.

I consistently questioned my understanding, looking for shortcomings in my interpretations of the data. I looked for alternative understandings and engaged in what Tesch (1990, p. 68.) describes as a "hermeneutic spiral". I reviewed the data over and over again, going back and revisiting the associations between the individual components of the text.

Validity and reliability: Stability and credibility

While analysing the data I became aware of the perceived challenges of reliability and validity within the qualitative research. When conducting research it is important that the data show degrees of validity and reliability. Since both reliability and validity are embedded in positivism it is necessary to redefine them to a naturalistic approach. Reliability can be defined as *"the extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study"* (Joppe, 2000, p. 7). In qualitative research stability is the equivalent of reliability within quantitative research. Stability has therefore been ensured through a process of repeatedly selecting themes and grouping them. This was achieved through the circular progression through data segments until the themes and categories achieved stability (Golfshani, 2003).

Validity, in quantitative research, refers to the extent to which a study achieves what it initially set out to achieve. The equivalent to validity in qualitative research is called credibility. Credibility refers to the correspondence between the way in which participants view certain things and the way in which they are portrayed in the study (Golfshani, 2003). Gottschalk (1995) has identified that the credibility of thematic analysis refers to the correspondence between the categories identified to the conclusion to the study and the generalisability of results to theory. The processes that I followed to ensure credibility are briefly discussed.

Going through the research cycle several times

I repeatedly interpreted the data. I also refined and extended on categories as I proceeded with my analysis. I differentiated and integrated themes as and when the need arose until I reached theoretical saturation. In doing so, I was able to compile an account that was of relevance to this study.

Systemic use of checking

Reason and Rowan (1981) identified that it was of great importance to invite peers, colleagues and supervisors to challenge and critique the analysis in order to provide new ideas into the inquiry. In this study, I discussed my interpretations extensively with my supervisor.

Step 5: Interpretation and checking

This refers to my interpretations and final written account of the experiences of disclosure of black lesbians in Pretoria as well as the meanings that they ascribed to these experiences. To verify the findings, extracts of the interviews are provided as well as links made between themes and categories generated in the interviews as well as themes identified in the literature. This involves a process of comparison where differences as well as similarities have been identified between the theoretic framework as well as the generated data.

3.6 Ethics

According to the Social Research Association (Social Research Association, 2003) guidelines I have obligations in the research process. I have taken the appropriate guidelines into consideration and have refrained from imposing my culture and values on the

participants. The nature of this research requires the participants to be fully informed about the aims and processes of this research. I informed the participants verbally that they received a consent form explaining the nature of the research as well as their rights as participants (Appendix B). Participants were informed of their right to confidentiality, anonymity and because they are volunteers they may withdraw from the research whenever they feel uncomfortable (McIntyre, 2005). They were also required to give signed consent for their participation and were therefore required to complete the consent form. As they are all above the age of 18 no parental consent would be required (McIntyre, 2005). This is taking into consideration the ethical implications of conducting research on minors without the consent of their legal guardians. By obtaining consent from the guardian the researcher risks indirectly disclosing the participant's sexual orientation, where the participant may not yet have disclosed.

The South African legislation has been taken into consideration ensuring the human rights of the participants and audience (Social Research Association, 2003). These research findings will undoubtedly add to the body of knowledge on the topic of lesbian realities. It will also create an awareness of the social issues that arise around lesbian realities in South Africa and also provide recommendations for future studies towards the eradication of violence against lesbians. The accessibility of these results will ensure the dissemination of knowledge as a responsibility of social science is upheld (Social Research Association, 2003). The research results of the research will be available to the participants at the end of the study. The data will be collected from the participants using a tape recorder. It will be stored in a locked cabinet for the required period of 15 years in order to protect the confidentiality of the participants (McIntyre, 2005).

Permission to conduct the current research study has been granted by the ethics committee and various other committees at the University of Pretoria within the Department of Psychology. Consent to conduct the interview was obtained from each participant.

I ensured that the participants understood my role as researcher and that the relationship that existed between me and any participant at any given time was that of researcher-participant. A counsellor was availed to the participants for debriefing, when the need arose.

3.7 Conclusion

The research process involved six steps as listed below. These steps developed as a guideline for qualitative research as described by Aronson (1994). The steps were

characterised by a logical and circular process, which has led to the findings of the current study. The findings will be discussed in the next chapter.

Step 1: A literature study was conducted on concepts in relation to the aims of the research study.

Step 2: The literature search guides the development of the research question used in the current study.

Step 3: The interviews were conducted.

Step 4: The interviews were transcribed and fully analysed.

Step 5: The analysed interviews were discussed in terms of the literature study.

Step 6: The conclusions and recommendations were made based on the analysis.

Chapter 4: Findings and discussion

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter the findings are discussed in detail, taking into account previous research into the current research topic. The research explored the experiences of disclosures by black lesbians, between the ages of 18 and 21 in Pretoria. This analysis was based on themes that consistently emerged from the transcripts of the interviews conducted with the research participants. I was able to identify certain themes by reading through the transcripts four times. The themes were then corroborated with the initial themes that were in the literature review, while incorporating the theoretical framework. Themes from all interviews were examined in order to determine the most consistent themes that emerged from the text (McCracken, 1998). The identification of initial themes enabled me to recognise basic themes in the transcripts. There were three main categories that emerged from the collected data and altogether ten themes were identified. The identified themes aimed at highlighting the commonly recurring experiences by the participants. Although the initial perception was that the experiences were unique, there appeared to be many similarities between the participants' experiences.

The chapter begins by illustrating the biographical information of the participants. It is followed by a discussion of my perceptions of each of the five participants, owing to reflexivity. Burr (1995) emphasises that as the social construction of knowledge is co-created, it is important to understand the relationship between myself and participants' interactions during the interviews. It will then be followed by a detailed discussion of the findings.

In the following paragraphs biographic information of the participants is provided. It is then followed by my impression of each interview participant as well as an overall impression of the interviewing experience in general.

4.2 Biographical information of the participants

This section provided a description of the sample as illustrated in chapter 3. The table has been provided to give an overall view of the sample, including area of residence, age, relationship status, employment status as well as their disclosure status.

As illustrated in Table 1 all five participants were from Pretoria, from both urban and semi-urban areas (Soshanguve, Pretoria East, Silver Lakes, and Brooklyn). They were aged between twenty and twenty one, with three of the participants being twenty one and two participants being twenty. The table further illustrates that three of the participants were currently in relationships while the other two were single.

The participants had all disclosed to a friend about being involved in a homosexual relationship. Of the five participants only two participants had not disclosed their involvement in homosexual relationships to their family, three participants had disclosed to family (siblings and cousins) about their same-sex relationships.

Participant	Age	Academic	Employment status	Sexual orientation	Relationship status	Disclosed to friends	Disclosed to family	Residential area
Andile	21	Studying: Diploma	Unemployed	Lesbian	In a relationship	Yes	Yes	Soshanguve (Home)
Buhle	21	Studying: Degree	Unemployed	Lesbian	In a relationship	Yes	No	Soshanguve (Home)
Celiwe	20	Studying: Degree	Unemployed	Bisexual/lesbian	Single	Yes	Yes	Brooklyn (Flat)
Delile	20	Studying Degree	Unemployed	Lesbian	Single	Yes	No	Silver Lakes (Flat)
Eleanor	21	Completed Degree	Employed	Lesbian/bisexual	In a relationship	Yes	Yes	Pretoria East (Home)

Table 1: Summary of participants' biographical information

4.3 The researcher's reflection on each of the interview participants

In this section I will discuss my views of each participant. I will discuss their outlook and the feelings they each evoked in me during the interview sessions.

4.3.1 Interview participant 1: Andile

This interview was conducted in my car in the parking lot at a mall. The reason we both agreed on the interview being conducted in the car was due to the clash in both our

schedule. She decided that I should meet up with her after school and conduct the interview, wherever I found her. Andile came across as very confident and appeared to be a comfortable participant. She appeared to be aware of daily challenges resulting from her sexual orientation. She was insightful and willing to share her experiences freely. She appeared to be well-adjusted and identified herself as being a woman who loved other women. She advocated for research, such as the current research, to be done as it would shed light on the challenges faced by lesbians in society. She openly expressed that the kind of treatment endured by lesbians in society made life difficult in that it encroached on their public space and forced them into seclusion. She demonstrated a diverse understanding of the isolation and necessary precautions associated with being lesbian. She appeared to be a strong young woman with ambition and aspirations like any other young lady her age.

My reflection during the interview

This was by far the most enjoyable interview for me. The participant seemed to be comfortable and mature in her understanding of herself. She did not have any reservations about any questions that I posed to her. I really felt happy after conducting this interview. However, at the time I had reservations about her answers as to whether or not they would fit in with my literature at the time.

4.3.2 Interview participant 2: Buhle

This interview was conducted in an office at a University. Buhle came across as being guarded and she did not like being addressed as a she, as “she” felt she was actually a man trapped in a woman’s body”. For this reason I will address Buhle as he, for the remainder of this study. He was knowledgeable about his situation as a lesbian in South Africa and expressed that he did not believe it was necessary to disclose his sexuality. He did not think it was of any consequence whether he disclosed or not. Based on his appearance he did not mind if people came to their own conclusion of his sexuality but for safety reasons he mentioned that he would never openly discuss his sexuality with anyone he did not need to. He was insightful and candid in his approach.

My reflection during the interview

This was a captivating interview in that it exposed me to a different type of participant, one that I had only heard about. Buhle was refreshing in that he did not fit in with what I had imagined a lesbian participant in my study would be like. He identified as being lesbian by

default, which qualified him for my study. I was fascinated by this participant and enjoyed this interview and all that it taught me.

4.3.3 Interview participant 3: Celiwe

This interview was conducted in an office at a University. Celiwe was a colourful participant who did not believe in labels and did not internalise any external reactions from others whether they be stares or gossip. She believed that because she did not know for certain what was being said she could not bother herself wondering about things she would never know. She appeared to be in a discovery phase as we spoke more about her experiences, during the interview. She made observations about her sexuality that she claimed she was not aware of. She had a distinctive perspective about her sexuality as well as other aspects of her life that other participants did not have.

My reflection during the interview

This participant made me nervous in that she did not answer questions directly. She used metaphors and explained everything we discussed at length. She was philosophical in her approach. My main concern was with the amount of time I would spend transcribing her interview. I did enjoy her refreshing outlook of the world. She really had a unique perspective which I found fascinating. At the end I was intrigued by how she perceived the world. She was funny and we laughed a lot during this interview. She did not conform to what society perceives to be 'normal' and expressed that she often went out of her way to be what she considered authentic. She had unconventional views of how society should be organised and how people should conduct themselves.

4.3.4 Interview participant 4: Delile

This interview was conducted in an office at a University. Delile seemed to be well aware of herself, her family as well as society's expectations of her. She was very informed of what was going on in society, especially in relation to the challenges lesbians face. She appeared to be aware of the two worlds in which she existed; the world that represented her freedom and further self-discovery; and the world where societal expectations had to be met. She was earnest and philosophical in her outlook.

My reflection during the interview

Initially I thought that the interview would be short and very direct, as she was very concise. She however, proved to be articulate and came across as being intelligent. She had an unusual perception towards other lesbians which baffled me a bit. She appeared to dislike those who conformed to the pre-existing lesbian identity consistent with dominant constructions in that she felt that they were playing out a prescribed script. She was the most formal interview that I conducted, in that she did not explain more than she felt was necessary. She did not laugh much during the interview and conducted herself in a very serious manner.

4.3.5 Interview participant 5: Eleanor

This interview was conducted in her place of work. Eleanor was an out-going personality. She shared as much of her experiences in a sincere manner. She fears disclosure beyond her safe space as she was well aware of the possibility of rejection and the stigma associated with being homosexual. She did make an interesting observation, about her rights as a South African, as stipulated in our Constitution. This was interesting in that regardless of their awareness of the Constitution, other participants did not appear to take it as seriously. They still presented with fears of being attacked. She appeared sheltered and seemed unaware of the realities that the other participants seemed to face. She was bubbly and playful in her approach but serious when required to be.

My reflection during the interview

While conducting this interview I was nervous and attempted not to be too familiar with the participant as I knew her socially. I was tired as I had been conducting interviews the whole day. My concern was that she did not associate with being a lesbian completely and that this would skew my findings. I was however, reassured in that social construction allows for diversity as people differ and are individually influenced by an interaction of a wide range of constructs, ranging from family, different cultures and subculture that emerge within their communities and society at large.

4.3.6 Overall impression of the interview participants

The participants were candid about their experiences and generally came across as being sincere in their interest in this study. They were willing to share information with me, despite

my initial reservations about their ability to easily share information. The participants comprised of educated young individuals who were articulate and expressive. The interviews were all conducted in a location where the participants felt comfortable being interviewed. All the participants were fluent in English and all preferred to communicate in English. Therefore all interviews were conducted in English.

I perceived the participants to be quite comfortable with my style of interviewing. They were well aware that I was heterosexual. This did not appear to be an issue as they openly discussed their experiences with me. They predominantly understood why I was conducting the study in that the consent form I presented to them gave them adequate information about the study. They were interested in the final outcomes of the study. I informed them that I would provide them with a copy of the final report.

4.4 Findings and discussion

This section focuses on the presentation and discussion of the themes that emerged during the analysis of the interview transcripts. The text from the interviews has been reduced to phrases and words to enable me to focus on the specific information that related to the aims of the research. There are ten dominant themes that have been identified in the data. They have been arranged in groups according to their relevance and grouped into three categories. Each of the categories will be discussed with reference to the literature. The categories will be briefly outlined in Table 2 below.

Identified categories	Descriptions	Identified themes
<i>Category 1: Awareness of same-sex attraction</i>	Discusses the awareness of same sex attraction. It explores the participants' initial experience of having same-sex feelings. This theme is relevant as it provides some insight into the age at which the participant becomes aware of their same-sex feelings. These themes will later be used to challenge the idea	<i>Theme 1: Dominant constructions of identified lesbian identities</i> <i>Theme 2: Identifying same-sex feelings</i> <i>Theme 3: Perceived permanency vs. the fluidity of lesbian identities</i>

	that same sex sexuality is an influence of the West, and that it is un-African. It will further be used to corroborate that there are few role models with whom black lesbians can identify during their identity formation.	
Category 2: Experiences of disclosure	Explores the experiences of disclosure. It focuses on both the participants' decisions to disclose as well as non-disclosure. The participants' accounts of disclosure will be discussed with emphasis on the uniqueness of the experiences. It also focuses on the preferences that participants have in relation to whom they choose to disclose their sexuality, as well as the meaning they ascribed to the reactions of the individuals to whom they disclose.	<i>Theme 1: Initial disclosure</i> <i>Theme 2: Disclosing to family</i> <i>Theme 3: Disclosure as relating to identity and lifestyle</i>
Category 3: External perceptions as a deterrent to self-acceptance	Focuses on external influences as a deterrent to disclosure. This category hones in on the participants' experiences of their social interactions with others, while exploring the possibility of the social climate as a deterrent to self-acceptance	<i>Theme 1: Homosexuality as being un-African</i> <i>Theme 2: The nature of associations with other lesbians</i> <i>Theme 3: Threat of corrective rape</i>

	as well as acceptance by others. It further explores the participants' relationships within the 'lesbian community'.	<i>Theme 4: Prudence for tolerance</i>
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Table 2: Categories and themes identified in the analysis

These categories will be explored and the individual themes will be unpacked in detail in the following paragraphs.

4.5 Category 1: Awareness of same-sex attraction

The themes that emerged in this category are discussed in detail. As mentioned in Table 2 the category discusses the awareness of same sex attraction. The themes that constitute this category are discussed according to their prominence in the transcripts. The following themes will be discussed in this category:

Theme 1: Dominant constructions of identified lesbian identities

Theme 2: Identifying same-sex feelings

Theme 3: Perceived permanency vs. the fluidity of lesbian identities

4.5.1 Theme 1: Dominant constructions of identified lesbian identities

As sex, gender and sexuality are often viewed as interchangeable constructs, it is of importance that these distinctions be clarified especially when relating to the participants' responses. These concepts are briefly explained here. Sex is the biological category used to classify bodies, while gender is the social imposition aimed at dividing the sexes, assigned based on biological predispositions of an individual and sexuality consists of social practices regarding erotic desire, pleasure and at times reproduction (Carr, 2005). The gender identity of the participants often relates to their sexual orientation and this is clearly illustrated in the above mentioned literature as well as in the responses provided by the participants. I will first discuss participants' gender identification before discussing the various lesbian identities participants mentioned during the interviews.

Ascribing gender identity

According to social construction theory, gender, sex and sexuality are constructed differently within different settings. Therefore they cannot be assumed to be universal and permanent. Social constructionists oppose the idea of gender as a property of individuals as well as the idea of gender as an enduring aspect of individuals. Social construction theory states that it is through a social process that we constantly construct male and female categories. According to social construction theory the construction of sex, biology and bodies is not considered an ahistorical given (Eagly et al., 2004,). With the social constructionist view of gender in mind the participants' gender identities, as discussed in this section, inform their sexual identification. Gender identity in this context speaks to whether the participants considered themselves as being male or female as this may or may not inform the individual's sexuality. When asked about their gender identity, four participants (Andile, Celiwe, Delile, and Eleanor) responded that they identified as being female. Delile described herself as a *"young, black, female"*, but Buhle responded by saying *"...honestly, I think, I see myself sort of as a man trapped in a woman's body..."* It was necessary to establish the gender of the participants because the gender of lesbians is often assumed. As depicted by the participants here, gender is not a given and it should therefore not be taken for granted. The criteria for participating in the study would have had to be revised to include the wide range of characteristics that had not been considered in the proposal of this study however, due to the ever-changing and self-developing nature of knowledge within social construction, engaging with the participants has created a platform for further creation of meaning to gender that I was not initially exposed to as a researcher.

Dominant constructions of lesbian identities

Taking the participants' gender identity into consideration, I explored the dominant constructions of lesbian identities drawn on by the participants' responses. Three main lesbian identities were mentioned by the participants and a fourth identity was discussed by one of the participants. The dominant constructions of lesbian identities identified in this study were the butch lesbian, the femme lesbian and the tom or tomboy lesbian. The final lesbian identity identified by one participant is the futch lesbian.

These dominant constructions of lesbian identities will be discussed in accordance with the identities that the participants ascribe to themselves, their general understanding of each identity as well as the implications of these identities on dating. These classifications provide

insight into dominant constructions on lesbian identities and will be discussed in the paragraphs below.

According to the participants the butch lesbian is a woman who identifies with a male identity. Only one participant (Buhle) ascribed to this identity. This was apparent in the way she dressed, her interest and her general behaviour. The participants generally described this type of lesbian identity with references to dressing like a man, not being well groomed and being rough as Delile describes:

“the butch ones the ones I don’t like these ones they will wear, you know your Brentwood shoes they’ll wear men’s your flannel shirt they’ll wear a tie, they’ll wear a jersey and they’ll wear a whole lot of stuff so that you don’t see that they have breast they’ll cut their hair , you know, they just won’t look after themselves nine times out of ten they’re very abusive.”

The butch lesbian identity is the most identifiable lesbian identity. Hence when heterosexual women dress like males they are often mistaken for being butch lesbians. A butch identity can pose great risk to those assuming it, as they can be attacked by homophobic members of society. There was a general view among participants that the butch lesbian can only date the femme lesbian. One participant equated the butch lesbian dating another butch lesbian to a male dating another male. This was interesting in that such paradoxes were observed and shunned by a lesbian participant. The butch identity was generally portrayed and viewed in a negative light by participants. According to Munt and Smyth (1998) butch lesbians are perceived negatively because masculinity associated with females is viewed as “a physical liability and body defect” (p. 60). This view highlights the contrast between the socially constructed feminine role associated with being female and the socially constructed masculine role associated with being male.

It also highlights how gender is naturalised in dominant constructions in that although gender is a social construct in dominant constructions it highlights gendered qualities such as certain ways of dressing or walking as ‘unnatural’ and ‘abnormal’. When butch women challenge their socially assigned gender roles it is seen as a transgression of the ‘natural’ differences between men and women. This defiance perpetuates the contempt towards lesbians the contradiction is that even though they are perceived to be unacceptable, they are less likely to be rejected when they are invisible. This implies that lesbians who keep their sexuality a secret are more accepted than those who disclose. Being invisible is twofold

for lesbians in that they can at times blend in with heterosexual females, as femme lesbians often do, and secondly lesbians are often not recognised as being legitimate within their sexuality, further rendering them invisible. It is apparent that being lesbian and invisible is more acceptable than disclosing, which is viewed as defiance towards social norms which regulate the roles assigned to males and female. So the study observes the first paradox in intolerance towards lesbians, which ultimately translates to the promotion of the invisibility of lesbians through their appearance. The clear example of this is depicted in the social view directed towards femme lesbians.

According to the participants the femme lesbian is characterised by a lesbian who remains feminine in her appearance and overall behaviour. Two participants (Andile and Eleanor) identified with the femme lesbian identity. I use the word 'identify' when relating the identities as only Andile and Buhle expressed that they were lesbian - other participants only made reference to identifying with a lesbian identity. Eleanor expressed that she was bisexual but that she identified with a femme lesbian identity. According to the participants, the femme lesbian identity does not differ from the dominant characteristics of a heterosexual female. The femme lesbian was generally described as being well groomed and as being 'normal'. This identity provides the femme lesbian with the advantage of 'blending in' and cannot be easily identified as being lesbian by appearance alone. Based on the appearance alone, the femme lesbian may therefore not necessarily be exposed to as much harm as the identified butch lesbian mentioned above in that her sexual orientation is most likely assumed by others to be heterosexual.

The femme identity is generally viewed more positively by participants and this is attributed to the perception that femmes are rewarded for presenting with socially accepted femininity (Munt & Smyth, 1998). Some even argue that feminine lesbians conceal their sexuality, implying that they do not own up to their sexuality. This, in light of the challenges faced by lesbians in South Africa, can easily be seen as not taking a stand against the silencing of lesbians and can even be viewed as being afraid to be seen. However, as Andile mentioned *"I'm a woman... I don't feel that my being lesbian is being less of a woman."* Femme lesbians enjoy being groomed and dressing in a feminine manner. In her view she is female (gender) and she loves other women (sexuality) however, in the above mentioned critique by femme lesbians, she expects that she should defeminise to become more visible. This view highlights the perceived invisibility of femme lesbians due to their visual similarities to heterosexual females as well as their attempt by feminist lesbians to 'correct' this stance.

This view, that the femme lesbian “blends in”, although not held by all, is a paradox. Participants reiterated that butch lesbians only dated femme lesbians, implying that there were predetermined roles that femme lesbians were assigned in relation to a butch lesbian. The critique of the femme lesbians, in trying to defeminise lesbians, is unnecessary as femme lesbians play a vital role in the formation of certain lesbian relationships.

However, since the reasons for ascribing to a lesbian identity are so numerous, often involving the conflation of sex and gender to conclude a lesbian identity, it would be naive to perceive all butch lesbians as being pseudo-males and to discount the sincerity of femme lesbians.

If butch lesbians, who identified as males were accepted, there would be great social implications, in that they would no longer be ‘females loving other females’ they would now be considered males loving females. Hence they would be socially accepted as being heterosexual and no longer homosexual. This view, which would be ideal for many, is far from being reality. However, it has pointed to a distinction into lesbian identity and the gender binary, in that lesbians are as previously mentioned assumed to be female, but as Buhle illustrated, they could also ascribe to a male identity.

Another lesbian identity identified by the participants was the tomboy or tom lesbian. According to the participants the tom lesbian was described as being able to date femme lesbians. Tomboy, or tom as it is widely known among the participants, has been identified as having both male and female gendered characteristics. In literature the tom lesbian can be classified as being androgynous, which is gender neutrality. However, it can be perceived as wanting the best of both worlds. This classification will be briefly discussed. According to Harrington (2010) the androgynous femme is a woman who does not present visually as traditionally female but often still retains more feminine aspects than a butch lesbian (Harrington, 2010). Two participants (Celiwe and Delile) identified as being tomboys, from childhood. The tomboy was identified as dressing in a masculine manner but also being able to dress as a female whenever she chose to do so. Unlike the butch lesbian, the tomboy does not necessarily identify as being male, they rather like to vary in the manner in which they dress and behave.

Andile described the tom lesbian *“they’re in between in a sense that, some people would say they’re confused, and some people would just say they like the best of both worlds which is those that wear skirts someday, even wear make-up someday, then the next day they’d be dressed totally like a guy”*. Although the participants describe the tom identity in relation to

appearance they were initially not content with being labelled. As Celiwe clearly said that she was a being, neither male nor female. This is consistent with her identifying as being a tom. She also mentioned in the interview that she was neutral and that she did not like being defined by her sex or gender. So according to Harrington (2010) Celiwe, although she does not approve of being labelled, is androgynous. So here the sex, gender and sexuality conflation can be clearly seen. Sex, gender and sexuality are intertwined and this is apparent in the participants' responses about their gender and sexualities.

The futch lesbian was highlighted by Eleanor who revealed this lesbian identity that she had read about. She stated that

"you're a female but you have more male kind of characteristics..., characteristics wise, you're butch and tomboy, but your presentation is femme, you wear dresses and skirts and you do your hair and you do your nails, like you fuss over girly stuff like earrings and clothes and accessories those kind of things not like...she's female, she's soft ... like she would be for instance when you go out, she'll be the one paying"

According to Harrington (2010) the futch lesbian considers herself to be the middle ground between the butch and femme spectrum and is often the most androgynous of lesbians. It was of great interest to me as it was new to me. This identity is described as predominantly being femme but possessing butch characteristics. This identity was of interest to me because I had sincerely not heard about it until the day of the interview. None of the participants identified as being futch.

In general participants described and labelled other lesbian identities in accordance to their appearance as well as their sexual preference. This is a dominant characteristic among the participants which mimics the interactions of heterosexual couples in their relationships, in which the female or femme lesbian is attracted to other femme lesbians, tomboy lesbian, butch lesbian and futch lesbians. However, dominant perceptions exist that, for instance, the tomboy lesbians could not date other tomboy lesbians. It also emerged that it was against the norm for a butch lesbian and a tomboy lesbian to date. This as previously mentioned was viewed as a male being romantically involved with another male. By the same token, a butch lesbian could not date other butch lesbians or tomboy lesbians.

The above findings illustrate the complexity of the constructs with which lesbians are associated. It is apparent that the romantic associations described by the participants have outlined a pattern that illustrates the dating practices. These were interesting to observe because the participants appeared aware of these clear restrictions. This too was a paradox because these structures appeared to defy homosexuality. *Homo* means two of the same, so if a butch lesbian and another butch lesbian cannot date, and a tomboy and a butch lesbian cannot date does that mean that lesbians have constructed a secondary form of homophobia within their own subculture?

On the one hand it can be argued that lesbians have the autonomy to choose to their exact specification the type of woman to whom they are attracted. This would imply that although there is a differing preference in identity and romantic inclinations, they have the freedom to choose whatever identity and sexuality they prefer, which according to literature is not prominent in hetero-normative society. On the other hand these identities appear to be predetermined which could be viewed negatively. The rigidity with which these participants view these identities projects that the rules limit and stifle their freedom to explore the in-between so to speak. To a large degree this behaviour mimics the cycle of intolerance imposed on homosexuals by heterosexuals.

As previously mentioned these identities have serious implications for disclosure for those assuming them. Where depending on the identity they ascribe, may either be 'outed', in the case of a butch and tomboy lesbian or remain 'invisibles' in the instance of a femme lesbian identity, which is largely believed to mimic a heterosexual female. Their identities further expose them, especially butch tomboy lesbians, to the dangers that exist within the current intolerant 'social climate'.

4.5.2 Theme 2: Identifying same-sex feelings

In identifying the initial awareness of same-sex feelings I was able to identify the influences that played a role in the participant's sexuality. According to literature the phenomenon of homosexuality has largely been associated with Western practices and as a result has not been perceived as part of African practices (Murray & Roscoe, 1998). Patron (2000) holds the assumption that a dominant sentiment exists within 'African culture' that homosexuality is un-African. To assume that homosexuality is un-African is erroneous. As anthropological evidence suggests that some African cultures accept homosexual practices as homosexuality is considered to be present in all cultures and races. Patron (2000) emphasises that cultural boundaries are responsible for regulating how these homosexual

desires and practices are expressed. 'African culture' is perceivably based on the extended family and clan structures, thus in this context homosexuality is perceived to oppose procreation, according to Patron (2000). As mentioned in the literature, homosexuality is perceived to be an influence of the West. Aspects of homosexuality being un-African will be discussed in later categories. In this theme the extent of external influences in the awareness of their same-sex attraction will be explored.

The participants were from diverse social and ethnic backgrounds. This impacted on how they perceived their same-sex feelings. When asked when they first realised their same sex feelings, with the aim of identifying the age of realisation, participants' responses placed them in early adolescence: *"I was in high school"* (Andile). By exploring the participants' initial realisation of same-sex attraction it was identified that although external factors did play a part in their realisation of same-sex attraction, participants already knew about their sexuality. The external factors only confirmed what was already known. Dominant constructions often insinuate that homosexuality is an influence of the West. This cannot be proven or disproven in this study. However, according to participants, they were aware of their same-sex feelings before they came into contact with external influences. The participant's responses to the timing of experiencing same-sex attraction indicate that they thought it strange being attracted to women because at the point of their awareness most of the participants had not met any lesbians. It would only be later when identifying with other lesbians that their same-sex attractions would be 'legitimised'. As Andile indicated:

"I thought I was crazy I thought, ok, actually when I thought I was bisexual, I thought I was crazy because, I thought it was abnormal to be attracted to another woman, if you're a woman so I kind of hid it a bit, I guess, I was denying it to myself, but then again, I guess I started seeing people who are just like me, then I thought, its normal why not"

Participants expressed an attraction towards other women but they did not necessarily understand their sexuality at the time. They feared that it was a strange phenomenon and chose to suppress and ignore their feelings. The awareness of the presence of other homosexuals in society allowed participants to embrace their feelings towards women. Identifying the participants' gender and sexuality in the beginning of this category was important in that assumptions are often made that people who engage in same-sex practices necessarily ascribe to a lesbian identity. When participants were asked about their sexuality they mostly highlighted that although they engage in same-sex practices they did not necessarily ascribe to a strict lesbian identity for various reasons. Reasons expressed by the

participants included on-going discovery into their sexuality (Delile and Eleanor), another participant (Celiwe) expressed a dislike of labels and another (Buhle) ascribe to the identity because it appears logical to others.

Participants therefore did not appear to be influenced by external factors in their initial awareness of their sexuality. They were aware of these feelings but due to various reasons, most involving internal feelings of conflict resulting from the perceived non-conforming and socially unacceptable nature of their feelings, they could not openly express them. External factors did play a role in their eventual enlightenment of the existence of homosexuality within society.

4.5.3 Theme 3: Perceived permanency vs. the fluidity of lesbian identities

This theme is aligned with an initial theme identified in the literature. Hart and Richardson (1981) mention that a lesbian identity is often perceived to be permanent. This theme speaks to the nature of sexuality and how it is often perceived as being a permanent construct.

During the analysis it became apparent that two of the participants (Celiwe and Eleanor) were in the processes of self-discovery. Four participants had at some or other point in their life been romantically involved with males (Andile, Celiwe, Delile and Eleanor). The reasons for their interest in men varied, from free will, pressure to conform to pre-described gender roles, to confusion earlier on in life. More importantly it was apparent that to three of the participants (Celiwe, Delile and Eleanor) a possible future relationship with a male was highly possible. As two participants (Celiwe and Delile) mentioned that they foresaw a strong possibility of marriage to a male in their future. The dominant sentiment was that there was no need to choose who one loves, and who one loves should not impact on how one is perceived or treated by society.

As previously mentioned a strong perception exists that sexuality is a permanent construct however, the need for participants to love whomever they decided made a pertinent point about the fluidity of sexuality. The participants illustrated that it was highly possible for an individual to move between sexualities as and when the need arose, thus challenging dominant constructions pertaining to the permanency of sexuality. As Eleanor responded “*no it's like, it's like, yes I would be with a guy, I like guys, I like girls more... I don't know, I don't know what that means, but yeah I like girls more than guys*”. The implications of being able to move between sexualities would be wide-ranging for society as a whole, in that the labels of heterosexual and homosexual identity would no longer have relevance. The labels in their nature are rigid and permanent, conforming to the patriarchal nature of society. The ability to

control how behaviour and interactions occur in order to maintain a certain 'order' would cease to exist if sex, gender and sexuality were no longer perceived to be permanent constructs. An illustration of how the participants would fare in such a society would be as such: Buhle who sees herself as a male would then be able to present herself as a male who would then be able to date and or marry a female. Andile would be feminine without judgement and condemnation of not conforming to being a visible lesbian. Celiwe and Delile would be able to depict whichever identities they wanted and if they later decided to marry males they would be allowed to do so. The possibilities are endless. However, the intolerance is still a reality and the prospect of women being able to "become" men is the ultimate challenge to patriarchy.

4.6 Category 2: Experiences of disclosure

Theme 1: Initial disclosure

Being in the closet, and what this meant to the participants;
Disclosure: in or out of the proverbial closet;
Appearances as an identifying factor of a lesbian identity.

Theme 2: Disclosures in families

Disclosure and non-disclosure within the family.

Theme 3: Disclosure resulting from identity and lifestyle

The implications of co-existing in two spaces.

4.6.1 Theme 1: Initial disclosure

As mentioned in the literature, disclosure is defined as the act of informing others of one's sexuality. This theme thus explored the participants' first experience of disclosure. Literature depicts that disclosure is often influenced by 'homo-negativity', as well as internalised stigma. Scambler and Hopkins (1986) add that individuals who disclose may also be susceptible to stigma. This means that homosexual individuals may view discrimination against themselves as a result of them being gay. Homosexual individuals therefore withhold social and behavioural impulses such as public displays of affection. Goffman (1963) also indicates that either felt or enacted stigma could result in what he terms information

management, whereby individuals conceal their gay identity from others out of fear of discrimination. Furthermore, William and Weinberg (1974) found that some homosexual individuals refrain from expressing their gay identity in public in order to avoid physical assault. This concealment is termed psychological inhibition and could impact negatively on the health of the individual (Cole, Kemeny, Taylor, & Visscher, 1996).

Consistent with the literature the data analysis revealed that participants often chose to disclose to only a few associates. Participants only disclosed to those with whom they felt safe. Delile claimed that she initially refused to verbally disclose her sexuality. She claimed that she disclosed her sexuality by associating with other lesbians and taking part in same-sex activities but only later verbalising her sexuality to close childhood friends. When asked who the first person was to whom they disclosed, all the participants informed that they had only told close friends. The participants surrounded themselves with associates who would accept and support their lifestyle choices. Participants chose varying reasons for disclosing to friends but mostly because they felt they would be accepted and understood regardless of their sexuality.

Disclosure was often characterised by the participant informing a close friend of her sexuality. The reactions from friends were wide ranging from immediate acceptance to other associates taking time to process the disclosure. Nonetheless, a positive reaction put the participants at ease and provided them with some kind of affirmation in their sexual identity. *"I knew she wouldn't judge me, you know, and we just, spoke about everything so ja, I knew she'd understand, although she was a bit shocked, I mean but it's understandable"*(Eleanor). The participants' responses about the reactions from friend highlight some level of diversity of their experiences. The participants' reasons to disclose varied as much as their decisions not to disclose their sexual orientation. Some of these reasons will be discussed in relation to the participants disclosing to friends and family.

Being in the closet, and what this meant to the participants

The closet is a phrase used to describe the status of disclosure. Being *in the closet* refers to non-disclosure while being *out of the closet* means one has disclosed their sexuality. The decision to disclose sometimes depends on where the individual lives; in some areas when people are known or suspected of being lesbian they may get killed. The participants were asked if they were in or out of the closet as well as what they understood by this concept.

The participants had expressed that they were in the closet in one way or another. Participants often did so for safety reasons and others for fear of social rejection. There appeared to be dominant feelings of inner conflict for participants, resulting from not being able to disclose their sexuality. Buhle responded by saying: *“ah, to me I think it means that you sort of like, you want to deny what you feel ... because I want to be understood”*

The participants' disclosure largely depended on the space they were in, as some spaces were perceived to be safer than others; this will be further discussed in following themes. The closet according to the participants' responses is not one but many. In other words, disclosure is not once off but an on-going occurrence. In some contexts they expressed being out of the closet, while in others they were still in the closet.

“like I said in Pretoria I'm not in the closet but when I'm at home, there are certain people who know that I find females attractive, but they never seen me, or heard me speak about my girlfriend so at home, I think I'm inside the closet” (Celiwe).

Participants expressed being confused, believing that being out of the closet means that everybody should know, like Buhle pointed out when asked what being out of the closet meant by using the example of a TV personality, she said:

“out of the closet would be like Ellen (Ellen DeGeneres) that for me would be out of the closet...” she continued to say: “...when you're just out there, everybody knows and you don't care what they think, and people accept you for who you are and those that don't accept you don't accept you ja think that my door is half open... I'm just somewhere in between”

This begs the question of whether being out of the closet refers to everybody knowing your sexuality? It also questions whether it is of any relevance that everybody knows the next person's sexual orientation. If so, do heterosexual individuals express their heterosexual identities and does the closet then apply to them too? Should it? These are very pertinent questions that will be discussed in the discussion section below. We however, continue to explore disclosure below.

4.6.2 Theme 2: Disclosing to family

Savin-Williams (1998) identified that lesbian youth displayed reservations when disclosing to their families in that the family unit is often the only support structure that they know. The parents often have perceived notions that their children are heterosexual, of which the children are often well aware. With this knowledge young lesbians or bisexual youth, as identified in our sample, find it difficult to inform their parents of their sexuality. This is often due to fears of rejection which could result or even being in them being thrown out of home or even being physically or emotionally abused. Very few young black people disclosed their sexuality to their parents (Savin-Williams, 1998).

In this theme participants' reactions towards disclosing to families were explored. Participants were asked if they had disclosed to any family members, some participants had while others dreaded the idea of disclosing to family members. Even so participants did not disclose to their parents. Three participants had disclosed to a sister (Andile), a grandmother (Buhle) and cousins (Eleanor). These disclosures were met with mixed responses ranging from disbelief, to denial:

“my sister is homophobic, first of all (laughs) ok she loves me to bits so she actually the part that I’m actually lesbian, she used to tell me that she actually suspected it, way before I told her but then it wasn’t as nerve wrecking as I thought it would be after telling her, I felt very comfortable” (Andile).

Although these participants may not have initially received the desired response, when disclosing, they were accepted by these family members in the end. They appeared to justify negative responses by saying that they expected some level of disapproval from their families but were happy that they were eventually accepted. Participants practiced caution when it came to their disclosure to family.

Non-disclosure within the family

Participants were more likely to disclose to siblings and cousins than to their parents. Delile and Celiwe had not disclosed to any of their family members. There were varying reasons as to why they chose not to disclose - these will be discussed. There was an apparent hesitancy associated with disclosing to family members, especially to parents. This hesitancy, although fundamentally based on fear of rejection, may also be based on the fear

of the permanency with which family members, especially parents, may perceive the identities. Celiwe responded by saying:

“there's the other thing I also think it might be a phase I'm thinking it might be a phase, but I think the part of me that think it's a phase might be, where I want to bring a man to the house”

The non-disclosure appeared to be about the participants reserving the right to change their sexuality at a later stage. This action of non-disclosure for the reason stated above, reiterates the fluidity of sexuality. As a result none of the participants had disclosed their sexual orientation to their parents, only to sisters and cousins as afore mentioned. Despite non-disclosure the participants predominantly maintained that they did not fear the rejection from their parents.

Participants did not disclose to their parents for varying reasons. However, Savin-Williams (1998) found that although young lesbians seldom disclosed to their families they were more likely to disclose to their mothers than to their fathers. He also pointed out that lesbian youth feared their father's rejection more than their mothers. In some cases when the family did find out they often tried to protect the 'family secret'; this speaks to the fear of the family being brought into disrepute by the lesbian individual. Social conformity appears to be very important to families; the appearance of young 'well adapted' children is of great importance to parents as it reflects on the type of people they are. Their attempt to dissociate themselves from a lesbian child within the family relates to the importance of being accepted in society as being more important than loyalty to that one family member.

The importance of disclosure has been discussed throughout this study and the challenges with which it is associated. The inability for young lesbians to disclose to their parents illustrated that although they needed the support of their family they did not fear being rejected as most of them knew that they were in a transition phase and that their sexuality was subject to change. While they viewed disclosure as committing to 'one sexuality' they did not yet want to commit to a lesbian identity because they felt that it was most likely that they would end up assuming their predetermined gender roles of being wife and mother later on in life. In retrospect, relevance of the importance of disclosure has come into question.

4.6.3 Theme 3: Disclosure as relating to identity and lifestyle

Disclosure often depends on the location and residence of the individual as well as her lifestyle. Three of the five participants resided with their families and two were living independently. This was important to establish in that it could have been a factor determining whether being dependent on parents was either a hindrance or catalyst to disclosure. It would have subsequently informed whether family dynamics would have been impacted by full disclosure to family. However, since none of the participants had disclosed to their parents this notion will be recommended for further research at the end of this research study.

Appearances as an identifying factor of a lesbian identity

Participants discussed various dominant characteristics associated with lesbian identities. These include dress sense, friends and associates as well as certain behaviours. For instance, participants would talk about the dress sense of a butch lesbian as being similar to that of a male and that butch lesbians only dated femme lesbians. This appearance would alarm someone who did not know about an individual's sexuality. As one participant (Andile) pointed out, her sexuality was sometimes inferred by her merely being with her girlfriend as her girlfriend was butch. She also pointed out that this would alarm males in the street, who would threaten them with violence. She said:

"if I'm walking with my girlfriend, my girlfriend is what we call 'butch' um, if I'm walking around with her it's obvious, that those two are lesbian and they actually wanna, what do we call they...they say they wanna transform us "

This, however, is the conventional view. Nonetheless women can be victimised if they are perceived to be lesbian. Hence an individual's appearance can act as a disclosing characteristic, further exposing lesbians to victimisation and homophobia. The butch lesbian identity is the more visible of the identified lesbian identities and butch lesbians are therefore more susceptible to homophobic attacks. This is also further exacerbated by behaviours such as public displays of affection. Certain localities where lesbians frequent such as gay bars and house parties can serve as a signifying mechanism for those who did not wish to disclose their sexuality.

Location as a catalyst of disclosure

The participants often interacted in multiple spaces such as home, education institutions or work and the social groups. It was important to establish which of these areas were accommodating of their sexuality. These spaces represented different contexts for the participants. Home represented heteronormative values which often involved the expectation of the fulfilment of traditionally assigned gender roles. When asked about their experiences and interactions at home and communities, the participants responded by saying that their sexuality was not accepted. Hence the traditional up-bringing was a hindrance to their disclosure in this context. As Delile expressed:

“as a woman, your role, is to have a child, cook for your child and your husband, and make more children, and you must accept everything that’s gonna happen, in your marriage and what not {hmm} because every woman has gone through that, lesbians, when your child is a lesbian, no grandchildren, no husband no mkwenyana to mow my lawn or what no”

They further expressed that it could prove dangerous if they were discovered in their communities as they could be attacked and even raped by disapproving members of society, in the attempt of ‘making them straight’. Termed corrective rape, this phenomenon will be discussed in the following themes. As Buhle said *“I’m just very cautious of what, the reaction I’ll get from people because you know people do weird things, I don’t wanna be stoned and ... raped into being straight”*

There appears to be a frustration associated with this space representing home and the community where the participants cannot be free to express themselves. Their identity has to be suppressed in order for them to be accepted. There are however, spaces where they are free to express their sexuality.

The other space

The ‘other space’ has been identified as a social space where participants feel anonymous. This space was described as often being crowded and was characterised by having young patrons. It may be a gay bar, a mall or a private party. There seemed to be other lesbians with whom they interacted in this space; this for some was refreshing in that they were able to express themselves without being condemned by community members. They relished

being in the 'other space'. Delile said “ *I think moving to Pretoria, from Kempton Park I just, I felt more free to do whatever I want whenever I wanted, however, I wanted to it was just* ”

There were dangers associated with being in that space, as Buhle expressed:

“I always think that there'll always be people around who are not accepting so, if you go to a gay bar ... people can come and like start shooting randomly, you know stuff like that has happened”

The gay bar is still the space more preferred for the participant than home. They largely expressed that being away from home enabled them to be who they really were without the watchful eyes of their parents or people with whom they grew up. Although they are free to express themselves, they become vulnerable to others in those surroundings as Buhle illustrated above. The fear of disclosure is very real as the consequences of being 'outed' are no different regardless of location.

Having engaged with the literature and the participants, I am perplexed by the need to label and in retrospect the need to disclose. If disclosure is of such importance within society it should be supported by members of society. If the pressure to disclose is so immense, it should be accepted. If there is no support for individuals to disclose their sexuality then they should not have to disclose as this exposes them to all sorts of abuse and public humiliation.

On the other hand this need for disclosure hinges on the freedom of lesbians to express themselves, freely without being victimised. This could be in their day to day relationships, the freedom to hold hands, the freedom to be. This further extends to the existence of artwork depicting homosexual relationships in a dignified manner; it could be in their day to day interactions with members of their communities. This need for disclosure is still not relevant. What is relevant is the need for unconditional acceptance and regard for the rights of all according to the South African Constitution. This can be effectively done once members of society adhere to the constitution and put an end to intolerance. This is ideal but as illustrated by the participants' views, far from being reality.

4.7 Category 3: External perceptions as a deterrent to self-acceptance

Theme 1: Homosexuality as being un-African

Social rejection of black lesbians within the 'black community'

Theme 2: The nature of associations with other lesbians

Theme 3: Threat of corrective rape

Theme 4: Prudence for tolerance

4.7.1 Theme 1: Homosexuality as being un-African

This theme explored the participants' perception of their sexuality in relation to their communities. It also focuses on society's perceptions of black lesbians and the resulting fears that lesbians associate with being a known lesbian either by disclosure or by association. This theme emanates from the initial theme identified in the literature that states that homosexuality is un-African. The significance of this theme to the current study is related to the above inference that same-sex feelings are un-African and that homosexuality is a product of the West imposed on Africans. It also touches on the theme exploring the initial awareness of participants of their same-sex feelings which looked at whether the participant's initial feelings were encouraged by any 'Western influences'. It was not apparent whether Western influence was perceived to be a direct influence by the participants however, since this was not the objective of the study, external factors that influence participants' sexualities will be explored instead.

It would be premature to assume that this one study can completely affirm that homosexuality is an influence of the West, however, from the little interaction with the participants I believe they were unaware of such influences. Beginning from an early age when they became aware of their same sex feelings, participants informed that their same-sex feelings were hidden from others until they decided to disclose, when they were comfortable. As Delile mentioned:

"I think I was about sixteen ... when you become sixteen you're like "hmm, I like that girl" but you don't really know, if this is the kind of like that is I'd like to be your friend type of like or I'd like to be romantically involved with you kind of like, but I think around about sixteen when I started ".

Social rejection of black lesbians within the 'black community'

Participants expressed that when people in their surroundings talked about homosexuality they often referred to it as a 'white thing'. Participants mentioned that black people did not understand homosexuality and often demonised it. They were often threatened with going to hell, violence and rape for not conforming to predetermined gender roles. Participants expressed dismay at the 'black' community's constant interference. Buhle responded by saying:

"black people are very ignorant like if they don't understand something they rubbish it... with black people ... it's ignorance... white people, you see white people walking around holding hands, making out and no one cares. You see black people doing that, I know a girl who did that and her girlfriend got raped"

The participants' perceptions were dominated by the view that other cultures were less judgemental of lesbians but and black culture was laden with judgement and condemnation towards black lesbians. They expressed that black people felt they had a right to advise an individual about right and wrong, regardless of whether they were related or unrelated to an individual. They often compared their experience to their perception of their white counterparts and commented on how white people could often accept decisions made by others and that they did not have a constant need to interfere. These were general observations made by the participants about black and white cultures. Participants further expressed that their white counterparts did not encounter as many challenges as they did and that their culture protected them. Buhle continued:

"black people are very ignorant like if they don't understand something they rubbish it white people I don't know, they're a little sensitive, they read, and so they understand better so I think that, you know white people are a little more accepting because they understand that if two people are doing their own thing, it's got nothing to do with me, with black people I don't know, they very, I don't know, it's just, for me it's ignorance"

Celiwe added:

"black and you come to someone and you say I'm lesbian, you already have a problem, you come to them and say I'm bisexual,

there's a problem there {hmm} but if a white person comes to a black person and says look I'm lesbian, they're like ha dog, do your deed, do your thing, the problem comes with the fact that you're black and now you're trying to do what white people do, for black people"

Here the study observes the perception of the participants as contrasting with those of their white counterparts. They view themselves as less advantaged because of being black.

4.7.2 Theme 2: The nature of associations with other lesbians

This theme was aimed at highlighting the associations between the participants and other lesbians. Some participants expressed a strong preference for surrounding themselves with other lesbians. Andile mentioned that:

"I've noticed since I've become very free and open about who I am I've gathered more lesbian friends than straight friends and when we do hang around each other, it just feels like it's normal, because we talk about anything and there is no questioning how is this done, how is that done... there is no um discrimination"

They articulated that they feel unconditionally accepted within their social groups with other lesbians. They further expressed that even though they were often a group of lesbians they were still human beings, expressing human emotions. They felt that their sexuality did not make them less human.

Participants identified those certain reactions to their identities within lesbian relationships to illustrate that they are no different to those expressed in other (heterosexual romantic relationships) relationships. Romantically participants expressed that they reacted as other couples would. For instance some participants expressed that when confronted with an unfaithful lover or suspected another girl of trying to interfere in their relation that they would react with jealousy and shared that they too had insecurities within their relationships. As pointed out by Andile:

"I don't know hey, it just gets exciting every time, ok, I guess because I'm in a relationship now, and I feel that I'm in love every

time I'm with my girlfriend I just feel it's exciting enough for me yeah"

Participants reiterated that relationships they have with other lesbians were like other human interactions. Eleanor spoke about other lesbians saying:

"they cool people they nice people it's like any other person that you interact with its just that they prefer females, or they prefer being in relationships with other females, so I don't really differentiate, ja, to me we're all people"

Be they relationships between friends or romantic relationships, participants did not see any differences in the ways in which they reacted to each other when compared to heterosexuals or perceived 'normal' people. This view was not generic as seen in Delile response:

"I can't even stand lesbians, it's, it's I know, its, it's a bit strange but, I cannot stand it, I can't tolerate them, it takes me a very long time to become friends with other lesbian people but I still keep my distance"

This is widely varying as human interactions may be, they present similarities. As illustrated by Andile's preference to be with people who accept her unconditionally. There are instances where people associate better with others while others remain selective with whom they associate. The theme highlighted that not all lesbians are required to only associate with lesbians and that even among lesbian interactions there are aspects of behaviour and interactions that do not appeal to all concerned. This was illustrated by Delile's response. Here participants illustrated that regardless of their sexuality they are not 'changed' by their sexuality. Their humanness was not ingrained in their sexuality. Since personalities remained constant, and sexual preferences are dynamic being lesbian does not prescribe a lifestyle for the individual their sexual preference may still change, but they remain human.

The participants have highlighted the nature of involvement with their partners and also indicated that their affinity towards lesbians is often encouraged by the closeness shared in these relationships. Lesbian relationships are therefore as real as heterosexual relationships and are not stereotypical depictions of exaggerated sexual fantasies, often portrayed in

pornographic content, as earlier mentioned. They have meaningful relationships that yield emotional satisfaction for the individuals involved.

4.7.3 Theme 3: Threat of corrective rape

Disclosure is dependent on the influences of the individuals' environment and the advantages and the disadvantages of disclosure. In the data there was mention of the fear of corrective rape by the participants. In this manner participants demonstrated their awareness of the danger of being discovered by disapproving members of the opposite sex. They have however, explicitly expressed that this practice is common to the townships and not commonly encountered in urban areas. Corrective rape is an illegal act performed by homophobic males to 'convert' lesbians into heterosexuals. This act is dominant in the black townships. There have been reports consistent with constructions being communicated by the participants in this theme. Andile responded that if males in the neighbourhood suspected her and her partner of being lesbian they would often *"say they wanna transform us ... rape us"*

The participants appeared to be aware of the phenomenon even though it did not directly affect any of them. This is the social climate in which they are expected to construct their sexual identity and at times disclose their sexuality. Participants often resorted to non-disclosure as they feared the outcome of corrective rape once they have been discovered. Nkabinde and Morgan (2006) articulate that black lesbians in Soweto fall victim to corrective rape. Reporting such crimes proves to be difficult for lesbians as they often fear further victimisation at the hand of the police, termed secondary victimisation. Secondary victimisation is characterised by verbal or physical abuse, blackmail as well as blaming the victim for what happened to them (Herek, et. al., 1999).

A study conducted by the Medical Research Council revealed that "It is estimated that a woman born in South Africa has a greater chance of being raped than learning how to read" (Rape Statistics - South Africa & Worldwide 2010, p. 1). The implication of corrective rape on disclosure is very severe in that many of the participants have illustrated that it is eminent. The media depicts many reported incidents of lesbians being raped and in some instances even being killed. This high prevalence of corrective rape deters disclosure. The reality of many lesbians is to live undetected for as long as possible to avoid being raped. This is one of the main reasons black lesbians refuse to disclose their sexuality in South Africa. There have been many attempts by women's rights activist groups to mobilise government towards

affecting the necessary interventions with very little success. Recommendations will be made in this regard towards the end of the study.

4.7.4 Theme 4: Prudence for tolerance

This theme is aimed at identifying the sentiments held by participants in light of their challenges as women who love other women. Participants have expressed that they do not see why it is difficult for certain members of society to accept them based on their sexual orientation. Participants mentioned that they did foresee hope for the future and others were pessimistic about being accepted in their communities. Participants believed that if people were educated they would learn to accept homosexuality as a sexual practice and the victimisation would cease. Eleanor said:

“because I want to be understood, cause I think if more people understand the pink world, if I can put it that way (laughs) the homosexual like world or gay world as others would call it, ... they would become more comfortable with it, and obviously they're uncomfortable because they don't know, so if I can you know, educate someone and make them understand”.

Participants were mostly negative in their outlook of the future; they did not expect change to occur in their life time. There is a possibility that change will be very slow as there is a need for national awareness around the social abuse of black lesbians in South Africa. The abuse of women in South Africa is very prominent and rape is a national epidemic. Government is not making headway in this regard (The Office on the Status of Women, 1999).

Hence the prospects of disclosure in such a social climate are very slim. The categories and themes provided the findings for the current study. These themes will be further incorporated within the theoretical framework, literature as well as above the findings. These results will now be discussed in the following paragraphs.

4.8 Discussion of results

The aim of this study was to explore the experiences of disclosures by black lesbians in South Africa, using a social construction lens. The study comprised of a sample of five (n=5) black women, between the ages of 20-21, who identified as being lesbian. It explored the participants' ascribed gender, their ascribed sexuality and how these constructs interacted as well as their decisions to disclose their sexuality to either friends and or family.

During the data collection process it became apparent that the definition for gender within the research proposal was too narrow. The definition did not explicitly unpack gender to the extent that it was required for the current study and participants' sexual identification also proved resistant to classification according to commonly assumed labels. The dominant gender identity ascribed by four of the participants was female. However, one participant identified as being male. This participant, although technically meeting the requirements for qualification for this study, due to dominant constructions, identified as being male. She thus considered herself lesbian as default for being in the body that she was in. This also exposed the diversity of sexuality which was initially not accounted for in the initial definition of the gender identities. The assumption of a lesbian identity also faltered in its narrow perception that there was a single sexual identity to which one ascribed for life. These were some of the challenges that surfaced during the data collection process.

During the analysis sexuality and the subsequent sexual disclosures emerged as being complex. They involved an interaction of the individual's psycho-social environment, gender as well as their sexuality. The dominant constructions in each of the above mentioned characteristics often rested on strong hetero-normative values that opposed homosexuality. This is evident in the perpetuated dominant constructions expressing that homosexuality was a Western concept and that it is un-African. It is against this backdrop that the study explored experiences of the disclosures by the five participants selected for this study.

Gendered lesbian identities

The term 'lesbian' in this context holds different meanings for individuals. To some, being lesbian means engaging in same-sex practices while to others it means remaining celibate. To others being lesbian may be less defined and could mean engaging in sexual relations with women or men as illustrated by the participants (Doyle, 1995). Therefore, a lesbian identity cannot be defined by a single component, such as sexual orientation, but is a more holistic identity involving gender and assumed sex of the individual. The lesbian identity involves a wide range of influences ranging from social, emotional and political influences. Since identity is defined as the meaning attributed to self, by others and by oneself, it is therefore socially constructed (Stone, 1962; Taylor, 1999). Relating this to the participants it was apparent that they were unique in their identities as well as their perceptions of disclosure. Initially this was identified in how the participants ascribed their gender identity.

Lesbian identity has often been confined to those who were strictly involved in same-sex relationships. Only one other participant identified as being lesbian according to the dominant definition of a lesbian identity. Two participants identified as being bisexual and another considered herself lesbian, she appeared to have not taken ownership of a lesbian identity. Throughout the study participants revealed that although they did not necessarily ascribe to being lesbian even though they identified with at least one of the lesbian identities described in the above paragraphs. The participants identified dominant constructions of lesbian identities namely butch lesbian, femme lesbian and tomboy lesbian. These revealed that although individual identities were unique they still depended on the language and pre-determined roles that existed within the homosexual society. This was apparent in how the descriptions of the various dominant lesbian identities were almost identical. The dating patterns described were synonymous for most of the participants. According to social construction truth, knowledge and meaning are socially constructed this was evident in the concepts communicated by participants. Despite lesbians being a minority, they still create meanings and systems that maintain a certain order in which things are done within their social groups.

Same-sex attractions

In understanding the onset of the awareness of their same-sex attractions the research aimed at observing the influences leading up to disclosure. It emerged that participants mostly became aware of their same-sex attraction during adolescence. At this stage they attested to being unsure of what these same-sex feelings meant for them and often dismissed them. This phase related to Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance, in which he explained that the individual experiencing same-sex feelings, may initially feel confused. He further explained that in an attempt to resolve dissonance between societal norms and the individual's own feelings she may become confused during the transition stage. When the individual accepts their homosexuality or if that individual identifies with a group where homosexuality is a norm, consonance can be achieved. The feeling of 'consonance' in the case of these participants can be equated to the feelings expressed by the participant when they became aware of the existence of other lesbians (Festinger, 1957). This feeling of consonance may not necessarily last in the long run in that although participants have realised their sexuality is validated by the presence of others, they are judged by society, forcing them into seclusion and exacerbated feelings of cognitive dissonance. Hence Festinger's (1957) theory applies partially in this instance; alternatively the individual cannot reach cognitive consonance due to the fluid nature of sexuality, lesbians therefore strive to reach a state of cognitive consonance.

It has been mentioned that constant contact with 'homosexual sub-cultures' can validate and normalise homosexuality as a way of life for the individual. Therefore, homosexual identity should be viewed in a social context and not solely at the individual level, confirming identity through social construction (Cass, 1979). The participants were raised in different households but they shared similar experiences during their initial awareness of their sexual orientation. They were isolated in these experiences in that they only confirmed that it was possible to be homosexual once they recognised other members of society who ascribed to a lesbian identity. Their identities were in essence legitimised by the presence of other lesbians, thus making it a conceivable for participants to disclose their sexualities to friend and family.

Disclosure

Once participants had accepted their sexuality they felt it possible to disclose their sexuality to close friends, those who they felt could accept them unconditionally. This process incorporated some of the strategies proposed by Kennedy and Haga (1998), namely screening, planned disclosure, unplanned disclosure and non-disclosure. In the initial disclosure participants planned their disclosure, telling only close friends. Participants have illustrated that some of these strategies came into play, for instance during the interviews all the participants expressed that they applied the strategy of *screening* when they chose friends and family members to whom they would disclose, when they believed that they would be unconditionally accepted, this engaged in the strategy of *planned disclosure* in which they disclosed to the identified friends and family members. *Non-disclosure* was displayed when participants refused to disclose to their parents as they were unsure if they would be accepted while also weighing the implications of disclosure and what this would mean if they decided to venture into a relationship with a man later of in life.

Participants did not find it important to disclose their sexuality at all, while other participants expressed discomfort with not being able to freely express their sexuality when they had not disclosed. The reasons that participants did not disclose were valid to them, some ranging from fear of rejection, violent attacks, rape and even murder (Tiemann, et. al., 1998). Participants relayed that they feared corrective rape, especially those living in townships. They spoke about hearing about corrective rape in the media, some participants even knew people who had been raped, providing yet another reason for participants to not disclose.

Disclosure in this context revealed that although the individuals came from different backgrounds and experienced and express their sexuality in a dissimilar way, the social climate was common for most of them, which is a society, laden with non-acceptance and hate crimes in the form of corrective rapes and killings as illustrated above. The participants also expressed that non-disclosure to people outside of their social circles was not of much importance to them, those who mattered most were the parents of the participants.

When it came to disclosing to their families participants feared that their parents could perceive their sexuality as permanent. Participants were most likely to disclose to a sister or a cousin rather than disclose to their parents, for the above stated reasons. As Hart and Richardson (1981) mentioned, thought should be given to how homosexual identity is maintained as a response to the perceived permanency of this sexual identity. Two participants anticipated marriage to males in their future. The experience of disclosure for these participants is well thought out in that they did not have to choose which identity best describes them; they could change their sexual identity according to their needs. Hence disclosure to everybody will only alert others to the fluidity of their sexuality and the investment made by the individual to their family and friend in this identity will appear meaningless once they marry a male or decide not to marry due to conflicting traditional views.

In African patriarchal societies, marriage, child bearing and fulfilling predetermined gender roles is of importance. The participants were aware that they may live their current lifestyles momentarily, however, they realise that they are governed by the communal laws that govern most if not all Africans. This law is a known and it highlights the patriarchal prescribed gender roles ascribed to males and females in a maternal role within 'African society'. It involves bearing children, marriage and obeying the laws prescribed by the family.

The involvement of black members of society in the lives of participants was met with contempt. Participants expressed a dislike for the manner in which 'black people' interfered in their private lives. They expressed that black people always felt compelled to provide guidance to them whether they related to them or not. This relates to the nature of social construction and how meaning is constructed through the interactions of society and the individual. Since sexuality is also socially constructed it would also involve this aspect (communal society) of black culture, to which they all ascribed. They had to find a space that did not encroach on their freedom to express their sexuality. It also highlighted that regardless of how unique an individual may be there is a degree of that uniqueness that is permitted or not permitted by society. Hence the experiences of disclosures are only relevant

because individuals belong to certain societies that have certain expectations (predetermined gender roles) of those who belong to it, which if not met, often result in hostility. Hence participants form their own social groups that allow them that freedom to express their sexuality.

As previously posed, does disclosure then mean that individuals need to make their sexuality known to all members of society? The answer is that hetero-normative constructions assert that everybody is heterosexual or is at least supposed to be. This construction is so dominant that every person is automatically considered to be heterosexual and should never be questioned about their sexuality. *In essence who can be certain that the majority of people in society are in actual fact heterosexual?* These are the types of questions that social construction attempts to address in its inquiry. Society is a nameless, faceless entity that we all blindly reinforce but never question. In these findings I have been made aware that the participants did not have to disclose to anyone. However, because they are perceived to be condemned for behaviours that are considered to be socially unacceptable, they feel compelled to disclose their sexuality, in the hope that they would be allowed the freedom to express their sexuality. It however, may be that disclosure is the process of elimination for those who deviate from 'social norms'.

Chapter 5: Evaluation and recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the evaluation of this present study. The study revealed that disclosure was a complex decision for the participants as it often depended on external factors such as community sentiments, perceptions of the reactions they would get from friends and family as well as dominant constructions expressing that homosexuality is un-African. Participants often disclosed to friends and work colleagues they perceived to be accepting and refrained from disclosing to their parents. This was largely due to their fear of the perceived permanency of their sexuality, which the participants felt could change at a later stage.

The chapter further identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the current study, especially with regards to the relevance of the methodology and the paradigm of social constructionism. The recommendations for future studies are provided.

5.1.1 Overview of categories and themes

The categories and themes outlined dominant attitudes communicated by the participants. These attitudes were sometimes consistent among the participants and at times they were in conflict, nonetheless these were pertinent to the current study. These themes will be briefly reviewed below.

Category 1: Awareness of same-sex attraction

This category discussed the initial awareness of same-sex attraction to establish the influences that informed the participants' awareness of their lesbian identities. The themes explore participants' feelings towards their lesbian identities, the awareness that homosexuality was an existing sexual practice as well as what this realisation translated to for the participants.

Theme 1: Dominant constructions of identified lesbian identities

This theme highlighted the dominant constructions that were used to characterise lesbian identities. These characteristics were diverse and some participants used these dominant

lesbian identities to describe their romantic inclinations. These constructions outlined the romantic attraction, the appearance and the behaviour predominantly associated with the identity. An interesting finding was that even though three participants did not identify as being lesbian they identified with some aspects of these dominant constructions outlined in this theme.

Theme 2: Identifying same-sex feelings

This theme highlighted the participants' initial realisation of same-sex feelings. This theme was aimed at exploring the initial age and overall feelings associated with being attracted to women at the time. Most participants were in their adolescence when they became aware of their feelings towards other women. The dominant sentiment was that they felt strange being attracted to other women as it was not something they had seen growing up. Most participants therefore chose to suppress these feelings, up until such a time that they identified with other lesbians, in the media or within their communities.

Theme 3: Perceived permanency vs. the fluidity of lesbian identities

Within the initial literature there were dominant constructions that highlighted the perceived permanency of lesbian identities. This was a very pertinent theme as it informed a later theme on disclosure. In this theme it was highlighted that participants had been involved with men and others foresaw future relationships and even marriage to male. This exposed the fluidity of sexuality.

Category 2: Experiences of disclosure

This category discussed disclosure by the participants including initial disclosure, who they disclosed to when they did, the reactions they received as well as why they opt for non-disclosure when they did. This category also explored disclosure to friends and family and the main reasons they predominantly disclosed to friends and not to family.

Theme 1: Initial disclosure

In this theme the participants' initial disclosure was discussed. The aim of this theme was to understand the participants' decision to disclose and the reactions that the participants received from the person/s to whom they had disclosed. What emerged was that participants were most likely to disclose to friends, cousins and siblings as they were accepting. The

initial reactions from friends and family were either those of initial shock, acceptance or affirmation that they already expected the disclosure.

Theme 2: Disclosing to family

As already mentioned in the above theme participants were more likely to disclose to siblings or even cousins as opposed to disclosing to parents. The main reason that participants gave for non-disclosure to family was the fear that they may be going through a phase of sexual discovery. Participants feared that their families would perceive their sexuality as a permanent state and not accept any changes when participants decided to marry a male, later on in their lives. An important contribution by this theme to the study was that participants practiced great caution when disclosing, for safety reasons as well as being unsure that they were lesbian.

Theme 3: Disclosure as relating to identity and lifestyle

This theme highlighted that disclosure, although often a verbal action could also be achieved through other ways. The section highlighted the lifestyle often associated with lesbians. For instance the initial assumption of the study highlighted that the constructions around lesbian identities were dominantly ascribed to those who identified as lesbian. Hence when the identity, in the form of appearance and behaviour was observed by others, one could be identified as being lesbian. This would also be considered in conjunction with other factors, for instance the friends that the individual has as well as the places that the participants visit.

Category 3: External perceptions as a deterrent to disclosure

This category discussed the external influences that deterred disclosure for the participants. The themes discussed included dominant constructions about homosexuality being un-African, the nature of homosexual relationships of participants with their peers, the threat of corrective rape as well as feelings about the prospect of coexisting harmoniously with heterosexuals in society.

Theme 1: Homosexuality as being un-African

This theme highlighted the dominant constructions that homosexuality is un-African in relation to the experiences of the participants. The participants were very aware of this perception and blamed it for the community's inability to accept them. They often made

comparisons about the gap between the western culture and African culture. Participants described that it was difficult for Africans to accept their lifestyle and that their white counterparts were in a much more privileged position because western culture did not involve interferences into the private lives of others.

Theme 2: The nature of associations with other lesbians

This theme stemmed from the nature of interactions and relationships that the participants had with others who ascribed to being lesbian. Participants described the interactions with other lesbians, as being similar to any other relationship. It was highlighted that romantic relationships evoked universal feelings in all people and that emotions among people were not necessarily influenced by their sexual orientation. The theme highlighted that participants often felt comfortable being in the company of lesbians as they were accepted unconditionally.

Theme 3: Threat of corrective rape

The theme on corrective rape touched on a very topical issue in South Africa. Participants were aware of the threat of corrective rape and spoke about it in relation to being in their communities. It was highlighted that it was often the consequence of being discovered in the townships. Participants although not directly affected, had known of people who had experienced this form of rape.

Theme 4: Prudence for tolerance

This theme explored whether participants foresaw any change in the social climate for lesbians amidst corrective rape and the murder of lesbians in South Africa. Many participants highlighted that they did not believe that social change would happen in their lifetime. Some mentioned that 'African society' would need to be educated in order for them to learn to respect diversity and the choices made by others. This, if successful would then ensure that they were accepted within their communities.

5.2 Evaluation

This study set out to explore the experiences of disclosure by black lesbians in Pretoria South Africa. The study, to a large extent, achieved its aims. I will now evaluate whether the

study was conducted in accordance with the previously mentioned (Chapter 3) principles of stability (reliability) and credibility (validity).

5.2.1 Stability: Consistency

As already illustrated in the findings, the consistency or authenticity applies only to this current study and cannot be guaranteed over a span of time to similar findings in other studies, as the study observed that romantic relationships that the participants develop may differ depending on their needs at a time. Hence the need to disclose may or may not be necessary depending on the participants' perceptions of their commitment to their current sexual orientation. Having assessed the diverse findings in the current sample, there is no uniformity that can guarantee that another sample could produce similar findings. Hence I accept that with time the dynamics of a lesbian identity could change and the findings along with them.

The tool employed to conduct this study (semi-structured interview) has the potential to yield a wide range of results as it is a flexible data collection tool. This would further impact on future findings as different methods of analysis could yield wide ranging results. Hence the findings in this current study are not generalised.

5.2.2 Credibility: Authenticity

In the current study the hermeneutic spiral was employed. Although it fell outside of the framework of social construction theory it was a valuable tool in ensuring the authenticity of the research study. Aronson (1994) warns about not changing the meaning of the message but rather to interpret it in its purest form while maintaining its integrity. Tied in with the aim of the study of exploring the experiences of the participants, I always attempted to ensure that their individual stories were relayed by employing the above mentioned method. It would otherwise not serve the current study to alter the data obtained through the interviews.

In addition to ensuring credibility and stability, I identified two major strengths in the current research:

- Firstly the transcribing and analysing the data in that it provided as much of the participants' account of events as possible. The transcription provided verbatim accounts of the participants' responses to questions, projecting their thoughts and words clearly. Allowing for a complete analysis of data.

- Secondly I was always aware of my feelings towards the research process, allowing myself to have insight into the impact I had on the research process. This was done by the reflexive journal that I kept throughout the research process.

5.3 Critique of the current study

Although there were advantages there were also two disadvantages to the current study:

- Availability of participants was a challenge for this current study. The method of sampling, namely snowball sampling, required that I contact prospective participants provided by the LGBT organisation, knowing that they may not be interested.
- The methodology, namely qualitative research, was time consuming. The steps involved required intense involvement from the sample, the data collection, transcription, data analysis and the writing-up. The proper execution of these steps was necessary to ensure that the findings were representative of the research process.

5.4 Recommendations for future research

Based on the findings in the current research that the following areas need to be further explored:

- Extensive research is required on the topic of corrective rape in South Africa and with strong motivation to deter it. The fear of corrective rape has crippled the participants in this study and has isolated them from society. In line with corrective rape, insight needs to be obtained on the stance of the South African Police Service of the secondary victimisation of homosexuals.
- The current study lacked explicit insight into the patriarchal perspective on the lesbian identity. The view that homosexuality is a product of the West and that it is not 'African'. The study identified strong inferences made in the literature but no evidence of direct research has been conducted on the views of the South African patriarchy towards homosexuality and its impact on the black community.
- Research is needed in the field of fluidity of sexual identity in South Africa stemming from the observation made in the current study, that sexual identity is strongly perceived as a permanent identity but as we have identified in the findings of the current study, this may not necessarily be so.

- A comparative study on the differences between black lesbians and white lesbians should be conducted. This should be done to ensure that there is no purposive segregation among the two groups.
- Finally research should be conducted to educate black communities about the rights of homosexuals in South Africa.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Level of education

- | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| a. Incomplete matric | b. Completed matric | c. Tertiary student |
| d. Degree / Diploma | e. Postgraduate studies | f. Other: _____ |

Location of residence

- a. _____

Employment status

- | | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| a. Unemployed | b. Employed part-time | c. Employed full-time |
| d. Temporary employment | e. Self-employed | |

Relationship status

- | | | |
|---------------|------------------------|---------------------------|
| a. Single | b. Causal relationship | c. Long-term relationship |
| d. Cohabiting | e. Customary marriage | f. Common law marriage |

Section A: Describing the construction of key experiences in the participant's life

Tell me more about yourself?

Probes

What has been the most exciting (highlight) experience of your life?

What has been the most challenging experience of your life?

Section B: Describing the construction of identity

How would you describe yourself?

Probes

What does it mean to be?

- I. Black/African
- II. Gender
- III. Sexuality

Section C: Self disclosure

What sexual orientation do you ascribe to yourself/ if any at all?

Probes

Would you describe yourself as being lesbian/gay/bisexual/straight?

If not what would you describe yourself as?

When did you first find out that you were gay?

How did you feel when you first discovered you were gay?

How do you feel about being gay now?

Is there any difference in how you feel right now to back then?

What does being (gay/lesbian/bisexual/straight mean to you?

How do you experience being (gay/lesbian/bisexual/straight)?

Probe

Is it sexual?

Emotional?

Who you are?

Probes

How would you describe your feelings towards individuals of the same sex?

What do these feelings mean to you?

How do you experience being lesbian in:

- I. Your community

- II. Society
- III. South Africa?

Section D: Description of the construction of disclosure

Experiencing disclosure of sexual orientation:

Probes

What does being 'in the closet' mean to you?

What does being 'out of the closet' mean to you?

Would you consider yourself being out/in the closet? (Why?)

Who is the first person that you disclosed to?

Can you explain why you wanted to disclose to this particular person(s)

How did this person react to your disclosure about your sexual orientation? What did this reaction mean to you?

Have you disclosed to your family yet?

Which family members have to disclose to? /How did they react?

How did this make you feel about yourself?

Section E: The constructions of meaning of being lesbian within a community

Feelings towards lesbians

Probe

How do you feel towards other lesbians?

How do you feel about labels often ascribed to lesbians?

Probes

Do you perceive the treatment of black and white lesbians to be the same?

What are the differences in the way in which they are treated? (If 1 is yes)

How would you like to be treated?

Section H: Reason for participation

Why did you agree to take part in this study?



Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

April 2010

Participant Information

Dear Sir / Madam,

Study Title: Constructions of disclosure by black lesbians in South Africa

About the researcher

I, Glodean Thani, am an MA: Research Psychology student at the University of Pretoria. This research forms part of my MA mini-dissertation. Your participation in this study is truly valued and will contribute greatly to the body of knowledge on the topic of black lesbians in South Africa, an area that is currently barren.

The delicate nature of this research has been taken into consideration and a counsellor will be made available for debriefing purposes. Mrs Trish Nhamoinesu is a qualified Social worker based at OUT-LGBT and Well-Being centre and will provide debriefing where necessary.

About the research

This research is aimed at collecting information about the experiences of black lesbian South African women who reside in the Tshwane region. The information will be collected through individual interviews conducted by myself and will be recorded using a tape recorder. The information collected will later be transcribed and analysed and written up as a report.

Your interest in taking part in this research is greatly appreciated. As you are voluntarily taking part, should you at any point feel uncomfortable, you are within your rights to stop

participating in the study anytime. Your true name will not be used for the sake of protecting your identity therefore you will be anonymous.

The information that you provide towards the study will be kept confidential. It will also be locked cabinet at the University of Pretoria in the Department of Psychology for 15 years to ensure the safety of your information. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes.

The results of this study will be made available in the form of a mini-dissertation once the research is completed. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you need more information.

Yours sincerely,

Ms G Thani

Researcher

072 346 0902

glodean_thani@yahoo.com

Ms I Lynch

Supervisor

012 420 5154

Ingrid.lynch@up.ac.za

Participant Consent Form

Study Title: Constructions of disclosure by black lesbians South Africa

I, _____ have read and I understand the contents of the Participant Information provided and I acknowledge that I have been invited to participate, that my participation is fully voluntary, and that I can withdraw at any time from the study.

With full acknowledgment of the above, I agree to participate / not participate in this study on this _____ (day) of this _____ (month) and this _____ (year).

PARTICIPANT DETAILS:

Participant name: _____

Signature: _____

Participant contact no: _____

Date: _____

RESEARCHER & SUPERVISOR SIGNATURE:

Researcher name: Ms G Thani

Researcher signature: _____

Date: _____

Supervisor name: Ms I Lynch

Supervisor signature: _____

Date:

Appendix C: Interview Transcriptions

Note: Any comments made by the researcher are placed in {}. The questions asked are generally standard except where probes and examples have been used to elaborate on a question.

*The first four questions are structured, they will be mainly used determine the participant's demographic information.

Interview participant 1: Andile

Q: {How would you describe yourself?}

P: Ok...laughs...um wow and get this question all the time {is it}...I guess I'm quite my own person, I'm one of those people I don't follow trends...{hmm} I'm out there in general...I am um how do I say it {Unique} Yeah totally

Q: {I like that. Ok and then in relations to your gender,...} hmm {how would you consider yourself...you know there's a difference between gender and sex...gender is how do you feel you are and not what everybody else feels you are} hmm...what I feel I am {hmm}

P: I'm a woman,{ok} hmm, I don't feel that my being lesbian is being less of a woman {hmm} I just feel I'm just like any other woman, but who prefers dating the same sex {hmm, ok so you're a woman, attracted to women} women {hmm}

Q: {So tell me what has been the most exciting thing in your life, in terms of you being a woman loving other women?}

P: hmm, oh ok, um, I don't know hey, it just gets exciting every time, ok, I guess because I'm in a relationship now, and I feel that I'm in love {hmm} every time I'm with my girlfriend I just feel it's exciting enough for me {hmm, so the closeness of your relationship is exciting} yeah

Q: {and gets more exciting, ok and the most challenging experience...}

P: having to go out at night with her {hmm} and obviously, having guys following us, those kind of crazy things {hmm}, because they homophobic, they wouldn't want...ok they expect us to date them {hmm} and they don't want us to date each other they see it as something

wrong, of which is a total challenge, cause sometimes you'd be cooped up inside the house, and not wanting to go anywhere, or just going to a mall, where you feel safer, unlike going to a party somewhere,

Q: {ok, so being confronted by guys is a serious reality?}

P: the most challenging one {is it} yeah. {I'm going to ask you more about that that a bit later}
ok

Q:{tell me, your sexuality right now, you just telling me that, guys will want you to date them, what else does it...not necessarily interfere, but what else does it control in terms of your life}

P: it controls, ok, because I'm a female looking lesbian {hmm} it controls the part that I can't be out there and say that I'm lesbian when it suites me, {hmm} I just have to say it when I feel safe {hmm} because if I do, you might be harassed or something, just because you're a woman, who's interested in other women {ok, it's like you have to keep secrets, almost, is that what it feels like} ja, it totally feels like you have to keep a secret

Q: {ok, so tell me, you've just told me now, you're a woman who loves women, so my next question was going to be what sexual orientation do you ascribe to yourself}

P: a woman

Q: {a woman ,but in terms of, you said you're a woman, who loves women, is it only a woman who loves women, or are there other elements to your sexuality or your sexual orientation, for instance there are women who love women and men} hmm {and we call them bisexual} hmm {remember we talked about it earlier} hmm {and there are women who strictly love women} hmm {and then there are women who love women and just don't act on it} hmm {and there are people don't think any of it applies to them, and they can be, whatever they want to be} hmm {ok, so how do you, if you do at all ascribe a label to yourself...which one would it be, lesbian who just don't think any of it applies to them and they can be whatever they want to be}

P: hmm

Q: {you know, so how do you, if you do at all ascribe a label to yourself, which one would it be?}

P: *lesbian*

Q: {lesbian, ok and a how did you first find out that you were lesbian?}

P: ooh, ok {laugh} um, I was in high school but I wasn't totally lesbian then {hmm} I was in high school and I felt an attraction towards women {hmm} I acted upon it, but then I thought I was bisexual because I still had a boyfriend, by then {hmm} then, as years um went by, I actually felt more attracted to women, and actually stopped seeing guys totally {hmm} so I then tapped into the lesbian world and left the bi world

Q: {ok, you said you felt attracted to women, was it a physical attraction, an emotional attraction, can you?}

P: both {was it} it was both the attraction... actually my dating guys, was one of those things that, it's something you have to do {hmm} girls date guys, it's just how it was, whatever {hmm} and then I just felt it's an obligation, I have to have a boyfriend, but I wasn't really interested in, and I could never even keep a boyfriend, that what would happen {so it was like, this is how girls at my age act, therefore I will do it} yeah {type of thing} that kind of thing

Q: {alright, tell me, like how did you feel when first discovered that you were a lesbian?}

P: I thought I was crazy {laughs} I thought, ok, actually when I thought I was bisexual, I thought I was crazy because, I thought it was abnormal to be attracted to another woman, if you're a woman {hmm} so I kind of hid it a bit, I guess, I was denying it to myself, {hmm} but then again, I guess I started seeing people who are just like me, then I thought, it's normal why not, then I guess I started living my life the way I felt it was comfortable

Q: {ok, I'm going to take you a bit back there, you said something about feeling abnormal to be attracted to a woman} ja {what made you think it was abnormal?}

P: because there aren't a lot of people who are attracted to the same sex, so I thought what is it with me that makes me feel attracted to a woman, that doesn't make me attracted to a guy, so that's the abnormal part thing

Q: {ok, so tell me, how do you feel about being a lesbian now as compared to when you first found out that you were lesbian?}

P: it feels good, it feels wonderful, I'm free, I guess, I'm out there {hmm} and I'm proud of who I am, I don't have to hide all the time, my friends know about my sexuality, um my sister knows about my sexuality, my parents don't know yet, but it's something that still gonna come out sometime soon {alright, like, ok I've kind of asked you the question now, that there is a difference now than what you felt then} yeah {hmm} there is a difference because, back then I always wanted to convince myself that you can't be liking women, maybe it's some stage, maybe it's some experiment {hmm} but then again, I decided that, if I'm going to be dating women totally, meaning, me being lesbian, it's something that it's not an experiment, it's something that I am {hmm} and it's something that I'm comfortable with, so back then it wasn't so comfortable, but now I've learnt to live with it {ok so, it's become a part of you} it's who I am

Q: {ok tell me has being lesbian changed you life in anyway?}

P: Not really, I can't really say it has because, the only difference that there is, is just how I feel inside, because, I still dress the same way I used to before, I still keep the same friends. There's nothing about me that's changed it's just, it's me being me {and happier} and happier

Q: {ok, so, how do you experience being lesbian? How do you experience it, how do you feel about it? I don't know how to explain it, do you understand what I'm saying?}

P: no, elaborate a little {for instance let me make an example about myself, I experience being straight as something that I've decided is ok with me and I'm happy with it, in that it's comfortable for, it feels like it fits right, I guess it's a very wide question, in that I can also say, the way we have, when I'm sexual with my partner it feels good you know } it feels right { I don't feel unfulfilled, I just wanna find out from you, is it a sexual thing, is it a physical thing, is it an emotional thing, and how well integrated do you feel these feelings are, do you sometimes feel at times that emotionally I feel a bit short, or sexually I feel a bit short, or do you know what I mean?} hmm {I just wanna understand on a different levels of, like we were talking about, you said you felt free, you felt happy } oh so you wanna know, back then how I used to feel {lets just say for instance, if you has to compare your relationship with your partner now and your relationship with a guy then now, what is experience of who you are now, in terms of emotionally, like you were saying I'm happy, I'm free} hmm {but I just want

to understand it now on the different levels, you know, you don't have to necessarily be explicit about your sexual experiences, in terms of content, but you can just tell me, sexually I feel fulfilled or you know what I mean?} ok when I use to date guys {hmm} let me just say I was in control of everything, I was just like a push over, totally {hmm} I'd make sure that I tell you what to do {hmm} and if you don't do exactly what I tell you, I'd just dump you for another one, because I never used to value having a boyfriend {hmm} and then it never had that you be my boyfriend and be my friend at the same time {oh ja} it would be just that thing that (Andile) is dating so and so to the public {hmm} but to us, we both knew that there were more hiccups in our relationship then meets the eye {ok so it was just for show} for show, it was more for shows because I wasn't really happy about dating {hmm} it just seemed very, uncomfortable, inconvenient, it was just for show like you saying {ok} my dating a girl {hmm} it started feeling good in a sense that I'd long to see her, be happy that I'm dating so and so, it wouldn't be about show, I wouldn't even care if we go out or what it would be, something that, as long as I'm with her, I'm happy {ok} and (laughs) um and ja it's just, oh and I wouldn't be the controlling factor it would be, it's us in this thing {hmm} it's not me {hmm}, it's not you, we both in it together {ok, so you feel connected to her} a very big connection {whereas with a guy, you were feeling like, ugh, ok I'm just dragging you along, type of thing?} yeah {ok, and in terms of, I don't know if you were sexual with your male partners?} uh uh {not, ok so you've never had sex with a man, alright, so you can't really comment on that} no {alright then hmm, I just wanna find out more now, in terms of telling people, we were talking about it earlier} hmm {and you were saying, you're restricted now, in terms of saying I'm Andile, I'm lesbian} hmm

Q: {to anybody, what are the challenges of coming out to people?}

P: rejection {hmm} rejection is a big thing in terms of coming out because, people act differently towards, lesbians, or gay , or what doesn't seem to be exactly what they are {hmm} people expect you to become straight because, I don't know, but they just expect something from you and then coming out is a bit of a challenge, but once you actually do come out, it feels better because you don't have to hide anymore {hmm} but then again, if you do come out It depends who you're coming out to, because rejection is harder on different people

Q: {hmm, ok, so I'm just going to ask you what does being in a closet mean to you? I guess now, in a sense you kinda spoke about it, not necessarily in relation to a closet} hmm {but, in terms of telling somebody, but now for instance, how does it feel to be in a closet, or what does it mean to you to be in a closet?}

P: it feels very heavy because you have to tiptoe around people {hmm} you can't show public affection, you can't even hang around your girlfriend as much as you want to, because people will be suspecting why you guys are hanging around together, what's happening {hmm} so being in the closet is just some heavy something that you feel you just wanna break {hmm} ja

Q: {so tell me, who was the first person that you told about being lesbian?}

P: a friend in high school {hmm, ok} ja it was a friend in high school

Q: {ok, tell me why you wanted to tell this particular person that you were lesbian?}

P: I shared every little secret with her {ok} so I felt the need to say, that I'm excited about this particular thing {hmm} so share the excitement with me, so fortunately for me she actually did {hmm} she was happy for me that I'm happy yeah {ok so, in a sense she acted in a way that you need her to react} ja, she didn't reject me, I hoped she wouldn't

Q: {hmm and how did this mean to you? I mean what did it mean to you, sorry? That she didn't reject you, cause I mean, by telling her there was a chance that she could've rejected you} hmm {but the fact that she didn't, what did it mean to you?}

P: it actually showed me that her friendship isn't about what I am, it's about who I am, the Andile inside, not the part that you're lesbian, or you're straight, just who I am as a person, so it meant a lot to me

Q: {ah, have you disclosed to your family yet, I know that you said you disclosed to your sister, is she the only family member?}

P: she's the only, ok I've got a cousin that knows about me {hmm} my sister also knows about me, and...yeah those are the only two people that know in my family

Q: {ok so it's a very few people, and how did those two people react when you told them? Lets start with your sister} my sister is homophobic, first of all (laughs) ok she loves me to bit's so she actually the part that I'm actually lesbian, she used to tell me that she actually suspected it, way before I told her {hmm} but then it wasn't as nerve wrecking as I thought it would be {hmm} after telling her, I felt very comfortable and now she knows even who I'm

dating {hmm} she's very comfortable with it and I'm comfortable with it {ok} and as for my cousin, because she's very strict {hmm} it was very difficult to come out to her {hmm} but once I did, it was also total bliss {hmm} just like with my sister [ok, and then tell me, how did this make you feel, I guess you said now it's bliss, but knowing that somebody in my family knows, you know] I felt more free, I felt like at least I can share my hurt, my joy, my everything with my sister, because we're very close {hmm} and then I felt that my hiding that I'm not dating a guy. I'm dating a girl was actually going to pull us apart one way or the other because I'd have nothing to tell her about me and everything, but things would be going on about me {hmm} and she has to know {hmm} so ja {so you have someone who is an ally who you can share your life with} yes {this part of your life} yes

Q: {I just want to know I know now we've spoken about your family, and are there more friends that know about your sexual orientation?}

P: all my friends know about my sexual orientation, I make sure that I make it clear, so that I don't have to face the coming out part {hmm} even if I meet new people I make it clear at the beginning so that I don't have to deal with it later {hmm} it something that it's out there, when I'm with you I make sure that you know because I'm female looking it might be hard to tell {hmm} what I am but I make sure that I make it clear

Q: {but, I just wanna know now, in terms of being lesbian in your community, for instance, I guess now you have your friends and you have your family, but in your community how does it feel, you know, what are your experiences in the community when some people in, I guess not everybody would know but there are some people, like you said that might suspect, how does it feel knowing that they know and living there? What are your experiences with the community?}

P: um I can actually say that they don't know, because I'm the kind of a person who stays in the house {hmm} I'm like indoors all the time except when I go out somewhere, or go to school which is not in my community {ok} so I can't say I socialise with them, meaning they wouldn't know {hmm} if I'm lesbian or straight of which they obviously assume I'm straight, because of the way I look and it doesn't really change a thing towards me because, they just treat me as who they think I am, I bet they'd treat me differently, if they were to know though {hmm} but it's something that I don't have to experience because I don't feel an obligation to explain it to them {hmm, ok and then, we were talking earlier about when you're walking in the mall, there are guys who would follow you} hmm { I don't know if it's in the mall or it's in the street} yeah, like if you go to a club or a party somewhere, like if they, ok if I'm walking

with my girlfriend, my girlfriend is what we call 'butch' {hmm} um, if I'm walking around with her it's obvious, that those two are lesbian and they actually wanna, what do we call they...they say they wanna transform us {hmm} they say they don't want us being lesbian, they want us to be straight and that's just how it is so, it gets creepy, so we don't actually go around the streets at night {hmm} but during the day, it's nothing alarming {ok, I'm gonna go back a bit to that statement, they say they want to transform you, what do you think it is that they want to do?} rape us {they want to rape you and make you a straight woman} uhuh { so tell me, I guess the guys are part of society} hmm {in this question, so how do you feel society and other women, how do they treat you, what are your experiences with them? I guess with the guys we've covered them but in terms of looking at everybody around you, how do you feel?} me as an individual it's {hmm} it's really not a big deal because people assume that I'm straight most of the time {hmm} but it then starts to be a problem when I walk around with my girlfriend {hmm} because it's clear when they look at her that these people aren't straight, so it starts becoming a problem because you get judged, you get rejected, you get called names, they call you all sorts of names, I guess it used to bother me at first but right now, I'm actually thinking that, as long as I'm happy, why should I care what another person thinks {hmm, hoo it is an interesting thing that you're telling me, we're gonna go more into like, your feelings about who you are and other people within the same community, like obviously as a lesbian} hmm {I'm sure, I'm not sure actually, I would like to know from you is it easier to be around other lesbians for instance to be around other women who..} much easier actually {hmm} I've noticed since I've become very free and open about who I am {hmm} I've gathered more lesbian friends than straight friends, and when we do hang around each other, it just feels like it's normal, because we talk about anything and there is no questioning how is this done, how is that done.?. I mean, you guys are different, there is no um discrimination {hmm} when I'm with my friends it's just something that's smooth {hmm} whereas with my straight friends I feel a bit out sometimes, because at times they'll be questioning, sometimes they'll be mocking, but then again, they'd cover it up sometimes and say it's just a joke, and I guess it irritates me to a point {ok, so with, basically when you're in the confines of your 'community' if I can call it that} hmm {it's a bit more comfortable in that you don't have to explain yourself} ja {and you have to keep justifying yourself, alright, I just wanted to be sure I understand you.}

Q: {So how do you feel towards other lesbians there?}

P: in terms of? {you know, us straight girls we got issues with each other, for instance there's this, ugh, look at her} hmm (laughs) {you know, there's this, sometimes a possessiveness towards your own partner, feeling insecure} hmm {or even, just look at how she's dressed}

hmm {there's a bit of a discourse between straight women, for instance, but how do you feel when you're around your female counterparts? Is it similar when you were straight or different} no, it's different, it's more hectic {laughs} it's so, so hectic...ok I guess on my part I trust my partner, so I don't care if other girls are around her, cause I know a whole lot of girls are very attracted to her, but it doesn't really bother me, because I'm actually confident with who I am, and then... but other girls, other lesbian girls would actually have a really big problem if you hanging around with their girlfriend or something they'd even go to the extent of going physical, because they feel that, you gonna take my girlfriend or something like that, but, yeah, it's actually very hectic (laugh)it's, it's, wow {ja} just imagining it {laughs, so you feel there are times when you're happy to be around lesbian women, in that, you don't have to explain yourself, but there are times when also within that space, they can also be miscommunication almost} it depends who you are with, ok if you're with female looking lesbians, it's just you guys, sometimes it's not really a bother because the guy looking ones 'butch' {hmm} just think it's just the ladies {hmm} we on the other hand, we're thinking, ag it's just them, you know {ok} yeah

Q: {so is there like a, now I just picked up that there's a pattern, that you're saying you have the butch lesbians, what are the others called?}

P: there are three kinds {ok} three kind of official names {hmm} there's what I am, which is 'femme' {hmm} which is totally female looking, like, you'd think that this person is straight {hmm} and then there's what we call 'Tom' {hmm} which is in between, ok let me just go to the 'butch' first{hmm} then I'll come back to the 'tom' the butch is almost identified as a guy {ok} that is what we call butch, you just look like a guy and that's it {hmm} and then there's tom, they're in between {hmm} they're in between in a sense that, some people would say they're confused, and some people would just say they like the best of both worlds {ok} which is those that wear skirts some day, even wear make up some day, then the next day they'd be dressed totally like a guy {I also hear you say that the femme, if I get you right, would look at the butch} hmm {and look at the butch girls sitting together} hmm {and not feel threatened, is there now a law that says a femme cannot date another femme, or a butch can only date a femme, or a butch can only date a butch are there any laws of that nature?} there's a stereotype that a butch can never date a butch {hmm} I think it's got to do with the sex part of it {ok} and then femmes do date each other {hmm} but some ,it's not something that everybody is keen on seeing, but femmes do date each other, and, actually that's where the cheating part of it comes from, two femmes, it's usually like that {ok} and (laughs) the, I guess it's just a stereotype that butch date femmes and toms date anything {ok} they can date femme, they can date butch {so they're not picky?} yeah, depending on their sexual

preferences {alright, it's quite interesting} very {you know} (laughs) {alright, that was the question I was going to ask you next, you say you ascribe yourself to be femme} hmm

Q: {alright, do you see any difference in how black lesbians are being treated in South Africa as opposed to white lesbians for instance? It's quite a general question to ask, because it may not be something that you're consciously} aware of {aware of, at any level have you ever noticed that?}

P: we're treated the same, there's this gathering of lesbians that we go to sometimes {hmm} ok this one is called first Friday, we go to some club {hmm} and then we hang out there a lot, it's dominated by white people, so I don't know, I just see the people being the same, and if it's discrimination, it's gonna be the same whether you're black or white {hmm} it's just discrimination as it is

Q: {alright, we've kind of come to the end and I'm really thankful for it, but I need to ask you one more question, um, why did you agree to take part in this study?}

P: because I feel a lot of people need to be informed about who we are {hmm} before they start judging and concluding, and actually try to understand who we are, before they actually think we're bad people, so I think my, taking part in this, is kinda informing those who aren't informed {hmm} yeah {ok, I'm very grateful for your participation} .

Interview participant 2: Buhle

Q1: how would you describe yourself?

P: wow, I don't know hey (laughs) I never thought about it, I don't know, I'm very shy {hmm} ja but, uh, I don't know {you're shy?} very shy {laughs} I don't know and easy going, you know, I just take each day as it comes {ok} and I try not to stress and ja, [that's a good one] yeah that's about it {laughs, so I'm going to ask you how do you describe yourself as well, but in relation to, your race, your gender, and your sexuality} wow, what a difficult question, um, wow, I don't know hey (laughs) I've never thought about it {is it} ja, I don't know {ok, lets cut them out} ok cool {break it down, that way it's going to be easier for you to focus on one thing} ok {in terms of your race} ja

Q: {what do you consider yourself?}

black {alright} ja {that one down. Your gender} um

Q: {do you consider yourself a man or a woman? and if not, give me what you think would best describe you, there's no wrong or right answer}

P: ok, ok cool, um honestly, I think, I see myself sort of as a man trapped in a woman's body {ok, it's my first time coming across that, but it's quite interesting} (laughs) {ok, so you're a man trapped in a woman's body} yeah, I feel like that most of the time { and then tell me, with that in mind, what sexuality 'are you then?} I'd like to think that I'm straight [ok so you're a man, who loves women} yes {ok that's quite an interesting one, I'm serious} (laughs) {alright so tell me more about yourself, what has been the most exciting thing in your life?} (long silence) um, I don't know, for me every day is an adventure, everything new that I do is an exciting thing {hmm} so I don't think there's one particular thing that I can single out {hmm} well I guess coming to terms with how I feel, has been pretty exciting, because it's been hard you know {hmm} everything that happens {ok, you say how you feel. How you feel about what?} How I feel about myself {ok} what I see when I wake up {hmm} in the morning {ok. Alright, but what has been the most challenging thing, cause I hear you say, in light of all the things I've been through} ja {you know} ja you know the most challenging thing has been trying to stay socially acceptable {hmm} uh, I can't dress like this all the time {hmm} or, um, ja so that has been a challenge, like when you go to places like, I'm at the law clinic, it's an elective that we do, and when you go there you have to dress a certain way, you can't just rock up in a shirt and a tie, they'll look at you funny {hmm} so, I think that has been my biggest challenge {ok so your sexuality, seems in this aspect to play a big role, I don't know

if it's your sexuality or your gender in this interview, for instance, because for us it starts of, well for this interview, I feel it starts with gender, because you're not necessarily a woman} I don't feel like one {ok, so, and then your sexuality is second, which in light of being a male is not necessarily that you would, I don't know, it sound like (laugh) it makes sense when I'm talking about it, but ok, let me ask you now then, has your sexuality played a role in the challenges you faced, it sounds like it to me} yeah it has, cause people look at me and they see a girl, so I can't walk around saying, I'm a man trapped in a woman's body {yeah} people would look at me funny, so you know { and it's a long line (laugh)} it is, it's complicated and it doesn't really make sense, I sound a bit mental, so I try not to say it a lot {ok} ja it has you know, because I still have to consider what people think, I still have to consider, I don't care what they think, but studying what I am studying, it's important to know what they think, so that you know, you can act appropriately, it's been hard, because not everybody is very accepting, so ja {ok. Alright, I just want to know, we've actually discussed a lot of the stuff that follows} ok {but, lets just now backtrack a little bit, so you say you consider yourself straight, cause that the next question I'm going to ask you, what sexual orientation do you ascribe, you yourself at all?} I consider myself straight, but to be politically correct then I'm a lesbian, I don't know I never look at it that way, ja {so, when did you first find out that you are...} I don't know, I don't know if you 'find out' {hmm}, I started practicing it, if I can say that, when I was in high school, even when I was in primary school I have my moments where I'd sit and wonder, and ask myself if I was boy, which of the girls would I date {hmm} I don't know, I think it's always been there {hmm} somewhere, but ja {ok, so, you say from primary you felt, I'm not feeling comfortable in this body} ja {ok, and then high school was confirmed} yeah {so around about which age?} I think 12, 13 somewhere there ja, ja {ok} I've always been a tomboy ever since I was like four or something, I never been in girls' clothing and all of that, but now it's like ja {you know what to call yourself} ja {basically} ja {ok, so when did you, I mean, how did you feel when you discovered that you, not discovered like you said, but came to the realisation that, this is me, you know} I was excited {hmm} because I didn't know that it was possible, I thought, well you know, stuff like this doesn't happen {hmm} so I, I was quite excited when I, the first person I found out about was Brenda Fassie actually {hmm} and so it was like, oh ok, these things happen {hmm} ja I decided to try it and ever since {ok, and then how do you feel about, I'm gonna keep referring to you as being lesbian} ok {I hope you're not offended} it's cool {is that fine} ja it's cool {how do you feel about being a lesbian now?} I don't know if feels great, {hmm} ja I don't have a problem with it, I just wish it didn't have all this baggage that it carries with it {hmm} ja because, ja you just can't be yourself, you constantly have to worry about like, I have to worry about my mom, and my gran and the rest of my family and what they think {hmm} but it feels great, personally it feels great {hmm} I love it, I wouldn't change anything (ok, is there any

difference between now, and when you know, when you were still in primary school wondering} ja {you know like, my goodness, you know am I a girl am I a boy?} hmm {do I love guys, do I love girls? Now that you know, is there any difference in the way you feel?} No {no} no {hmm} because I think at that time, there was really nothing to feel {hmm} I don't think there was anything to feel, and even when I did find out that it's possible to feel this way, I never stopped myself from feeling {hmm} the feelings came then I embraced them {hmm} it still happens now {ok} so ja, {so you've always been open with yourself, with} ja {being in love with women} ja {alright so tell me, how has this experience of you coming into being a lesbian, because in my understanding, it's sort of a journey, you've always known, you've just embraced it all the way, how has this experience been for you?} challenging {hmm} cause it's, like you say, it's been a journey for me, but it's been a journey for me alone {hmm} other people see me, and they see something else, and so you know, I want people to see me, and they must see me, they see something else, so it almost seems like there's two people to me {hmm} so ja, in that respect it's been challenging, but otherwise, you know it's been simple {hmm} you know, because I've always been a tomboy, people, it's not a problem for people, so in that respect, it's been cool it's been easy, but, ja I don't know, when it comes to other people, it gets a bit difficult, ja {but tell me now, you say they see two different people} ja {can you maybe elaborate on that for me?} I don't know I feel like when people look at me they see..., they don't see me, they don't see the lesbian, they see this girl who likes wearing guys clothing and then they see me, I don't know getting married, and having children {huh} and ja, so that for me is a bit of a problem, but ja {so in a sense, you are saying, that in the way you dress you are basically displaying who you are, but people don't wanna take it} ja {they're saying ag, no she's probably just going through something} ja {I think I understand now. But then now, I want to talk to you about other women, alright, now how would you describe your feeling towards other women, and ok, this is now in the sense of attraction, to other women} hmm, I don't know I think it's the same way that, normal relationships go {hmm} I um, think it's the same as you'd feel for a guy, or a guy would I feel for a girl {hmm} or another guy would feel for another guy, it's a, it's, I don't know {it's natural} I think so, because I've never felt anything else. I've never been attracted to a man, so I don't know what that feels like {laughs} I don't know, I wouldn't say it's natural, because a lot of people will say it's unnatural, but for me it's natural {ja, so for you it flows, there isn't a point where you feel} no, never {apprehensive. Alright, I just, you basically said to me right now that everything about being lesbian feels natural to you} ja {ok} because I've never felt anything else, I just hear people say, oh my goodness no, you going to die, and you're gonna go to hell, you're gonna burn, but for me it's like I don't know {ja} I don't force it, comes and so, ja {ok, so there's no condemnation from within} no {alright, alright, I just wanna talk more about you telling other people, disclosure, disclosing to other people

(laughs)} I don't (laughs) some people pick it up from the way I dress, and some people pick it up from other people {hmm} but I don't walk around with it written all over, but I don't deny it either {hmm} when people ask me, I confirm, but I don't go out and tell them {alright, so you don't disclose at all} no {alright, but tell me now, what is? So you are? Ok let me ask you first, what does it mean to be in a closet to you.} ah, to me I think it means that you sort of like, you want to deny what you feel {hmm} ja I think so {ok} but I'm not sure

Q: {do you think you're in the closet?}

P: no, I'm just very cautious of what, the reaction I'll get from people {alright} because you know people do weird things, I don't wanna be stoned and like you know {hmm, I understand} and like raped into being straight {hmm} and because of where I come from as well, I come from a township, and ja {you know what it's like {it's hectic (laugh)}} so you can't just walk around trying to be you {ja} and my family as well, um I don't know, I'm not sure how they'll take it {hmm} and I, um it's something that I don't want to deal with {hmm} and I feel like it's none of their business {hmm} do I don't shove it in their face, but I don't deny it, and they never ask {hmm} so, to e it's like I never ever denied it because they never ask {hmm} but I wouldn't say I'm in the closet, no because a lot of people know {ok} ja

Q: {alright, so with that being said, what would then be out of the closet for you?}

P: out of the closet would be like Ellen {oh, Ellen DeGeneres} ja (laughs) {ok} that for me would be out of the closet (laughs) {ja} when you're just out there, everybody knows and you don't care what they think, and people accept you for who you are {hmm} and those that don't accept you don't accept you ja {ok} I think that my door is half open {alright, ok so you not necessarily in the closet, you not necessarily out the closet } no {you just standing} ja I'm just somewhere in between

Q: {ok, so, that is the next question that I'm going to ask you (laughs) so who's the first person you ever told?}

P: ooh, honestly my friends, I think {hmm} in high school, my classmates {was it voluntary, was it something that you shared?} no, they asked me if I feel I'm attracted to girls, and then I said yes, and that was that, ja, it was quite random {hmm} but ja, that's what happened {so tell me why did you choose to share that information with them?} because like I said, I don't deny it {hmm} if people ask, I never deny it, so they were, you know, it was like, you know how it gets when people skinner about you, and they start to like, oh, my goodness, oh my goodness {hmm} so ja for me it was let me put a stop to this when they had the guts to ask,

then I told them, they left me alone {alright} it was like, look at her she's a lesbian, some of them didn't speak to me for months, cause they thought she's gonna hit on me {laughs} I was at an all girls school {hmm} so ja { must've been awkward} it was, it was, but after a while ja {it must've been liberating as well though} ah I don't know, ah a little, just a little {hmm} ja I was still in grade eight so {you were still young} it was freaky, but it was like, ja, I felt, when I got home I was ashamed and embarrassed, I felt like oh, my goodness, did I do the right thing{hmm} but then the next day, I went back and I didn't care {hmm, but tell me when you say that you felt ashamed and embarrassed, was it because of their reactions?} ja {so it wasn't that you necessarily felt ashamed of who you are} no it was because of how they reacted, they were like oh my goodness you're a lesbian, oh my goodness and then the one girl was like "do you like me" {laughs} and then I was like don't, now really, I was thinking oh my goodness this is what I'm gonna go through for the rest of my life {hmm} and then ja that night I just I decided to accept it {hmm} some people are going to embrace it some people are gonna say oh my goodness {hmm} we need to pray for you {laughs} and ja I'll just take it as it comes {ok so tell me, before then, I heard you talking about Brenda Fassie} yes, yes {before then had you met any lesbians} no {is it} ja, so like I said I wasn't even sure it existed, because I didn't know anything about it {hmm} and then I was watching the news, and then she popped up and they were saying something about her and her girlfriend {hmm} I was like oh, ok {hmm it is out there} ja, after that I saw it in a different light ja {ok, so in peoples reaction has been one of the biggest challenges} ja, it has been, it still is {since then? until now} ja {can you share just one or two of those reactions} ahh, well actually, like people, you get different reactions {hmm} you get people who don't care {hmm} like they look at you and they don't care what you are {hmm} and then you got two extremes, you got the one extreme where people are like in awe of you and are like "she's a lesbian" and they're like wow, you're made to be this thing {laughs} and you get other people who are really, really disgusted and they start so say all these things like, you gonna burn and we need to pray for you and you know so, ja, you get a lot of hatred from people and ja, but, I don't know {it sounds like most of the negativity comes from the Christians} ja well you know eish {are you a Christian?} I don't know, yes {you were raised Christian?} yes I was, and I still am, and again, a lot of what I am is from the township {hmm} when you are in church there, they judge you {hmm} ok, and the first thing you have to wear a skirt, I refuse to wear a skirt, so I don't go to church, and then they judge you and they tell you how you gonna burn, and they tell you, you know how God doesn't want this {hmm} you know for me it's like, no, it's nobody's business, if I'm gonna burn, that's my own business {hmm} so ja, I would say that I am Christian, just not like {ja} hardcore, and devoted like that {is it mostly because you've been rejected by the Christians?} it's cause they're so judgemental {hmm} and you know , it's, for me they come across as hypocrites, so I don't want to be associated with

something like that {hmm} so ja, I just, ja {so tell me have you disclosed to your family yet?} no {not a single member} I told my granny once {laughs} I was in grade nine, and I said to her, um" mama what would you say if I said I was lesbian?" and she said "I don't know what am I supposed to say?" I said I don't know what are you gonna say" she said I don't know, so I said "I'm a lesbian" she said ok, and that was that {laughs} it's never been brought up again, she hasn't said anything, I don't know she probably thinks I was going through something {hmm} so, ja that was that {hmm, and it was never discussed by any family thereafter} no, my mom, always asks me about boyfriends, and stuff, I just say I'm not interested in men {she's not suspicious, or anything?} she is, but you know, I think she asks because she wants me to say that {hmm} I'm not {ok} but I don't want to say that, so every time she brings it up, I rubbish it away because I don't know {ok} I don't how I'd face her {and your dad?} I actually don't know where he is {oh} (laughs) I don't know, but I don't think, I don't know where he is {do you know him well enough?} I know him, but I don't care about him {ok} ja so {you don't have a relationship with him} no {the ones that are close to you, the one knows and she's like whatever} I don't think she knows, I think, I don't know I think she thinks it was a phase and I was just, you know, I was in an all girls school, so I was overwhelmed by all the skirts I saw {laugh} ja I don't know, and then my mom, I don't know, I don't know, my friends say that she knows, she's just waiting for me to tell her {what do you anticipate?} I don't know, I honestly don't know, because she's very, ja, she has like this lesbian colleague that she works with and that woman told her that "your daughter is a lesbian" {hmm} and I don't know, she seems cool {hmm} with the whole idea {hmm} but I don't know, when she actually finds out if she'll still be as cool, and I don't want her to find out {you don't want her to find out?} no {and how long do you think you can hold it off for?} (laughs) forever, I really think that I can, it's been this long, I think I can continue {they'll be a time when grand babies are expected (laughs)} no, I don't know, they know I'm not really into children {hmm} I like them when they're like small {hmm} and they can't talk and they can't do anything {hmm} then after that they just get annoying {ja} so I'm not really into kids and stuff {hmm} so ja, I don't know [so your family hasn't exactly given you anything} no {honestly it's like, there's nothing to go on} no {but, form that, I just want to know like how do you experience being lesbian? in terms of other people like your community?} um, ja the community, extremely judgemental {hmm} it's hard, it's very, very hard, people fish for information, not because they care {hmm} just because they wanna skinner about you {hmm} so it's like, um, for me it's been, it's been hard, so I just {hmm} I don't hide it but I don't shove it in their face either {hmm} I try not to care {hmm} about what they think, but that is hard as well {hmm} I don't know, in Hatfield, I think it's better in Hatfield {hmm} because people, I feel, I don't know, they just don't care, they got their own lives going so, ja {hmm} it's better and there's a lot of them, as well so it's like ja {so it's a more accepting} some

people are more accepting, some people just want to burn you, ja {even in Hatfield (laughs)} even in Hatfield, ja even in Hatfield {there's a lot of burning going on there} ja it's hectic, but ja Hatfield is a better place to be {ok, so in terms of like going out, cause you said you got a girlfriend} go out how? Like a couple and stuff {like movies} ja we do, but she's very like, what are people gonna say, so we walk like the one you saw now {hmm} like how we are, like friends {hmm} like all my friend look like that, so every girl I'm with looks like my girlfriend {hmm} so ja, people don't really know {hmm, so you don't display any affection in public?} oh no, I don't wanna be killed, not yet {(laughs) you don't hold hands nothing like that?} no, not yet {it must be difficult though} agh sometimes {ja} sometimes it is, but then again ja {do you have a place where you feel safe?} no {not even with any group, I don't know if you are part of any group that are lesbian} up and out {hmm} ja {and within that space?} no {still not} no {ok} (laughs) {I thought you would} thing is I always think that there'll always be people around who are not accepting so, if you go to a gay bar, like you know, people can come and like {ja} start shooting randomly, you know stuff like that has happened, so I don't {so you've structured your life in a way that protects you} ja, sort of {ok} which I really, uh it's not something I'm not proud of {hmm} because I don't, I'm not ashamed of who I am so, it almost feels like a contradiction so {no, I don't think so hey} don't you? {no I don't, the thing about it there's a difference between like when you go out like this is who I am, and I'm not gonna tell anybody, you're not saying I'm not, you're not saying I am, whatever you make of it, you know what I mean, so I don't necessarily have anything to be ashamed of} but I'd like to be like that, I'd like to be {but the world is not allowing you to be} ja you see, so I guess it's not my fault {no it's not we live in a big world}

Q: {so tell me, in terms of society as a whole, we've spoken about your community, when we talked about Hatfield, we tapped into that a bit} hmm {but when you look at things around like in the country, when you look around how, do you feel being a lesbian in this context?} um, I still think uh, I still think I feel the same way {hmm} because I read an article a couple of weeks back about some man, who had a sex change {hmm} and he was fired {hmm} so I still think that either way, even with the laws we have, it just, it make no difference {hmm} to just be yourself and be out there, there'll still be people who don't accept, and if it's people who have control over your life, like an employer or something {hmm} then either way you're still screwed, it's just. It's a difficult thing to be ja {it's not a good place, the space you're in doesn't allow you to thrive as well} ja {ok} not at all

Q: {alright, moving from that I just wanna understand, how you feel towards other lesbians, cause I can understand, we're straight people we have issues with each other cause we're straight, do you feel there are things like that within your community?} ja I think so you know {hmm} I think it's all part of human nature {hmm} there's always that, like you know, there's an inclination for us to sort of be friends, be together, but that's the one extreme and then

there's extreme is like I don't wanna be her friend she's gonna take my girl type of thing {ok} (laughs) those type of things happen as well so ja it's the same {ja} as the heterosexual community {ja I'm picking that up. Like sometimes there are labels that are ascribed to people, especially within the lesbian community, which of these labels is more fitting to you? because I was speaking to another lady and she was just telling me her version of it, I just wanna understand, I don't wanna give you any cues, because I don't want you to be influenced, if I can put it that way} ok, but what sort of labels are you talking about? {you were talking about, when I'm with my girlfriend, she looks sort of like that} hmm {what do you mean by, like that? Like my friend, what is that called, like when a person is looking more like a girl?} feminine {ja} ja, uh what is it called {ja but I mean, obviously it seems here, because you say to me "I dress like this"} ja {and obviously not all lesbians dress like that} obviously not {I just want to understand in your opinion, are there categories of lesbians} I don't think so, I don't know, people describe me as a butch lesbian {hmm} whatever that means I don't know, I don't know for me lesbian is lesbian {hmm} it's, it's a, all it means is who you're attracted to, all these sort of you know, you're a girly lesbian type thing {stereotypes} ja I don't know, ja, well it becomes important, when you um, you become attracted to someone {hmm} I wouldn't want to be attracted to someone who looks like me {hmm} it's gonna be weird, what? you know I mean appearance is important {hmm} I mean if we both look the same, then it's just weird, it's like going for a guy type of thing for me {hmm} but I think, I don't know, I think we're all the same, I know a lot of like girly lesbians that like very feminine, they wear high heels and they've got weaves and they got nails, and I just think it's a matter of preference {hmm} it's just, ja {and also how you identify inside} ja {because you were very open about what you felt you were} ja {alright, hmm, I just wanna know like, I'm looking at this from a wider perspective, do you think there's a difference in how black lesbians are treated as opposed to white lesbians?} yes {hmm} um, white people, ok black people are very ignorant {hmm} like if they don't understand something they rubbish it {hmm} white people I don't know, they're a little sensitive, they read, and so they understand better {hmm} so I think that, you know white people are a little more accepting because they understand that if two people are doing their own thing, it's got nothing to do with me, with black people I don't know, they vary, I don't know, it's just, for me it's ignorance, it's just like you know, they see something they don't get and they feel like it involves them and they just want to get in there, they want to be involved, it makes it difficult {hmm} so ja, but not to say that white people are not like that {hmm} I've come across some who are very like {nosey} ja and hectically homophobic, I don't know white people, you see white people walking around holding hands, making out and no one cares {hmm} you see black people doing that, I know a girl who did that and her girlfriend got raped, so you know, it's {hmm, so you think it's a cultural thing} ja I think so {sho} because black people think no,

you know white people do those kinds of thing, black people shouldn't be doing those kinds of things, so ja {you think that they think that homosexuality is western?} ja it's a western thing and like it came because colonisation came {hmm} and now that colonisation's gone all that stuff must go as well, so ja I do {ok, um I think that basically, it brings our interview to an end, but before then I just wanna understand, why did you agree to take part in this study?} I don't know actually, I don't um, Delile asked me and um, I think I had nothing to lose, I've never done something like this before so I thought it could be interesting so, ja, I don't know actually {hmm} ja {was it interesting?} it was, I mean I thought about things I never thought about before, so ja it was interesting {ok, the main reason I'm doing this study, as black women no one really takes an interest in us} hmm {and I'm straight but I feel every black woman} hmm {regardless of sexuality, from rural or urban deserves to be treated with respect and love} hmm {unconditional love and that's why I think I'm doing this research, because I want people to see people for who they are and not necessarily what they want them to be, so ja that's what I'm doing. I'll probably do my PhD on it as well} oh ok {alright thank you so much for taking part}

Interview participant 3: Celiwe

Q: {so tell me, how would you describe yourself?}

P: In terms of what?{yourself} nje {ja, Celiwe nje} I'm just a person who lives hey, I take things as they come {one day at a time} ja {ok} you know, I have this little philosophy that don't fix it if it's not broken {hmm} so when it breaks that's when I fix it, if it's not uh {leave it} just carry on with life {ok, and in relation to race} see like I already said, I don't like these stupid boxes {boxes} and categories and yada yada {buy humour me, please humour me} akere now, if we have to put people in boxes, I would be classified as black, I have a problem if you gonna classify me don't call me black, call me African {African} call me Ndebele {ok} do not call me black, cause {you're not black} black is a neutral {ok} that's what it is, it's not even a colour {it's not a colour} and that's not what I am {alright you didn't like boxes but for the sake of this study, there are a couple of boxes} as I'm saying, for the sake of society {yes} and everybody else around me, I shall say I'm African {alright} yes {and in terms of gender} I'm a female

Q: {you're a female and then sexuality?}

P: I'm a being {a being} what do you mean, in terms of

Q: {ok, there are two types of sexuality that are predominant known, there is homosexuality and heterosexuality, which one would society place you in?}

P: that's the thing like, I'm a neural, like, dude like I said I'm not into girls 24/7 of my life and I'm not into guys 24/7 of my life {ok} I'm into whatever comes to me and I'm like yeah that I like {ok, so you don't ascribe to a sexuality} no {ok, I'm going to ask a couple of questions that in your sexual practices, you may be able to answer, and I don't know if you'll be able to answer all of them but please try} ok {alright then, um so tell me more about yourself as Celiwe} but am I telling you as a friend, you {we're just conversing, I just wanna get to know you and understand} cause you know the thing, people that study law, over think things and over analyse, so I'd have to now understand, from which angle am I supposed to approach this. Celiwe in general is apparently, I'm outrageous I'm out there {hmm} but I do have my tendency of being outrageous and outgoing but nje nje, I just choose to be in my comfort zone {hmm}

I like my comfort zone a lot {ok} being with my friends chilling, being at home with family chilling that's me {ok, so you like being around people} I hate being alone {ok (laughs)} I can't stand to be alone.

Q: {ok what has been the most exciting experience of your life?}

P: exciting...I can't say I've had an exciting experience, things are exciting before I do them {ok, the idea of things} ja once I've done them, then it's no more exciting {hmm} I'd say, one thing I look forward to doing this year is going on South Africa's biggest king swing, I've been on a king swing, I wanted to go on a king swing, now it's not that exciting anymore, now I want to go on South Africa's biggest one {what's a king swing if I may ask?} um, it's a big swing basically, they, it's like bungee jumping {uhuh} it's a bridge, they tie you and you stand on a platform, there's another platform on the if they wish to have {uhuh} but half the time they don't, you jump and you swing {to the other end} no you just swing {wow} until the swing stops and then you go down {sounds very exciting (laughs)} ja

Q: {what has been the most challenging experience of your life?}

P: varsity {varsity, in what way?} I'm not used to working hard for good marks {laughs} you put in double the effort to get half the marks I got in high school, and I'm not, I have certain standards that I have to live by, and if I don't meet the standard, it's a problem and varsity {like that} is proving to be a problem {varsity is like that hey?} hmm {it's so far from what you know, nothing is what it seems here} hmm

Q: {alright I'm gonna ask you one more question in that range of questions, what has your sexuality, or has it played a role in the exciting things in your life or the unhappy things in your life?}

P: you know the thing is, one would say I'm nonchalant about a lot of things {hmm} if I choose to do something I choose to do it {hmm} if I get out of it positive or negative, I don't now take it and say, because this guy hurt me, guys are bad, and make me never wanna date guys, or because this girl hurt me, no I just, something bad may happen, and you take it as a bad experience, you don't take it as a bad experience because it is a guy, or because it is a girl, so I don't really have any {I understand what you're saying, basically one vent doesn't determine} no {future perceptions of a specific group of people, or event} hmm {alright} I'm one of those people who don't learn, my mother says I don't learn, you say don't put your hand on the stove, I will look at and I'll be like ok, I know I'm not to put my hand on

xxix

that stove, hover over the stove, feel ok, this stuff is hot, but the random day will come when I'm like oh, {laughs} ok it burns, this is how it looks like {ok, so basically, your past doesn't always determine your future} that's another one little philosophy I have that, you can't, look, the past is the past and you can't now, today want to go fix what you did yesterday, and today, I can't sit down and schedule what I'm going to do tomorrow, because I don't know all the other factors at play for tomorrow {sneeze} bless you that's the word, you really, if you gonna live life focussing on what happened in the past and letting the past now dictate your future, you are not gonna see everything, you would've seen {hmm} and you're not going to experience everything you can experience {gee that's very profound, actually. Alright we spoke about labels and that you're not comfortable with labels} haai that I'm not comfortable with labels I don't see a need for them {ja, the world does} ja {it makes them comfortable}.

Q: {With that said, what sexual orientation would you ascribe to yourself if any at all?}

P: akere now, if we're going to look at the three main things which is your lesbian, by lesbian including your gay boys too {hmm} your homosexual, your bisexual and your heterosexuals {hmm} but when I have to sit down and say now Celiwe choose one of the three, I would choose bisexual {ok} ja {ok, now that's where you feel most comfortable} ja

Q: {alright, um, so when did you first find out that you were bi-sexual? Or for the sake of this study that you were attracted to women?}

P: um, I speak a lot {laughs} so I need to connect the dots for you to get to where I am {that's fine} um, uh man, I used to have a crush on Sade YoTV presenter {ok} I had a crush on her {hmm} to the point where I was like, you know what, I'm gonna make a plan to go to Urban Brew studios, my mom knew some guy, some agent guy, ja I basically went there odd days, you know {hmm} audience member I got to know the people, you know I befriended the people there, at that time, I didn't, I didn't think that it was an attraction towards females because I was like what, grade 6, grade 7 {hmm} so at that time I just thought this girl is cool, she's so like me and you know, got to varsity, got out of my small town, came to the University of Pretoria because I don't have any shadows, and people who knew me {hmm} where I come from in my life and I could start new and ja. A friend of mine was like in the beginning, "Celiwe are you lesbian, just, just lets be honest with each other?" and I'm like no dog, I'm not into girls, I guess the thought had simmered, I was a tomboy, in a small town, there's no such thing a lesbian {hmm} small town, you're a tomboy and that's where it ends and that's all I thought of myself as. I got here and I was like "hey man you find the odd girl here and there attractive and you choose not to act upon it that doesn't mean you're not, you

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know attracted to them" {hmm} so I think when I got to varsity that's when I started thinking about it {ok} ja {so you entertained the thought, because you were allowed to} ja now that I was in varsity I was allowed to be me, and still now, if I leave here, if we were friends here in Pretoria and we go home now, the things I do at home and you check the things I do here, you'd be like these are two different people {hmm} and ja, there are certain things I can't do back at home that I can do here {ok} when I got here I got free, I was free to do, so {with that being said, it means that, in my understanding, is that back home, it's not that you weren't thinking about it, it's that you weren't allowed to voice it, if I can put it that way} no not that I wasn't allowed to voice it, the thing is, I'm gees, um, I think of myself as a gadget {hmm} I used to for a big part of my life, I used to think of myself as a gadget, that's why, when you looking for me I'd be in the house on the computer {hmm} even if I had maths and science to do I would be doing my computer studies, day in and day out {hmm} so, I liked programming because I could determine the results {hmm} and that, I could control, over what, how this programme was going to run, that's how I thought of myself, I thought, this thing that you have emotions and all of that, I was, someone said it now, it was someone on TV and they were like {hmm} "emotions cannot be scientifically quantified", and I'm a scientist, now since they cannot be scientifically quantified...therefore emotions don't exist in my books {hmm} I'm a scientist and science is all that exists in my life {hmm} to me emotions were a programming language that is, that is in the air {hmm} and their busy talking about making it {hmm} but hasn't been made, so I can't now, learn how to use that programming language because it's not made {ok} so I never used to process emotions, the only emotions that I would feel as a kid was just anger and sadness {hmm} I would be happy because I chose to allow society to think that I'm happy for that day {ok} but I was always just an angry being, so when I'm at home I can't be me, I go home, I mean it's home, I've been living this certain life and people are used to Celiwe being like this {hmm} and if now I come, and I act in a different way, I feel like now, I won't be able to control the outcome, from the people, so I carry on living the way I've been living and slowly but surely unhinge until they get the real me {this is your family?} Not, not even my family, dude hey, like eish, my family doesn't count, like people {people in } general} ja {ok, so what you like is, you have a very structured way of looking at things} yes {and if things, if you foresee that look here, things could turn out this way, you'd rather not?} no I'd just leave it {ok, alright, we've kind of strayed for a bit there} ja {you say that back home you're not expressive, as expressive as you are here?} ja {alright so in a sense that part of the world doesn't see you as we this side University of Pretoria see you?} no {so they wouldn't know what label to ascribe to you?} no they still think I'm a tomboy {so they think you're a tomboy} I've got my days of getting all dressed up and dollied, and they'll be like there's Celiwe {laughs} the girl side of her, other than that, I live in the hood, I don't see the reason to wake up in the morning, bath, look pretty, to go sit with

guys and do nothing the whole day, I don't chill with girls anymore, cause half of them, actually all my friends are pregnant now, I have nothing in common to speak with them about, {ok} so I chill with people who don't care, as long as I'm clothed {hmm} and I'm there and I'm talking, it's all they care about {ok} ja {so this is now back home} ja {so you don't necessarily fit in with the girls because they're moving on with their predetermined lives and} I have nothing to talk to them about anymore {(laughs), so you've outgrown them or they've outgrown you?} I think to a certain degree, I've outgrown them, like I said, I live ko Kasi {hmm} in my block, well in my street, the people I know, there's only like two of us who come to University well one in TUT {hmm} and I'm here the others are studying that side, so they still got the way of thinking that's that side {hmm} him and I will come back home and we'll have hours on end conversations and you know it would be fine {hmm} I could do it and it's now, chill with everybody else who's stuck in the Vaal, either stuck in the Vaal or hasn't gone to varsity, hasn't passed their matric, I mean {it's not stimulating} ja, it's, it just it rots me, like I can't do it {hmn} I can't sit there and watch people debate about "I think I need another child, so I can get a grant", I'm like dude let it go {ja} I'm thinking I need to go and study and pass this semester nicely so that next semester I don't have problems {hmm} they're thinking about government's money, I'm like it's not your money, you know, so ja {ok, we really are straying a lot, I'm gonna now, try and focus back, on your attraction to females, alright hmm I find it difficult because this one was kinda structured for lesbian participants, and you said that you don't necessarily ascribe to, or if you chose to ascribe it would be bisexual, so I'm gonna just talk about your same sex feelings} um, I was gonna say that it doesn't matter {alright, so how do you feel about that aspect of you, cause I understand that you're attracted to men and you're attracted to women} hmm {how do you feel about being attracted to women?} being attracted to women is nice, no nice is so condescending, it's so me apparently because of my star sign {hmm} cause apparently Leo's are heartfelt people {laughs} they want to get to the heart {hmm} when I, well with the few girls I've dated, it's like I enjoyed that because I was free to be me, there was you know, communication, there was mutual respect, not to say that guys don't give you respect but like dating a girl is like so much more fulfilling, you know, to a person's character, wow, like you get to explore yourself, to understand yourself you know, ja {so it's fulfilling} now I'm starting to ask myself am I still bisexual {am I taking you on a journey?} dude I'm actually thinking like hawu, I would never say such things about a guy, and that's the other thing, when it comes to my guy relationships, there's a standard, there's actually a standard {hmm} and there's only one guy who's reached that standard, it's hard for the rest to follow suite {ok} with girls there is no standard, I'm new {hmm} I've only dated two girls, well I've only really dated one, cause {laughs} some sort of entry, my entry level person, my entry point into this whole thing didn't really count as a girlfriend, but ja, being with girls is so nice, it is, it's really hot {you feel at

home} ja {ok, I just wanted to also, just go back a bit, you say, you first came to Pretoria, when was that?} three years back {when you first discovered, that look here I could actually like girls and now when you think of how you felt then and now, is there a difference?} yes I'm, gees, I'm like, like I said I wanna go on the biggest king swing in South Africa, I'm a dare devil {laughs} you know, so if something, something excites me before I do it, after I've done it, it doesn't excite me anymore {hmm} when, the first girl came into my life, I didn't think of her as anything either than a friend {hmm} till a friend of mine was like "do you like this girl" and I said "hmm, not really" and she's like "but she likes you" and I was like oh, lets see where this is going to take us {laughs} if that's the case, then lets see where this road is going to take us {so you were just looking at...} ja in the beginning people could say I was just bi-curious {ok} I wanted to see {the other side} what's happening on the other side of the fence {ja} now I'm like, now I know what I want {hmm} from a person and hence I say I don't want to put myself in a box {hmm} in whatever form in comes in it doesn't matter {hmm} as long as I get what I want, yes {alright, so basically for you it's not about the physical} hmm hmm {or what society says, it's about the being inside} yes {and what they do for you, alright, so like you said initially, and I respect that no labels ascribe to you in the natural world} hmm

Q: {ok, alright then, your same sex attraction to women how's that changed your life?}

P: I don't think it has {hmm, you're still the same person} yeah I don't think it's has, it hasn't

Q: {alright then, so tell me more about being bisexual then, how do you feel, how do you experience it, I guess in a sense you've spoken to me that you don't really care about other people and what they think, it's just about how it, how it fulfils you} hmm {just tell me, how would you describe your feelings towards other women? How do you feel about other women?}

P: I'm an open book {hmm} and apparently that's like my downfall, I'm like, I don't, I don't shut out, if I date a guy, I'm very weary of, I've been dating guys all my life {hmm} I'm very weary of opening up too soon, doing certain things too soon, you know, with guys there's like a programme to follow {hmm} but with girls it's like, oh ok, here's a girl we're dating lets go with the flow {hmm} and then, my previous girlfriend we dated seven months, I dated the guy before her for years {hmm} after four years I said to him I love him {hmm} with her it was like hey wait, a week later I'm like hey wait is this honeymoon phase {hmm} or is it like going through, you know the elements, you're thinking maybe you love her but, this is, can't be, it's too early, it's too soon. Time went on, I think it was a month into it, we were chilling and I was like dude "what if I told you I love you" she was like "ei dog, you suck cause I was going

xxxiii

to tell you that today” I’m like “I’m not too sure about it, it feels too soon” and she was, luckily for both of us, it was our first time with a girl {hmm} so we were both experiencing everything new, one thing we both agreed to was that it’s easier to open up to a girl {hmm} as much as I might be an open book, I’m not completely open with guys, with her it was like lets do the deed

Q: {ok so tell me, I hear you saying, it’s easier, it’s basically a bit more natural, I don’t like to use the word natural, because when people think natural, they think of how we all perceive natural, you know, that a woman, is supposed to be with a man, this is supposed to happen this way, but for you know what natural feels like} hmm {it like your right hand and your left hand} hmm {it feels natural to be with a woman, ok but tell me is it emotional, is it sexual what is it with you, your attraction to women} with me it’s mostly an emotional thing {hmm} you can’t be in a relationship with someone and not be emotionally invested in this person {hmm} if I’m gonna date you and I don’t have any emotions towards you, like I would, I won’t even try, like I’ll just tell you there’s no emotion here {hmm} all I want is friendship, if we’re gonna try something else then it’s just a waste of time {hmm} with females it’s like dude, you don’t even have to say it, it’s just, well from that one person I dated {it was intuitive almost} ja, it just came about {ok, if I had to say something right now, you’re sounding like you’re leaning to the other side} I’m listening to myself [you’re lopsided (laughs)] I’m listening to myself speak and I’m like {oh my goodness} am I still dating guys, because again, society says look, Adam and eve and not {Adam and Steve} you know {ja, alright} ja

Q: {alright, I’m gonna talk more about disclosing like, what does it mean for you to be in a closet?}

P: that I pretend like...dude...for me to be in the closet you’re not, you’re not being true to yourself, you know you’re doing things because this is what society dictates and because society says when you walk, you must walk straight {hmm} don’t walk to the left, it, that would be in the closet, when you’re like ok, because they say that when I walk I must walk straight I must not walk to the left, I will walk straight even if I want to go to the left {hmm} in the closet would be you don’t do anything, because you’re afraid of what somebody else is going to say {ok} or what somebody else is going to do {ok, so you deny yourself} yes you deny yourself of what you could experience or could be experiencing

Q: {ok, so what does out of the closet mean to you}

P: it's being free to do whatever you want {hmm} if I want to walk down the road with my girlfriend holding hands then that's what I'll do, if I want to go out and kiss her in the middle of the dance floor, then that's what I would do, I'm not going to now...ok I'm dating this girl and no one is allowed to know about it, only a certain group of people are allowed to know about it, if I decide to, no that's not...the minute you start putting up barriers to this relationship that you're having you're in the closet {hmm} but, when you let go and you say let's do the deed, then that's it

Q: {would you consider yourself in or outside of the closet?}

P: like I said in Pretoria I'm not in the closet {hmm} but when I'm at home, there are certain people who know that I find females attractive, but they never seen me, or heard me speak about my girlfriend {hmm} so at home, I think I'm inside the closet and the other thing, I don't like the girls at my place

Q: {so tell me, you said that um, you talked about how open you are in Pretoria, and I'd figured that if you'd ever told anybody, it would be somebody this side, that you're attracted to women, so have you told anybody that you're attracted to women?}

P: but they know, {laughs} people that need to know, know {ok} I don't need to tell, the first person I told when I acknowledged that look I might be attracted to females was a friend of mine at home {hmm} him and I are like are like, we're too tight like that {hmm} I don't know I told most my friends from home before I decided to tell anyone her {hmm} ja then, one day my friend and I were chilling, we chill, firstly we chilled with a bunch of lesbian people and one day it was like what we're attracted to females, it was just that stupid day, but after that day I started thinking like what if {hmm, so you have lesbian friends?} a lot {here or at home?} here, you don't, dude, {laughs} dude I come from a place where flipping FW De Klerk used to be mayor, ok {ok, so it's very conservative} so {laughs} you dare say you're lesbian it's over for you, it's tickets {it's very, very conservative area} it's not as bad as these places they show, the Sowetos, and Diepsloot on TV, it's not that bad, but it's just taboo {it's a taboo} ja, you don't, like you don't

Q: {alright, so, the friend of yours the guy, is he the guy from TUT that you were talking about earlier?}

P: no, he's my neighbour

Q: {the guy from TUT}

P: my friend the one I told you about is also in TUT, I met him though other people, through my primary school friends {is it} reunions and what what, that's how I got to know him

Q: {so why did you choose to talk to him about it? why was he the first person that you decided to tell?}

P: because I knew that he was in the closet {oh, so you felt, "look her if I tell you, you can't tell, cause I know your secret" type of thing or did you feel I'm so comfortable with you right now} he knows where I am, like, he knew what I was going through so it wouldn't have been hard for me to now start explaining things I can't explain to myself {hmm} so it was easier for me to tell him {so it was like a process that he was going through with you?} he wasn't going through it with me, we didn't talk about it until I spoke about it {ok, so you opened the door?} yes and ja, apparently I have a knack for seeing things {ok so you're very observant} yes I, I {you sassed him out, like this one} I could see like, you know what, ok sharp I thought I could hide my thing, but I know for a fact that there's something that's happening there in your life, so let me try it, let me tell you and let's see if you're actually going through what I think you're going through or not

Q: {so, basically, you felt, I could be ok with guy, and you were right, ok, alright so how did he react?}

P: dude it was over mix it when I told him, people try new things, I think I might be going down that road and he was like oh, ok {so you guys were on mix it? oh ok, but I mean did you feel ah (relieved) or uh} I'm, ja you could say, I burped out {hmm, so it was like a weight lifted off your shoulders} ja I needed to tell someone before I could tell other people {so the reaction was?} it was fine it was cool {and to you what did it mean, it meant, I'm ok} I'm fine, I'm ok, I'm not a weirdo, just cause there's no programme out there for what I'm going through doesn't mean you know

Q: {ok, so tell me, have you told anyone in your family yet?}

P: there's the other thing I also think it might be a phase {is it} I'm thinking it might be a phase, but I think the part of me that think it's a phase might be, where I want to bring a man to the house, and show my dad my future husband {hmm} and have my two and a half kids with my white picket fence {hmm} that's the side that says I thinking it's a phase but then at

xxxvi

the same time there's a side of me that's like I don't think this is a phase, I'll tell them, my parents from what I gathered my parents won't freak out and they won't be like they want you out my house or something stupid like that but then now, I tell them and like they have to, and this is now their way of thinking and then they thinking this is her life, I come back later and I'm like, I'm getting married to a guy, then it's like no, now why did you tell us this {hmm} if this is not what you decided {hmm} I wish not to tell them until I myself am entirely sure {hmm, it makes sense, so you're not, not telling them, it's just that you need to be sure about it} ja, I can't just rock up and just be like ei guys I haven't even, well I haven't even confessed that I am dating, they know, but I haven't told them, like look hey there's a guy in my life {hmm} and to go from not telling them about a guy, to coming and saying there's a girl in my life it's too big a deal {hmm} you know, my dad still thinks of me as his little girl, you know and I'm not dating I don't have some guy who's going to hurt my feelings out there, you know {hmm} so I don't want to {hmm} jump stage one and go to ten {hmm} and like ei so what's happening? {but it sounds like you have support should you need it} ja, should I need it I would have support {alright, so not even a cousin knows?} no, she's not really family, family, I call her my little sister, she knows [so it would never get back to your family if she knows]

Q: {Ok, alright I'm going to refer to you again as same sex sexuality, or same sex practicing person, it sounds confusing, but when you are in a relationship with a woman how do you perceive the community's reaction to your relationship?}

P: I don't care actually {ok} so I don't really take cognisance of what people are saying to me, I was always a weird child so I've always gotten stares, so when someone stares at me, I first ask is it because I'm wearing something funny?, is there something on my face? Or are they staring cause people generally stare {hmm} or is it because I'm with my girlfriend and I'm walking down the road holding hands, what are you staring at me? What's the reason and since I won't get an answer, I just {disregards them} yeah, you know, I've been getting stares from Vereeniging, Pretoria, I thought it would change, I get stares there too, there's something about me that makes people stare, whatever it is I really don't care, and if it's because I'm with my girlfriend at the time, I really don't care

Q: {ok, so you can't really separate what they stare at you for, you don't know if it's your sexual preference or if it's because of your hair, is it your spectacles?}

P: you see there's too much to, ja {ok you don't take it personally, basically, cause if you did I feel you would more or less feel sensitive and say it's because of A, so in a sense, you say whatever, you shrug it off} hmm ja go ahead, take a photo it'll last longer

Q: {(laughs) and society as a whole I guess community and society are sort of the same thing, but I feel community is a bit closer and society is a bit wider} wider yeah {so how do you feel, that they feel about you and people in your situation or more explicitly lesbian?}

P: dude, for now, dude, I'm still fresh to this whole thing {hmm} I still remember how I used to think and feel about people in same sex relationships {hmm} and I sort of know where they're coming from [hmm] so, what's your question again? {I just wanna know how do you feel, how do you perceive them and their feelings towards people in the situation that you're in?} I know what they're thinking {hmm} my questions got answered when I was in a same-sex relationship [hmm] things like this doing an interview {hmm} I don't think interviews will get you into what I see {hmm, hmm} you know {hmm I'm aware of that} so I mean, you can think whatever you want to think {hmm} I'll allow you, but don't judge me, because you are not seeing what I am seeing, and what I am seeing is working for me so I choose to...whatever anybody thinks about me the way I do things I don't care {ok} until you walk a mile in my shoes, your opinion and what you think it really doesn't mean anything {so you don't really care? bummer it all} there's a lot of thing I don't care about hey {I know I'm picking that up} there's a lot I don't care about {like whatever (laughs)}

Q: {and then I understand that ok, you say you've got a lot of lesbian friends, how do you feel about them? How do you feel towards other lesbians?}

P: they're people {they're people, so there's no animosity, you're gonna steal my girlfriend nothing like that?} ei man, if we were in a room and I was the only girl, and there was like a whole truck load of guys there, and I'm with my boyfriend, the guy would feel the same way, that these guys might steal my...it's {it's universal} it's always going to happen, that people are going to think you're going to take my girlfriend, well I've had many experiences, people thinking I'm going to take their girlfriend, I meet someone for the first time, I'm a nice person, I meet someone for the first time, something that happened now, now, they were drinking, we were drinking, then the girlfriend was cold, I had a jacket and a jersey on and was like "ei dog, you can have my jacket" I don't know this girl from a bar of soap, I don't know her, she can leave with my jacket and I wouldn't get my jacket back {hmm} and it turns out that the girlfriend, she's see now, I can't separate, there was a dreadlock girl and a girl with braids, the girl with the braids was the one I gave my jacket to {hmm} it turns out that the dreadlock

xxxviii

girl, was a friend of my first girlfriend {hmm} in inverted commas, then I was told “hey dog, this girl thinks you’re gonna take her girlfriend” I’m like “dude I’m not interested” “then why did you give her your jacket?” “because she was cold” but now she feels threatened, ah dog, I like I don’t care hey, the poor girl was cold inside “if you feel threatened, good for you, knock yourself out I’ve always had people thinking I’m going to steal their men, their girlfriends” {hmm} I’m just a nice person and if you think I’m being too nice that’s your problem {hmm, so insecurities are insecurities} that’s for you, like the last guy I date, has major ass insecurities and I couldn’t do it, I’m not going to be constantly stroking your ego to make you realise that I’m yours and yours only {hmm} if you think I’m going to take your girlfriend it means you must sit down with yourself and be like checklist, what has she doing that makes me feel like I’m not doing better {hmm} and you need to up your game, I’m not doing anything, I don’t have any intension of taking your girl, if you think I’m going to take her, then good for you, if I’m thinking of taking her, I probably will, I’ll wait for her to break up with you {hmm} I won’t do it while you guys are there still in the mix {ok} yes

Q: {alright, often labels that are often ascribed to lesbians and I hear you say you’re not lesbian, but there are time when you are interested in lesbians and you do partake in same sex sexuality}

P: I don’t date butch lesbians, {uhuh} this is how I date, I can see you have questions already, this is how I date, I will not date a full blown lesbian because, those people have too much, too much trouble

Q: {what do you mean, by full blown lesbian?}

P: there’s like different levels to this whole thing, you know like if you’re a lesbian, you have your butch lesbian, you have your girly-girl lesbian, you have your tomboy lesbian {hmm} my friend you’re not even lesbian, actually no wait ok let me bring it out {hmm} you have homosexual, bisexual, heterosexual {hmm} a fully blown lesbian is the one who chills, who’s only going to date girls {hmm} and your bisexual, you know bisexual people {the ones who are on the fence} yes, then there’s straight people, but inside the straight people there’s also another division, which are I’m not going to touch a girl, or maybe I’ll touch a girl {hmm} I’ll date a bisexual or a maybe I’ll touch a girl {ok, those who could experiment, they’re the ones who could experiment} ja, I could date someone like that I will not date someone who has been a lesbian for longer than I have {why?} it’s whoa dude like, whoa, I have a friend {hmm} she’s been lesbian since kingdom come {hmm} she doesn’t date lesbians because she says they are full of trouble, she’d rather take a straight girl and convert her {laughs} that’s what

xxxix

she loves to do, she take a straight girl and convert her, and make her bisexual or lesbian or whatever, but she'll never date a...bisexual people tend to have this mentality that I'm dating a girl, so I'm faithful to the female species, I'm dating a guy I'm being loyal to the male species, they don't think of that as cheating {ok} they might be dating both at the same time, they don't think of it as cheating, for people like, for me that's cheating {hmm} because I regard myself as a human being, I'm not bisexual and I'm not in a box, when I'm dating {hmm} and whoever I'm dating from whichever side I must stick with that one person {hmm} with your lesbians they have a problem with you dating and then you have a guy friend, cause they feel competition, I'm bisexual, they'd always feel like they're in competition with guys and it doesn't work, you know, I'd rather have someone who thinks like me, who knows that look {hmm} if she decided to look that way and sees a girl, hey, I she decides to look that way and see a guy, then hey, what she does about it, is the part where I actually come in {hmm, sho very complicated} ja

Q: {alright, I'm gonna ask you now, we're coming to the end, but I'm gonna ask you still, a couple more questions. Do you feel that black lesbians and white lesbians are treated the same? In South Africa, or...}

P: now this answer would come from my experience {hmm} what I do see on TV is that, when you're black and you come to someone and you say I'm lesbian, you already have a problem, you come to them and say I'm bisexual, there's a problem there {hmm} but if a white person comes to a black person and says look I'm lesbian, they're like ha dog, do your deed, do your thing, the problem comes with the fact that you're black and now you're trying to do what white people do, for black people being lesbian is not in their vocab, ke stabane because some tsotsi guy came up with some tsotsi taal {hmm} it's not a legit word {hmm} because it's not in their dictionary it cannot exist, so now if you come here with, telling me about your white people tendencies, being lesbian we have a problem, {ok} so for me I'm from the hood, and we were going to school in town {ok} I can see that darkies can never take, they'll never take a girl being lesbian lying down, a black girl, but if it's a white person, they really don't care, cause they're already thinking this girl wasn't anyways going to date any of us so it's fine {hmm} they can do whatever they want, so it's socially more acceptable, apparently, if you want to put it that way, it's socially more acceptable for you to be white and lesbian than to be a black lesbian {ok, the way you described it has made me see it differently I've never seen it that way before, it feels as if black people feel entitled to you, in that you can't be something we say you can't be} hmm [oh ok, I've never actually seen it that way} if you step out it's a problem {ok}

Q: {ok so how would you like it to be?}

P: how would I like it to be? {hmm} man, I have a philosophy{hmm} that if everyone thought like me {hmm} now that's me being pompous {laughs} if everyone thought like me the world would be a better place {I agree with you} I mean we, spend too much time worrying about why is this person doing something that's, why is the other one doing...when you wake up in the morning and you look in the mirror when you brush your teeth, you see you, when you were born, when you came out it was you [hmm} unless you came with a twin, but when you were born, even if you came with a twin, there were not, inside of you there was only one person {hmm} hence you must live your life for this one person {hmm} focus on you, everybody else, is out there leave them, it's for them {hmm} don't {I understand} man it frustrates me actually {I understand} can everybody mind their own business and care about themselves and everything will go fine {it's like this thing we call society, who is society?} you know

Q: {anyway I understand where you're coming from with that. So finally why did you agree to take part in this research study?}

P: Delile asked me {ah, thanks. So it wasn't anything political, no deep need to change the world?} I'm not going to change the world, I know there's no way {hmm} the world will change to the way I'm thinking while I'm still alive {I understand it will take millennia} if they are going to change, it's not gonna be anytime soon {maybe we'll compete with aliens and seem better all of a sudden} huh maybe hey {(laughs) thank you so much Celiwe for taking part in my interview} it's a pleasure.

Interview participant 4: Delile

Q: so how would you describe yourself?

P: young, black, female {yeah that pretty much sums it up and then in terms of your sexuality?} I'm still trying to confirm everything {hmm} so I'm still on a journey to still figure out where I stand in life, so I can't really give you a definite, lesbian, curious, bisexual, what not {hmm} but I think I have more inclination towards the lesbian side then the bisexual side {ok so you, still discovering yourself?} yeah

Q: what has been the most exciting experience of your life?

P: I think moving to Pretoria, from Kempton Park {from Kempton Park} I just, I felt more free to do whatever I want whenever I wanted, however, I wanted to it was just {freedom}

Q: and the most challenging experience in your life

P: I don't, I don't find things very challenging, I just, I tend to get over it, and it doesn't really affect me that much {ok, so you're saying you don't look at things as challenges} no {alright, so you have a different way of looking at things, that could possibly be challenging?} hmm {alright, has your sexuality played a role in these exciting aspect of your lie and the not so challenging?} um, I think, ok, ok fine, the most challenging part in my life, probably trying to discover who I was, and with just trying to identify with myself and be able to say this is D, and I'm not changing for anyone, my exciting came now that I was in Pretoria, cause now I was given the opportunity to explore one of the things that I was, not really fighting, but played a role in identity {hmm} as to who I was, but when I got to Pretoria, I was in Pretoria, and I was like ok this is a new start, nobody knows me, there's no history, there's no reputation, it's just you, you just do whatever you feel like doing {ok, so it's as if, you saying the challenging part was coming to terms with this is who I am, and this place has basically allowed you to explore as much as you need to, to get to the point where you understand who this is} yes {ok, I understand you now}

Q: {alright, ok, what sexual orientation do you ascribe to yourself?}

P: I think, like I said I'm not sure, where I am right now {hmm} but if I were to put it on a scale {hmm} and say ok fine, forty percent, not forty, about thirty five percentish of me {hmm} is

bisexual {hmm} but the rest is very lesbian, I hate the term lesbian {hmm} I cannot stand it even, I can't even stand lesbians, it's, it's I know, it's, it's a bit strange but, I cannot stand it, I can't tolerate them, it takes me a very long time to become friends with other lesbian people but I still keep my distance, cause I'm just not comfortable around the, I'm not comfortable with the stereotype that comes with being "a lesbian" {ok} type of thing I actually don't like that term lesbian

Q: {is it the people that are lesbian or the behaviour they exhibit in the name of lesbian}

P: I think it's their behaviour {ok} and maybe it's also the people {laughs} I think, your behaviour determines who you are {ok} if, you gonna be doing things that I don't really like I, I don't think I'll easily gravitate towards you, I'll move further and further away from you {ok}

Q: {so when did you find out that you had an attraction to women?}

P: I think I was about sixteen {ok} I think, I think I, I don't know, I think it was more a, I just never thought about it {hmm} when you become sixteen you're like "hmm, I like that girl" {hmm} but you don't really know, if this is the kind of like that is I'd like to be your friend type of like or I'd {hmm} like to be romantically involved with you {hmm} kind of like, but I think around about sixteen when I started {hmm}

Q: {when did it get clarified to you that it was romantically involved or...}

P: at age eighteen {at age eighteen, alright so you feel that the journey started at sixteen and moved} yeah [and it's still moving] it's still moving {but at eighteen you'd confirmed that I definitely have a love for women} yeah

Q: {alright, so how did you feel when you started feeling that way... let's say when you were sixteen, how did that feel?}

P: I brushed it off, {hmm} I, cause I only dated like what, about five girls, between sixteen and eighteen, but most of the people I dated were guys {hmm} so I brushed it off as if whatever, you know {hmm} and then it felt a bit awkward, because, you're thinking, yes you're still confused, are these romantic feelings or they genuine like {hmm} for someone cause you'd like to be their friend {hmm} but I just brushed it off, like you know what, whatever, moving on with life {so when did at eighteen, it was confirmed, in a sense I want you to give me a brief explanation of, you confirmed it} um, gosh, I dated, ok, here it is, I

actually haven't told people this story, one day in 2004, December 2004, I was still seventeen, I called a radio station {hmm} YFM and I said, you know I want you to hook me up with girls, you know, whatever, whatever, just randomly out of pure boredom {hmm} ok, fine, obviously I got a lot of phone calls, and there was one who lived in my area, so I was like, this one seems like a nice person {hmm} I met her and we dated for about three months and I think that's when I realised that I could actually be romantically involved with a girl, because that was the first time I actually fell in love {hmm} ja {ok, so you fell in love with her} ja {ok} but then again, I'm always falling in and out of love, so, but relationships, for me, relationships for me are complicated, I haven't really found, how do I say this I haven't found the one {hmm} and I don't know what to look for in the one {ok} so I just take chances at everything {alright} and I shoot blindly and wherever it lands, it lands {ok, when you say blindly, does that mean, either with males/females} it depends where I am, like I said in Pretoria for me is my haven to do whatever I want {hmm} without fear of anything happening, you know, back home it's more subtle {ok} it's more, I'm more of a girl than here {hmm} I wear the skinnies (jeans), I wear the stilettos, and I'll still be comfortable {hmm} I won't be a player {hmm} at home {hmm} I think the last time I dated anyone from Jo'burg was when I was still that side I think {hmm}, up until 2007 after 2007, I haven't dated anyone from that side {ok} it's just, I don't know, I think I have, not split personalities, but two identities, that I'm comfortable, and I'm comfortable with both, you know, weekends I'm mommies little girl, daddy's little girl {hmm} we have a nice little family, this side, I'm my own person {hmm} I'm a totally different person {so this side, you were talking about how you do wear skinny jeans and you do dress up very feminine, but is this now here or at home?} this is at home {ok} at home that's how I am {hmm} obviously I will relax and I will wear, you not so tight jeans and your track pants and just get really relaxed {hmm} this side I don't care what I wear {hmm} tomorrow I could decide to wear a mini skirt {hmm} and I could do it, because there's just, I, I'm building my own, reputation {ok} whereas back home, there's a reputation that I have to maintain {ok, makes sense}

Q: {alright, um, at this moment you haven't really told me, are you, you say you're leaning more towards being lesbian, but you're not lesbian?}

P: lesbian, in that, I would never, ever, ever marry a woman {ok, that you've already established} yes, I can be in a long term committed relationship with a woman for the rest of my life, but I won't go out and put a stamp of approval and say, we are married {why?} I think, I'm a religious person, {ok} so I don't think I would want to get married {hmm} I would marry, you know, o dream a lot {hmm} so when I'm dreaming, and I dream, something about marriage it would be a man {ok} and obviously he has his own attributes and what I like

about him, when it's woman, I never ever dream of marrying her {hmm, ok, that's very interesting, um, I'm almost afraid to call you lesbian, because you don't call yourself lesbian} no {what do you call yourself, I call myself D {D is this your name that's given for this interview?} yes {ok, so you call yourself by your name} by my name

Q: {so how do you feel about being attracted to other women?}

P: I'm naughty, I'm very, very naughty {hmm} it's not to say that I'll be attracted to you first,{hmm} I'll wait for you to show signs that you're attracted to me {ok} and then I'll pay with your emotions and with your attraction and take it to my advantage and then eventually, I'll be like you know what I'm tired, something new now, so I don't really, I don't know, I don't know what the concept of love is I don't know, I'm so confused right now, I really don't know, I can be attracted to you and say, you are yellow boned, you are right, shape right build {hmm} and I find you very attractive, but I'm a very difficult person to please {ok} there are certain things you need to do after, you need to really say I have an attraction towards you and I'd like to be romantically involved with you, otherwise, I'm just too playful {ok, so right now, you're not into, you're not wanting an emotional connection, you just interested in the physical aspect?} I'd love that {you would love that, but are you currently experiencing that?} no {oh, so right now, it's just really playful} playful {is it sexual?} sometimes {but it's not deep seated commitment that you're looking for at this point?} you know I would love to have that cause I have never ever had that {alright} that's what I look for {so you want it} I want it {but you haven't come across it, alright , I get you now, but with a woman?} yeah with a woman {are we clear on that?}

Q: {alright, So when you first found out that, I could be in love with women, and now, you were two different people in my opinion} hmm {how did, what is the difference between then and now?}

P: then I didn't know, I didn't know, I couldn't, ja, I just didn't know that a woman can be attracted to another woman or that a man, can be attracted to another man, sure I came across the words lesbian and gay, but I just didn't know what it really meant {hmm} sorry what was your question? {I wanted to know the difference between your feelings back then and now that you know, like you're saying that you know} my feelings back then, I was confused {hmm} I didn't know what was going on, but now, I've come to accept that I am growing as a person, so it's not gonna be an automatic thing, there's set answer {hmm} that yes this is the status quo {hmm} it's gonna take time and when I get there I think I'll be happy {ok, for you it's still} it's a process, life for me is a process [alright} it never ends {it keeps

turning, alright, has your love for women, I'm gonna put it that was because you don't necessarily ascribe to yourself as lesbian, has it changed your life in anyway?}

P: umum (no) no, {not, you're still the same person, when you were five} I'm still the same person, yes {ok} cause I was a tomboy, when I was growing up and my parents knew that they have these little subtle hints that they keep dropping, you know they'll see, I don't know if you know Wendy Isaacs {umum (no)} Durban lady from KZN she's a lawyer and she works for POWA, {I might've seen her on TV} yes, she's bold and, well now she's got these thick lips and they're dark {is it a black lady?} yes black lady, Wendy Isaacs {yes I think I've seen her speak about certain things, yes} she'll appear on TV, and there was a point where I had no hair, and they'll say "you know you remind me of that Wendy Isaacs girl" ka, ka, ka, and you know you'll brush it off and once my brother made a joke that he's nervous about introducing me to his girlfriends because next thing I might "shapa him ka stena" (steal them from him) and then he left and then I was like pardon? {There's something you know about me?} you know, but he doesn't really know {hmm} I haven't brought anyone {hmm} home, so they can't really say that, no she's a lesbian, but if you take a stereotype of a lesbian, that's always hanging out with a lot of guys {hmm} always playing guy's sports, always shopping at Aca Joe {hmm} I don't do that, I cook, I clean you know, I dress up {you do the girly things} and I actually enjoy doing the girly things, so with them I think it's as confusing as it is with me {but do you think they're very suspicious?} they're not very suspicious, they're just unsure {ok, it's not suspicion, it's lack of certainty} certainty

Q:{alright, if let's say for instance, just for the sake of this interview, I'd have to put you in a box, what box would I put you in?

P: I think you'd put me in lesbian box {s it?} hmm {ok, so you're giving me permission to say lesbian throughout this interview?} ja no, go for it

Q: {so now, how do you experience being lesbian then?}

P: it's fun, {it's fun} I enjoy it, it's, obviously I don't like the stereotype that comes with it {hmm} but I actually enjoy these games that I get to play {hmm} ok, I no maybe I'm not a nice person, but, it's. It's different {hmm} I think, no, actually it's not different, it's the same as any other relationship {hmm} or being placed in any other box, it's like you having man problems, I'm having women problems {hmm} but you must remember that the same problems a man, would have when dating women, are the same problems that I would incur {hmm, cause at the end of the day they're people} but dating women, you're gonna be

PMS'ing, obviously with gay guys, I suppose they don't have the same issues as the lesbians have {hmm} heterosexual couples don't have the same issues and all that {hmm} but we all have our issues {and issues that are unique to relationships maybe?} hmm, in terms of two people who don't really know each are forced to interact with each other in this context} yeah

Q: {ok, I understand what you say, how would you describe your feelings towards other women?}

P: other women just {women, that you might be attracted to, or women that are in the pool of women that you could be attracted to, cause I can't say, you know, you are attracted to some women, but some women you can access and some women you can't, but general feelings towards women?} I'm very respectful of women, you know and I respect your decision, and I respect who you are, {hmm} and I'm not gonna, impose myself on you {hmm} that's why I prefer to wait for you to make the first move {ok} I, I don't know, I don't not see women as sexual objects {hmm} ja I think that varies {ok, so your view of women, is not like you're saying, sexual objects, they're people, they're respectable} ja

Q: {so, when you look at a woman and you like her, as much as you're waiting for her to come to you, what is it about her that attracts you? I guess it can't be the same for everyone, but you know, what I'm trying to get at is it a sexual attraction, is it emotional} oh {is it physical?}

P: oh it's an emotional attraction, it's an emotional attraction, how I feel when I'm around you, but the last thing when I'm around you is sex {ok, I think we got that one, right on the head}

Q: {in terms of experiencing your sexual orientation, in this instance, we're talking about you being a lesbian, how do you perceive someone who's in a closet? What do you think that means, when someone is in the closet?}

P: I think you need to respect that they want to be in a closet {hmm} they're probably not comfortable with coming out {hmm} and we cannot force them to into come out and be like hey guy, you are a lesbian and you must accept it, it's their own personal journey, you may come across some people that you may perceive to be lesbian, but they're actually very straight {hmm} they just really like to dress in a particular way and act in a certain way {hmm}

so it's everybody's own personal choice and we need to just respect that, we can't go around and telling people who they are {hmm} unless they have told you who they are

Q: {ok, going back to the closet now, what is a closet to you?}

P: a closet is none disclosure, I suppose {ok, that's a very nice way of putting it, so it's someone who chooses} it's a secret life {ok, a secret life, alright, that is actually a very nice answer}

Q: {what does it mean for you to be out of the closet? Not necessarily for you as an individual, but what does that concept, what does that phrase mean?}

P: I think being out of the closet, I think it's when you have accepted yourself and once you've confirmed yourself and now you're willing to reveal it to the world and you accept that some people will like it and some people won't, I think, it's not enlightening ...what's the word when you're so free that, you know, it's like being saved {laughs} I don't know it's like being saved {oh I think being saved, I'd be elated if I was saved, I would be content, I don't know which word} everything that comes with being saved, so you're basically saving yourself from yourself {ok, I'd be elated if I was saved} hmm {if I was drowning, or something}

Q: {alright would you consider yourself outside or inside the closet?}

P: I think I'm inside the closet

Q: {you're inside the closets, to whom are you inside the closet?}

P: to my family {ok, and then friend?} friends, they don't care {hmm} they'll label me and they'll tell me what I am, but really, we're all very open minded {ok} we're all, I mean we're all very experimental {ok, gave you openly come out, and said, I am... or have you never needed to} I've never needed to {so they looked at you once and they said aha you're our friend} you're one of us

Q: {you're very special, so you've never actually come out to anybody?}

P: no {not a single person?} not a single person {are you serious?} no {but in a sense it was consensual that your friends looked at you and decide that you are lesbian?} I think, ankiri I

told you I'm very picky with my friends {hmm} so, I won't really gravitate towards your {straight looking?} no, no, your butch type of {sorry, oh, ok} lesbians, no I won't, I'll go towards your tomboyish ones {hmm} your feminine ones, you know the ones that I feel comfortable around {alright so within that group you gravitate towards to these friends, but you're telling me that they just look at you and they say "you are lesbian"} because they're normally there when I'm doing all these things {oh, ok, you don't open your mouth to say, I'm lesbian you do certain things} ja by implication, I suppose {alright, you disclose by doing things I a group context} hmm {alright, so you don't say it?} no {but you have then disclosed in that sense?} yeah {in a safe group} hmm {ok, so these friends that you've disclosed to are they friends from back home, or are they friends from here?} both {is it, and your friends at home how do they react?} they don't care cause they're doing the same thing too {so basically, your friends are all lesbian?} no {but they're comfortable being around lesbians} ja {alright} cause, I think, I think, with my friend from back home we grew up , {hmm} and you'd notice that this one is gravitating towards being a lesbian {hmm} but she's still my friend and I known her for so long {hmm} and we still accept each other {hmm} we're a diverse, my close friends {hmm} there's an Indian, a Coloured, two blacks and a white girl, you know, we're very diverse, we're all open minded {hmm} we're all from different religions {hmm} different cultures, we do things differently {hmm} and because we grew up together, we've learnt {hmm} we've tolerated each other and we've tolerated each other for who we are {ok so there's a lot of support and a lot of I'm ok with it, because I know her you?} yes

Q: {ok, alright and what does that mean to you, to know that it's ok being me, regardless?}

P: I don't really have a problem with it, because I am, I mean, like who I am, is who I'm gonna be, till the day I die {hmm} you know, and you can't change that {hmm} and if you gonna try to change that, it's gonna be very difficult, it's gonna be, we're gonna have a very difficult relationship, I probably distance myself and cut off all ties {hmm} because clearly we're not gonna work out {hmm} but if you understand that this is who I am {hmm} and you are you {hmm} it's fine, if we like to do things together, we'll do then together {hmm} who knows maybe we'll have a good friendship {hmm, so you like people who are also open about things, you don't want people who, are constantly trying to change themselves because they're not comfortable with themselves?} no {ah, you want people who are ok with themselves as they are because then it's ok, for you to yourself as you are} hmm

Q: {ok, I think I understand, so you say you haven't disclosed to your family yet?}

P: no

Q: {and if you had to disclose to your family who would be the first person you would tell?

P: I would tell my mother, when she is six feet under {ok, so this is never gonna happen?} never {ever?} that's why I don't wanna get married, because by marriage, I'd have to invite my family over and {admitting} admitting, whoops, being saved and walking out of the closet you know {right into the frying pan} no I'm good {ja so it's never gonna happen} it's never gonna happen, I mean my parents are not homophobic or anything like that {hmm} it's just I don't feel comfortable with it, because it would be something different for my family {hmm} because there aren't any, I suspect one of my cousins to be gay, but, it's not, it's not something that we have at home in my family so I would be the first {hmm} and because they know me it's, fine {ja}

Q: {when you say have in our family, what do you mean?}

P: there are no gay people in my family, {no, one openly gay you mean?} well ja {I think everyone in my family is straight, I mean my brother is straight, he is married {you were talking about your cousin, just now} oh my god, she's still young {hmm} she's gravitating towards this very butch {hmm} side of things because she's playing soccer, she's got short hair, she's got...{ok so you feel that your family the way in which it's set up, is not ready?} we're very conservative, we don't even go to charismatic churches, we go to the orthodox {traditional} very traditional, it is church every Sunday, so {ok, I understand why now}

Q: {and in terms of your community, cause you actually have two communities now in essence, you've got Pretoria and you've got Kempton Park} hmm {how would you feel they would perceive you lesbianism, or how they do perceive your being lesbian} I think people have their suspicions, in the community, but because of my actions when I'm that side, they're not sure {hmm} they think "you know what she's very comfortable with wearing baggy jeans and with track, I don't wear, baggy jeans but loose fitting jeans and track pants and loose t-shirts because she's going to wash the car {ok{ if I don't was the car then no one else is going to, {ok} but again, you'll come back two hours later and she'll be cooking, and she'll be cleaning, and then you'll be like {hmm} you'll be confused you know {hmm} or their suspicions says that they don't hear about boyfriend drama, or what not, cause I'm actually the good girl, of my block, {ok} there's no drama around me, so I don't know what they think actually, I think that they'd accept it, they won't feel very, homophobic or anything like that

Q: {and then your Pretoria community?

P: Pretoria is gay town, if you're not gay, the you're straight then it doesn't matter {hmm} you know, but also it depends on how you play your game {hmm} you need to respect that some people are straight and they're not willing to convert or you know, or test the water or anything and as long as you remember that you'll be fine {ok}

Q: {and then society as a whole, how do you perceive it, in its, I can't say in its treatment, but I guess that's the best way to put it, in its treatment of lesbians?}

P: it's, it's so, gosh what's the word, ignorant {hmm} I think we come from an ignorant background, no, not ignorant, but I mean we weren't educated {hmm} you know and we just don't know and we're not willing to learn {hmm}, so what you hear in the news in Soweto, Alex, what, what, what, sure it does affect me but you'll be like shame, you know, thank God I don't live in Alex, thank God I don't live in Soshana, or wherever but, you're like, it's stupid {hmm} it is stupid [ok] I have no other way of putting it

Q: {and when you say about the incidents that you hear in the media, I just want to clarify, you're talking about the hate crimes?}

P: the hate crimes ja

Q: {alright, and then the country as a whole, what do you think, I know it's a very big country and there's different parts and corners that no one ever visits, what do you think the perspective is on homosexuality in South Africa?}

P: I think it's still based in ignorant, I find it really strange that's people would accept a gay man, than they would accept a lesbian {hmm} you know, you know, they were still having these {hierarchies} yeah the hierarchies/ for me it's, it's, it's diff, I don't know, they say that being born a woman is a curse because, now you going to work for the rest of your life and being born a man, you're actually being blessed, you know {I hear you} so it's, I think if people's perceptions had to change {hmm} if people were willing to, you know, learn {hmm} what being lesbian entails and what being gay entails, {and how do you think people can learn?} that's going to be a problem, that is going to be a problem, {hmm} because we come from a past where people were oppressed, and you get people in rural areas {hmm} and this whole Castar Simenya, the whole debacle {hmm} I got an aunt in rural Mpumalanga, and she still doesn't understand what this whole hermaphrodite is {hmm} and she says no, look at him it's a boy, he looks like a boy, and it's like it's not about how you look in the outside,

it's, you know, even in radio, they'll even say that no, when you're a hermaphrodite, you're A B C and D and this and that {hmm} and you're like oh, ok, but they still don't understand, they still I see, a girl, I see a boy, we can only blame it on our past and we can't look at the past every single time {hmm} we need to look from now onwards and say look guys let's just accept it this is how it is {so tolerance} tolerance {regardless of what we know, or what we have heard, just to tolerate unconditionally}

Q: {ok, how do you feel about, I'm gonna ask you a different question from what we were going on about, how do you feel towards other lesbians? I know you told me initially that you feel ugh}

P: I, gosh where do I start, lesbians I do not, I don't know if it's a self hate thing or what {laughs} maybe you might be able to tell one day, I cannot stand lesbians, I cannot for the life of me stand lesbians {hmm} because they represent something, maybe I just don't like the fact that dress different {hmm}, they talk differently they're abusive, some of them are abusive, they, they I feel like they wanna be guys, but why would you wanna be a guy when you're a girl, when it feels, I don't understand, I really don't understand, cause I'm so comfortable with being a girl {hmm} that I wouldn't want to start taking hormone tablets and doing all these strange things {hmm} to be a guy you know {hmm} so I just don't understand

Q: {so for you the main thing is, someone trying to change themselves} someone {to fit a certain mode that they've created in their mind of what they are?}

P: ja

Q: {there are obviously labels ascribed to certain lesbians, I don't want to mention them to you, because I want you to give me your own}

P: you get the butch ones {hmm} the ones I don't like {ok} these ones they will wear, you know your Brentwood {aha} shoes {they'll wear men's your flannel shirt they'll wear a tie, they'll wear a jersey and they'll wear a whole lot of stuff so that you don't see that they have breast {hmm} they'll cut their hair, you know, they just won't look after themselves {ok} nine times out of ten they're very abusive {hmm} they're very possessive, they're just not nice people to be around, they're like the worst part of being male {ok} that's what they are {the extreme males} the alpha males of all lesbian, then you get the tomboys {hmm} that's me, that's where I'd put myself, they dress very casually, they will dress nice sometimes, but they're still in touch with their feminine side, they'll do their hair they'll do their nails, they look

after themselves {hmm} they not abusive nine times out of ten {hmm} you know, they good people {ok} then you get the feminine side, the feminine side is broken up into two further groups, you get the feminine ones that are curious about this whole thing then you get the feminine lesbians, those ones, the feminine lesbians are lesbians that actually enjoy being a woman, they will dress like a woman, and they will act like a lady, those ones are the ideal ones, then you get the curious ones are doing it for now, just to figure out if they are a lesbian or not {hmm} nine times out of ten, the curious ones end up with the butch ones {alright} which is strange, because if you're a girl, and you want to date another girl, why are you dating a girl that looks like a man {looks like a man, I get you}

Q: this is linking to almost what we spoke about previously, when we talked about lesbians being treated differently} hmm {and I wanna know, do you feel there's a difference in how black lesbians are treated than how white lesbians are treated?}

P: black lesbians, we are disadvantaged in that from home, is not very literate {hmm} and then this is all new to them, they may see it on TV but they still don't understand it, {hmm} so you will still be ostracised about it, and what not, with white people, I think white people, it's easier white people they know, it's been around {hmm} for generations with them they understand it, and I think they are more accepting about stuff, cause black families, as a woman, your role, is to have a child, cook for your child and your husband, and make more children, and you must accept everything that's gonna happen, in your marriage and what not {hmm} because every woman has gone through that. lesbians, when your child is a lesbian, no grandchildren, no husband no mkwenyana to mow my lawn or what not {ok, so basically it takes away from them their predetermined roles for their daughters} yes {and therefore the script doesn't get to play out the way they had planned}

Q: {ok, and how would you like lesbians to be treated? Or black lesbians rather}

P: like people {hmm} if my son is gay, I would like you to treat him as a boy {hmm} if my daughter was lesbian, I'd like you to treat her like a girl {hmm} I don't see why we should be treating people differently because they are sexually attracted or emotionally attracted to somebody of the same-sex {hmm} you know, I think it's, there are still people {hmm, so at the end of the day, labels aside, people should} treat people as people

Q: {alright, ok, we've reached the end; I just want to ask you one more question, why did you agree to take part in this study?}

P: I've got nothing to lose

Interview participant 5: Eleanor

Q: {can you tell me a bit more about yourself? how would you describe yourself?}

P: well, I'm a very, I'm a very bubbly person, and outgoing and I love being around people, I love meeting people and ja, I'm very talkative, and what you see is what you get basically {ok, and relation to your race, your gender, your sexuality? Well I'm black, I am female, and I am bisexual {hmm} but leaning more on the girls side, cause I like girls so it's like 80/20 percent {so basically you're in a journey of self discovery} if you wanna put it that way ja, {ok, cause if you're leaning towards being lesbian} no it's like, it's like, yes I would be with a guy, I like guys, I like girls more, it's not I don't know, I don't know what that means, but yeah I like girls more {ok} than guys

Q: {ok, can you just tell me what has been the highlight of your life? Just in general}

P: the highlight of my life, I would say finishing my degree actually {hmm} and like cause, and like the whole varsity experience actually, buy yeah, finishing my degree, my current relationship {is also a highlight?} it's also a highlight, cause I learnt a lot about myself, it brought out a lot of the real me so ja

Q: {ok, alright, what has been the most challenging experience of your life?}

P: shoo, the most challenging? {hmm} um, growing up at a time and having a single parent, because my dad at the time was gone to medical school {hmm} yeah, growing up with, and my mother wasn't working, so we were kind of in, we had a time of poverty [hmm] I don't like talking about it, because it's still hit's home {hmm} but yeah, for a great part of my primary school life it was not pleasant {hmm, ok, so fine, was there a lot of financial problems?} yeah a lot yeah {alright} and a lot of not knowing what we were gonna eat at night, what I'm gonna have for breakfast in the morning, but I've learnt to go to school {hmm} put on a smile on my face, be like everything is ok, when it wasn't {hmm} ja {it must've been difficult} yeah it was, it was, but I suppose it made me, I'm humbled because of that and I'll always be humble, because of that, I'll always appreciate, because of where I come from {ok} ja {so you learnt something?} yes and to have to work hard to get things in life, that's what my mother taught me, so it taught me to work hard for the things I want, that nobody can take them away from me {hmm} ja

Q: {*alright has your sexuality played a role in any of these? I guess in the first one you mentioned it briefly*}

P: *well yeah, in my past I don't know, cause I didn't know anything, but yeah I would say that yeah {especially the relationship that you're still happy about} hmm {alright, so, I know you told me now that you're in a 20/80 ratio of a relationship} hmm {or a sexual orientation, can you just for the sake of this interview} hmm {give me a box that you would put yourself in}*

P: *bisexual {bisexual} ya, but you see I can't really, for the sake of the interview, it's bisexual {ok you're bisexual} hmm {but say you're leaning more to being lesbian?}*

Ja {alright, very confusing} (laughs) well I suppose it's confusing for most people but it makes sense to me, I understand it {hmm} it's difficult to explain it to someone {alright} ja {but currently for the sake of this interview, you are in a relationship with a woman?} hmm {alright, exclusively?} hmm

Q: {*alright, when did you first find out that you were attracted to women?*}

P: *I think it was like in high school sometime {hmm} I can't remember when exactly, but, cause I always used to look at girls, you know like how you look at women, and like oh she's cute whatever {hmm}, and then there like "hmm, she's cute" (laughs) so it was that kind, I would look at, cause I like boobs {hmm} I like nice full perky, but they must be full {ok} ja, they must be a handful, like nice, cute petite ass, something that fits into my hand {ok} so, but that's for the femme chick {ok} tomboy ones I like bigger than me, and chubby yeah {hmm} so I would look at girls like that but I would never say anything {hmm} cause I've never seen anything like that, o didn't understand why I had to look females like that, and I would fantasize about girls, having sex with girls or kissing girls whatever {hmm} and then so yeah, so I never really, so it was always there, but I never paid attention to it {ok} yeah*

Q: {*ok so you're saying at the back of your head, now when you look back*}

P: *now when I look back and understand what it actually is, then ja {in primary school} in high school {sorry in high school} ja mid-high school {like standard eightyish?} ja I would say there {alright} even earlier than that, but ja I would say standard eight*

Q: {*so when you first felt this, how did you feel, I mean, what was it to you, when you felt this, I guess in a sense you've said, that you weren't sure that it was even allowed*}

P: ja cause I was like, I would, cause you know how you get that tingly feeling when you see someone cute (laughs) so then I would get that and it would be weird, cause why do I get that when I'm looking at another female, you know {hmm} and obviously growing up, in my neighbourhood, cause I grew up in my Mamelodi, you know, everybody is a man and a woman, {hmm} you know, on TV there's a man and a woman {hmm} when my friends say they're dating it's a boyfriend type of thing {hmm} so then I was a bit confused, like so this is, it's not supposed to happen {hmm} so that's why I didn't pay much attention to it {hmm} cause like I didn't understand, it was really confusing, I did not understand what it was {hmm} but I knew it was wrong because if it was normal, according to society {hmm} then you would see that, I wasn't really exposed to those kind of people {hmm} ja so to me then it was like, ok, so the environment that I was in was very heterosexual {ok} dominated ja

Q: {ok, so between high school and now, how do you feel, is there a difference in how you feel?}

P: yes there is , cause now I understand what it is, that I'm feeling, {hmm} who I am, I have a better understanding of who I am now, you know, and I'm not confused about how I feel towards certain people and, like I'm just, I'm more myself obviously under certain circumstances, obviously under others I would need to fall under the norm of society {hmm} I'm not out yet {ok} to a lot of people {ok} but those who know I can be myself around them, I actually say out loud wow, that girl is sexy, wow I would love to be with that girl {hmm} oh my goodness I wish I could whatever {hmm} (laughs) I can, be more vocal about..it, I don't have to keep it to myself anymore {ok} and you know, it's more fun here because there are people who share the same interests you know, so at least there's somebody I can talk to about, that girls ass, or that girls whatever

Q: {ok, talking about ass and all of that, how do you experience being bisexual}

P: what do you mean, how do I experience it?

Q: {is it for you more physical, is it more emotional, what aspect of it is more appealing to you? And now I'm obviously concentrating on your attraction to women}

P: ja, well it's difficult for me because, obviously when you first see someone {hmm} you are attracted by what you see, you know {hmm} and then from there, it goes on the more emotional part of it {hmm} because that's when you start spending time with the person, you start, to get to know then and what not {hmm} so at first glance it will be the physical, and the

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more time you spend with that person, it becomes more emotional, and it is physical {alright, so for you it's initially physical?} ja then {then it progresses to a full} fuller {a rounded experience } ja

Q: {ok, I'm just gonna move on to defining certain things} hmm {ok, you just told me now that you haven't disclosed to that many people, but there are those you've disclosed to} hmm {so I just, in light of that, what does being in a closet mean to you?}

P: not being able to express myself {in terms of, like not being able to express myself in public with my girlfriend {hmm} you know we can't walk around holding hands, and we can't kiss in public {hmm} you know and we can't be affectionate, not necessarily, just holding hands and kissing, but you know you are very different when you are with your intimate partner than when you are with your friends, {hmm} or whatever, so we can't express that affection, in public, because, obviously with me, all my other partners were, like males, although I here and there be kissing a girl, and what not, but obviously it would be like, ha, ha, ha {hmm} and {cover it up} cover it up, type of thing, so now I can't really express myself, when I'm in public with her {ok} so that's what being in the closet is {it's very difficult} ja it really is, it really is ja, cause being constantly have to explain yourself, cause people don't know, like why you guys so close {hmm} why do you look at each other so funny? Why, why, everybody is, you constantly have to explain yourself so ja, it gets a bit annoying {so you get scrutinised almost?} ja

Q: {ok, and then what does being out of the closet mean to you?}

P: to me it means just being me, you know? Having, being able to hold hands, with my girlfriend in public, and kiss, obviously appropriately, not like swallow each other in public (laugh) ja like, just being affectionate with each other, in public and it being ok, and not having to explain myself as to why I'm doing that {hmm} and things like that

Q:{ok, so would you consider yourself , in or out of the closet?}

P: I would say in the closet, because not a lot of people know, well not the people that matter to me, who know that I do girls as well {ok} I would say in that instance, I am in the closet, ja

Q: {so you're partially in the closet?}

P: ja

Q: {alright, so tell me who was the first person you told that you like girls as well?}

P: shoo, I think it's my best friend, {hmm}, ja

Q: {and why did you choose to tell her or him?}

P: it's a hero, well she's a, I knew she wouldn't judge me, you know, and we just, spoke about everything {hmm} so ja, I knew she'd understand, although she was a bit shocked, I mean but it's understandable, {hmm} cause I don't expect every person to be like oh, that's cool you know, cause if somebody has known me for so long, you know and you've been talking about boys a lot and what not {hmm} obviously it's a shock to them in the beginning, so I understand

Q: {hmm, so you said, initially she was shocked?} ja {alright, when that happened how did you feel? When she was acting shocked}

P: well I kind of expected it, but also like ah, it's just you again and your crazy ideas {hmm} you know type of thing, but when it got serious, it actually got, this time I got a girlfriend [hmm} cause I always just talk about it, and up until it materialised, if I can put it that way {hmm} that's when she realised how serious it was {hmm} and at that time already I think she was desensitised because I had been talking about it so much {hmm} so ja

Q: {but then she was accepting in the end?}

P: ja, she loved my girlfriend, all my friends love my girlfriend {alright} she's sweet

Q: {ok, so her acceptance of you telling her about your love for women {hmm} {or a woman, in this instance, what did that mean to you?}

P: one less person to pretend to {you doing the world one person at a time} well I felt, cause it's like a weight, is literally being lifted off your shoulders {hmm} you know like, now I can be, so when I do certain things I don't have to be questioned you know {hmm} ja

Q: {ok, alright and have you disclosed to any family members yet?}

P: ja two cousins {hmm} ja we are like, the one is older, a year older and another one is a year younger than me {ok} ja

Q: {how did this person (s) react?}

P: well the first one she laughed, {hmm} and she thought I was joking {hmm} up until I showed her a picture of my girlfriend and she was curious, like why are you doing that? what has gotten into you? like some sort of disease or something but now, she's cool with it, she can see that it's serious {hmm} it's real and the other one the one who's a year older than me, she was a bit thrown off (laughs) cause when I mentioned it, we never spoke about it {hmm} I just mentioned it and she was like oh, ok, but I also didn't want to push her {hmm} cause I understand that it's something, it's a bit hard to swallow {hmm} and digest, so I was like oh, ok, it's fine, and then, I'd mention my girlfriends name, her and there and she'd ask, so how is she? You know {hmm} I gave her the space to come to terms with it, by herself, get used to the idea, cause now she's even like, "you know as long as you're happy" {hmm} "who you happy with is not important, as long as you're happy" and she's happy for me because I'm happy {hmm} so ja, {ok} so she's cool about it now

Q: {alright, you know when family members accept it} hmm {how does that make you feel?}

P: it actually brings tears to my eyes hey (laughs) I mean but, with them, even if they were against it, it wouldn't have mattered to me {hmm} but my mother whoa {so that's the big fish?} ja, ja , I think if I tell her and she accepts it and she's ok with it, then what everyone else thinks {wont matter?} doesn't bother me

Q: {ok, alright then, and then the community, um, how do you think it's being perceived or, if anybody knows, or if people would know, how would they perceive it? Your sexual orientation}

P: hmm, I think a lot of them would be ok with it, I'm not talking about all the people now, {hmm} all the people, I don't know {hmm} surely my, all the people wouldn't understand cause they're talking about their grandchildren and, and, and, {hmm} but people my age, kind of my age, I think they would be cool, cause now, it's kinda like, at some stage, it was the in thing you know {hmm} type of thing, and I mean two girls together is perceived as sexy you know {hmm} ja, they would be ok with it {the immediate community, I'm just talking about your family right now} ja {other people as well, you think it would be fine} ja they'll be like ja that's cool

Q: {ok, and then society?}

P: I think, but you see the thing is now, my girlfriend is white {hmm} (laughs) so that's like, as if you guys being gay is not enough, you had to be an interracial couple {hmm} you know {hmm} so I think they'll dwell upon that more than the fact that we're two women dating {hmm} because now, you see it everywhere {hmm} in society today you know, it's on TV, you know it's everywhere, so I think it'll be, it's getting easier these days {ok, alright} ja

Q: {and then in terms of being in this particular country} uhuh {how do you feel your experience of, how do you feel being a South African, affects your sexual orientation? Or even your need to disclose at some point or other}

P: I think it gives it a platform to blossom, {really} I mean here we are protected by the law and it is my human right to be with whoever I choose to be and things like that {hmm} so yes I say it does actually give it the platform, it's just a shock for people {hmm} but otherwise I would say, being in this country and being gay, it cool {ok} because you don't get executed for being with another {uh} I mean they even approved same sex, civil unions {ok} so ja {so you're ok with being in this country, alright, ok}

Q: {I'm gonna move on now, a bit closer to your other community, which I this instance I'm talking about lesbians which you surround yourself with} hmm {how do you feel about lesbians?}

P: they cool people {hmm} they nice people it's like any other person that you interact with it's just that they prefer females, or they prefer being in relationships with other females, {hmm} so I don't really differentiate, ja, to me we're all people

Q: {ok, and then in terms of the labels, you know that there's labels} hmm {and within the lesbian community there's also labels} hmm {ja, so which labels are there and which ones do you feel you would fit best in if you do at all?}

P: well there, do you want me to list them for you? {ja} I not so long ago heard of another one "Futch" {now that's interesting I never heard of Futch} Futch means that, cause ok, there's butch, you know the butch looking ones they more masculine, and more rough looking {hmm} and there's tomboys {hmm} my girlfriend is the tomboy, like they're still females but they have short hair, jeans, sneakers and a t-shirt {hmm} when it's cold a hoody {hmm} lie they never wear skirts {ok} ja but their softer than butch lesbians {ok} and then

there's femme or lipstick lesbian that's me, {hmm} you look like your 'normal chick' if I can put it that way {ok} you do your hair, you do your nails lip gloss and all of that and ja {and futch?} o yes, futch is you're a female but you have more male kind of characteristics {ok} ja {so it would be more butch?} you, characteristics wise, you butch and tomboy, but your presentation is femme, you wear dresses and skirts and you do your hair and you do your nails, like you fuss over girly stuff {hmm} like earrings and clothes and accessories those kind of things {hmm} but you're still leaning towards the masculine side?} not like, I don't know how to explain it {is it a woman physically shaped like a man?} she's shaped like a woman, she's female, she's soft (laughs) ja but some, like she would be for instance when you go out, she'll be the one paying, {ok} those kinds of {so the dominant partner/} ya partner {but with feminine characteristics?} ja {ok, quite interesting, I never came across that one before, ok do you see any difference, I think it was you who said...}

P: oh no where I fit in, oh you see right now, I'm dating a tomboy, [hmm] I'm femme, I identify myself as a femme lesbian and I like tomboys and I like femme chicks, lipstick lesbians {hmm} so I think if I was in a relationship with another lipstick lesbian then I would be futch (laughs) {ok} I would be the more dominating one {dominating one} cause I have a dominating personality {so this would be about personality and not about sexuality and all that} ja {ok} I would be the more, although I would still wear my stilettos and what not {hmm} but in the bedroom I'd be (laughs) I'll be the more dominating one and you know going out I'd be the one who pays more, and, but the thing is same sex relationships it's 50/50 but you know there always that one who more than the other one, {expected} not necessarily expected, but they just, it just happens, you don't talk about it, like this is what I'm gonna do, or this is what you're gonna do, or this is how the relationship is gonna work, it just happens {ok} and you just find you place within the relationship [alright, so it's just a smooth flow, and then you find your place and you're comfortable with it?] ja and then everything is good from there, so yes with the tomboy one (phone rings), with the tomboy lesbian then, I am femme, and I, it's not, it's not like, well my good friend, like she would do the whole paying, because she identifies with male characteristics {ok} I don't, see I'm a girl, through and through, {hmm} ja so, ja if I was with another chikita, I would take on the more dominating role {ok, but not necessarily that you're saying you're a male} no I don't identify, I just think, my girl needs this, my girl needs that (laughs) {ok} this is how I treat my girl

Q: {do you think that black lesbians and white lesbians are treated differently? And I think this is quite interesting in that you and your girlfriend are of different races}

P: ja {hmm} they are because you see, with, in our culture {hmm} oh no, in black culture it's very difficult to, people don't understand that, cause in the white culture they're more accepting {hmm} you know type of thing, cause in the black culture as well it's like agh these white people things you know {hmm} you see these things on TV or these white people {hmm} type of thing, so it's not within our culture {hmm} so yes they are viewed differently hence the whole correctional rape and other stuff that you don't, that you hardly hear of in white communities, because they are lesbian

Q: {ok, so you feel culture is the culprit, it's what separates us}

P: ja it is

Q: {and how would you like them, or how would you like black lesbians to be treated?}

P: like human beings, you know, cause I don't understand why it has to be, cause you are dating whoever, now you have to be treated differently {hmm} cause at the end of the day, like I said we are all human, you know so, it shouldn't matter who you go to bed with at night, people should just treat you with respect, merely for the fact that you're human being {ok, that's a valid point you make}

Q: {alright, I think we've reached the end of the interview, and I just have one more question, why did you agree to take part in this research?}

P: wow (laughs) because I want to be understood, cause I think if more people understand the pink world, if I can put it that way (laughs) the homosexual like world {hmm} or gay world as others would call it, then it would make, it would, there would become more comfortable with it, and obviously they're uncomfortable because they don't know, so if I can you know, educate someone and make them understand, ja why not, that's why

Thanks you very much Eleanor for taking part

Appendix D: Reflexive Journal

This section will focus on the thoughts and attitudes that I experienced during the research process. I will explore the challenges that I experienced during the collection of my literature for review, as well as finding the participants. I will also share the incongruency that I experienced during the interview process. I will finally discuss my challenges with analyzing the data. Using Hogan's (1995) reflexive SAID approach I will describe my experiences through this research process.

My current lifestyle

Situation

I began my dissertation in 2006, and have changed my dissertation topic many times. I have decided to conduct my study on the experiences of lesbians' experiences of disclosure. This topic was more relevant to me because of my interests in gender related issues. At the time I had experienced a lot of personal challenges including the loss of my father. He was my support system and needless to say my motivation dropped significantly during the rest of the year and the following three years were no different. Along with the stress that I experienced, I lost two supervisors to different institutions and academic pursuits. These experiences did not do much to boost my confidence. With the passing years I engaged in different work situations that were in no way connected to my research career. As a result I felt I had lost all connections with the University and my dream to complete my studies dwindled. I however, tried to keep contact with Prof Maree who ensured that I was issued a new supervisor. This helped me a lot in that I was able to get focused again. She has been supportive and I am truly grateful to have had her as a supervisor. She motivated me to get to the point where I am on the verge of completion. This all happened in the space of a year. I am also currently a mother of an 18 month old baby boy. He has also motivated me to get back to my career goals and to develop as a researcher.

Affect

I had a wide range of emotions during this period (2006-2009). They ranged from frustration, anger, regret, fear of failure, feelings of failure as well as hopelessness. I cannot believe that I have come this far. I have gained new perspective on my own life and I believe I have dealt with the issues that accumulated in the course of the past three years. I still have work

on developing my confidence again, especially where my knowledge of research is concerned.

Interpretation

I have interpreted this phase in my life as a defining phase in that I learnt about my own need to succeed as a researcher. I believe that I initially studied and progressed in my studies to create a sense of pride for my family, especially my dad. I am starting to see that I was merely playing a role that they had constructed for me since I was born. As educators, my parents have always wanted me to reach new heights in my education and I obliged without reflecting what that meant to me. I am now able to process each and every thing that I have done to get to where I am, and have devised a plan to proceed from this point.

Decision

I am in the process of completing this degree and making plans for my PhD in the Anthropology of social and economic development with a focus on the feminization of poverty. It has not been easy getting to this point but if anything I have a new found appreciation for my education.

Literature reviews

Situation

In this study Chapter 2 focused on the literature review. There is a shortage of literature specific to the South African context on the topic, but I do believe strides are slowly being made in this regard. With research like the current research there is a lot to be learnt about the marginalized lesbians in South African, with emphasis on the black lesbians in this regard.

Affect

I really tried to embed all the literature in the South African context, but I was overwhelmed. I had to contend with a highly stressful job, a baby and trying to compile this literature review to the best of my ability. I am proud of the work that I have done, although I believe there is always room for improvement. My supervisor has given me a lot of support with this particular chapter. It has been sent back and forth numerous times and it has shaped into a well written Chapter.

Interpretation

The chapter points to a strong presence of a persistent patriarchal presence in South African society. Surprisingly regardless of the westernization taking place in the black society much remains the same. The designation of gender roles and the expectation that these be maintained is one of the points that results in a regressive culture of control over women. I observed a lot of progressive thinking among the participants of the current study. I was captivated by their progressive philosophies pertaining to their outlook on life, at the same time I observed a pull from home, so to speak. This pull was that which begged for acceptance and unconditional love that they feared would not be there once they disclosed. They would concede and return to being what is socially accepted if they believed that they would please their parents.

Decision

The study has tried to accurately accumulate as much of the participants' experiences as possible. This was done by constantly checking the proposal and the accumulated literature pertaining to this study when writing up Chapter 4 (findings and discussion).

Finding participants for the study

Situation

This has been the most challenging part of the entire research process in that the sample was really scarce. The LGBT associate that was tasked with helping me with the recruitment of participants handed me a list of random participants. They were black and they were lesbian, but he had not told them that I would be calling them to recruit them for the study. As a result some of the numbers were not working and some of the participants I sensed were offended. The one participant I managed to get a hold of was 40 so she didn't meet the criteria for the study. I was really disappointed by the lack of commitment from my associate. It really discouraged me a great deal not knowing how I would make the time to individually find participants for my study, with working shifts at my job and not being able to connect with participants at times that suited them.

Affect

I really felt happy that I had completed conducting my interviews. I felt that the worst was over and that although a lot of work lay ahead I had managed to capture the essence of the research study. I hope that the work that is being done in this field will translate to legislature that protects black lesbian rights.

Interpretation

I interpreted this to mean that social stigmatization of lesbians has enforced their invisibility. They do not want to be seen or approached unless they trust the individual they are dealing with. It was therefore comforting to finally be able to establish rapport with the participants.

Decision

An associate of mine from the University who is very supportive of my academic progress informed a friend of mine about a possible participant who she thought would be interested in the study. The participant was really patient in that it took us some time trying to match up our times between my work and her schooling. We eventually managed to meet up after work and school respectively. This was one of the most enjoyable interviews I have had in a long time. The participant was really comfortable in her own skin, making it really easy for me to speak to her. Needless to say I felt relieved that I had conducted my first interview. The subsequent interviews were however, difficult to secure, but the advantage of having chosen the sampling method, of snowball sampling, that I employed in this study allowed me to tap into associates and their social networks in order to recruit participants. I had to find a suitable time for all the remaining participants. These interviews were conducted on my day off at the University. I managed to interview the remaining four participants in one afternoon. It was really tiring and emotionally taxing

Conducting interviews

Situation

The interviews were interesting and they allowed me to gain insight into the participants' experiences, before engaging with the data. Having experienced the data first hand allowed me to have a glimpse of what the complete data was going to look like. It allowed me to already start identifying themes that would speak to the literature in the study; it also allowed me to identify new themes and dominant constructions presented by the participants' interviews.

Affect

The interviews though initially nerve wrecking for the fear that the participants would not be receptive, turned out great. I enjoyed engaging with the participants and their experiences. The participants were engaging, which made me feel like they enjoyed the interview. I felt a bit of fear when some of them answered their questions. I felt that the information they provided would not fit into my idea of the study. But having the study rooted in social construction reassured me that the way in which the data manifested itself was only a stronger characteristic of the uniqueness of people and their social situation. New

perspectives were introduced to me that I was not even aware of. This was what made the choice of using social construction such a great one.

Interpretation

The interviews were of importance to the study in that they presented the data to me to understand before the analysis. It was one an important part of the research process as it allowed me to interact with the participants whose experiences I was writing about.

Analysing the data

Situation

Analysing the data was more enjoyable as it was familiar to me from the initial interviews. Transcribing the data was a tool that allowed me to be familiar with the data. Having to listen to the recordings three more times, allowed me to be more comfortable with the data. When I developed the themes I had already identified initial links in the literature that spoke to those themes. The shortcoming of the data was that it was rather extensive.

Affect

I was more confident with the analysis of the data. I did not experience any challenges, apart from it being lengthily.

Interpretation

When doing this section I started to understand that the data was the core of the research. By analysing the data I started to see the study more holistically. I saw how the theoretical framework spoke to the method of data collection, and how the method of analysis was relevant in delivering the data.

Writing up on the findings

Situation

It focused on bringing together the entire research project and presenting them as within the scope of social construction. I was a challenge in that I would write up the findings, then with guidance from my supervisor; I had to reword it according to her recommendations. I felt that it was holding me back from completing my degree. I however, started to see that I was almost finished and that I needed to focus more on the content, instead of just releasing the chapter.

Affect

I started to feel like I would not complete the writing up as I was not feeling confident. I felt that I did not know what was required of me, thus making me feel despondent. I have however, written the final chapter, before completing the chapter of findings. I guess it made me feel like I was doing something more.

Interpretation

The findings were more than I expected them to be when I initially proposed this study. They include a more holistic view of the participants. Were I had previously seen elements of the study topic, for instance the sexual identities (i.e. the butch lesbian), were now related to disclosure in that some identities were known characteristics of lesbian identities, which potentially exposed (the person ascribing that particular identity) as being lesbian.

Decision

It was difficult to finalize the findings but with guidance from my supervisor and renewed commitment it was possible to do so.