

**An Analysis of Understandings of and Attitudes towards Transgender People  
on a South African University Campus**

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## ABSTRACT

There are issues that always arise when it comes to gender identities and gender expressions. These issues are a result of the gender binary that corners people into being either feminine or masculine. Our societies are shaped in ways that supports this gender binary. If you are born a female, you are expected to be feminine and if you are born a male you are expected to act in a masculine way. When a person whose gender identity does not correspond with his or her assigned sex at birth, their behaviour is problematized and sometimes even criminalized and they are considered as deviant individuals by many societies. Consequently, most people who do not conform to gender societal norms are more exposed to violence, stigmatization, discrimination, marginalization, and victimization. People have difficulty understanding that there is 'gender variance', in other words, that there are more than just two genders. It is apparent that, even though societies enforce the gender binary, there are individuals who wish to express their genders in different ways, thus there are people who identify as transgender. The main focus of this dissertation is on the gender identities of transgendered people. Transgender people are people whose gender identity and or gender expression is distinct from the sex to which they were assigned at birth. The transgender group is a minority group (including in African countries) and one can argue that it is either misrepresented, misunderstood, hardly visible and ignored. This is evident when one looks at the lack of research on transgender populations in Africa. The main purpose of this research is to investigate the understandings that people have about transgender people on a South African university campus. In this dissertation the intent is to explore what it means to be transgender, the Rhodes University students' understandings of transgendered people, the issues of gender identities and gender expressions and the challenges that transgender people face. The research question that this dissertation seeks to find an answer to is "Do Rhodes University students understand the notion of transgender and how do they react towards transgendered people on campus?"

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

There are transformations that are occurring in the lives of men and women in African and also in Western societies. Confronted by confusion around gender identity issues, overlooking the fact that a significant transformation is taking place in our societies is very easy. Within the sociology of gender, gender identities and the gender binary are being questioned and challenged. In other words, gender identities are shifting from being based on the gender binary of either feminine or masculine to being based on the gender preferences of each and every individual. This dissertation is about understanding, investigating and interrogating how people understand transgendered people and their attitudes towards them on a South African university campus. Furthermore, this dissertation aims to investigate the perceptions and understandings of people when it comes to gender identities, gender variance, transgenderism and gender non-conformity. I do this by engaging mainly with two theoretical frameworks which are: Symbolic Interactionism and the Transgender Theory. In addition, Social Constructionism is discussed when discussing the construction of gender. This dissertation may also be read as an attempt to broaden and bring about awareness about the term 'transgenderism' and what it means to be transgender in South Africa. It can also be understood as an attempt to encourage more people to learn and write about minority groups such as the transgender populations in South Africa. The field of research for this dissertation is the Sociology of Gender. The title of this dissertation is: An Analysis of Understandings of and Attitudes towards Transgender People on a South African University Campus. This research was conducted at Rhodes University. Moreover, the main goal of this dissertation was to investigate and determine how Rhodes University students understand the notion of transgender and their tolerance and acceptance towards transgendered people at Rhodes University and in the society more broadly. The secondary goals were; to explore how people think transgender is constructed, to study the understandings of Rhodes University students about the differences between transgender and transsexual, to interrogate Rhodes University students' attitudes towards transgender people and to study how people's perceptions shape the challenges that transgender people face at Rhodes University.

In this dissertation, before discussing transgenderism broadly, I start by providing a discussion about gender and sex, gender identities and gender expressions, gender variance and gender non-conforming. I consider the sociological theories of gender and the biological theories of gender in an attempt to discuss the social construction of gender and the differences between sex and

gender. In order to understand transgenderism, we have to understand the differences between gender and sex as they are often used as intertwined or integrated. Understanding sex as a matter of being male and female, and understanding gender as a matter of being feminine and masculine makes it easy for the writer to discuss transgenderism, hence I decided to include an extended section on sex and gender.

Furthermore, in this dissertation the term transgender is used as an umbrella term to describe people whose gender identity or gender expression differs from that usually associated with their sex (American Psychological Association, 2006). Anyone whose identity appearance or behaviour falls outside of conventional gender norms can be described as transgender. However, it is also argued in this dissertation that not everyone whose appearance or behaviour is gender-atypical will identify as a transgender person or use that label to describe themselves (American Psychological Association, 2006). Specifically, this dissertation adopts Susan Stryker's definition of transgender. According to Stryker (2008: 1) transgender refers to "people who move away from the gender they were assigned at birth, people who cross over the boundaries constructed by their culture to define and contain that gender". The experiences of transgender individuals raise compelling questions about the nature of identities that are socially defined (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010: 431). Included in this dissertation are different experiences and challenges that transgender people encounter. I also discuss what is called "Gender Identity Disorder" or "Gender Dysphoria" in order to show the compelling questions that are raised about the nature of the identities of transgendered people. Using the social construction of gender, I show the possibility of individuals discovering their gender-variant identities at an early age. Indeed, it has been argued that the majority of transgender people discover their gender identities at a very early age (Kennedy & Hellen, 2010: 25). They transition from one gender to the other and live or sometimes wish to be permanent members of what, in terms of the dominant discourse, is regarded as the 'opposite gender' (American Psychology Association, 2006). In this dissertation I provide a broad discussion about transitioning from one gender to another and also mention how and when individuals go about self-identifying themselves as transgender. This dissertation also provides a broad discussion of what the term transgender means, the categories that fall under this term when used as an umbrella term, and the challenges that transgender people face in South Africa. The symbolic interactionism theory is used to discuss the self, the body and the interactions that transgender people have with the societies or the majority of people who do not identify as transgender. In order to show the challenges that transgender people face in our societies I also provide gender-based incidents that occurred or occur to transgender people in

South Africa. Moreover, when discussing the life experiences of the transgender people, I also apply the transgender theory.

### **Symbolic interactionism**

By using the symbolic interactionism theory, I aim to show how people place attachments to gender identities and transgender individuals through the interactions they have with them. Moreover, I use this theoretical framework to discuss gender and the construction of gender through interactions with other people. In addition, the symbolic interactionism theory is applied in a way that shows how transgender people interact with the people in societies. Symbolic interactionism theories of gender are the most useful tool for analysing the persistence of gender inequality in South Africa. According to Schilt (2010: 6) “symbolic interactionism theories highlight how masculinity and femininity are not natural off-shoots of maleness and femaleness respectively, but rather social constructs achieved through interaction”. The cultural schemas about gender are the ones that shape social structures as deeply held notions about how men and women are and what they should do and they are embedded in social institutions and reproduced in social interactionism (Schilt, 2010: 6). When discussing transgender people, I refer to them as the social actors who refuse to conform to the traditional gender binary and I also discuss the hegemonic discourse about gender identities.

### **The transgender theory**

The application of the transgender theory will help us understand the lived experiences of individuals who identify as transgender. According to Nagoshi & Brzuzy (2010: 413) “the transgender theory is an emerging theoretical framework on the nature of gender and gender identity in comprehending the lived experiences of transgender people”. It is different in emphasizing the importance of physical embodiment in gender and sexual identity. It integrates the embodiment with the self and socially constructed aspects of identity through the lived experiences of those with intersecting identities (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010: 431). Furthermore, it provides a theoretical basis for reconciling feminist and queer theoretical scholarship with social work practices and advocacy with regard not only to issues of working with transgender people but also to larger issues of group identity and social oppression (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010: 431). The transgender theory is a critique of both the feminist and the queer theories (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010: 435). In this dissertation I do not focus on the feminist and queer theories but it is important to mention them in order to show the significance of the evolution of the transgender theory.

**Chapter 1** is an introduction to this dissertation and it focuses on brief discussions of the main topics and the theoretical frameworks that are used in this dissertation. It then attempts to link them to the main focus of this dissertation which is on transgender people. Moreover, this chapter serves as a foundation to the broad discussion that will follow in the next chapters.

**Chapter 2** is a literature review whereby diverse literature on gender identities and transgenderism from African, and Western societies is discussed. This chapter starts by discussing social interactionism theory and transgender theory and then a thorough discussion of the topic follows. Following that is a discussion of theories of gender and sex, discussing the differences between the two. Furthermore, I also discuss how sex and gender are constructed, with one being biological and the other one being socially constructed. My aim here is to show the differences between male and female and masculinity and femininity. I then build a strong discussion about gender identities which leads to the main discussion about transgender individuals in South Africa, specifically on a South African university campus. It is important to note that one can never understand transgenderism without discussing the differences between gender and sex, gender identities, gender variance and gender expression, hence I have decided to include them here. Furthermore, this chapter refers to transgenderism as an umbrella term that encompasses a variety of identities, including transsexual, cross-dressers, drag queens and kings and other terms as devised by individuals who live outside the dominant gender system (Gagne & Tewksbury, 1999: 64). In some cases, transgender individuals are referred to as people who are non-conforming to the traditional gender binary. Moreover, I have also used real life experiences in order to show or debunk the atrocities that transgender people encounter in South Africa.

**Chapter 3** is a research methodology section and it discusses the research paradigm which was used, the methods used to collect data and more. In order to ascertain the levels of understandings that Rhodes University students have about the idea of transgender, I have used a qualitative research design. According to Creswell (1994: 1), qualitative research is an enquiry process of comprehending social and human problems, it is formed with words and it reports detailed views of informants. This research consists of texts, words and more direct narratives about transgenderism. The type of sampling I used is a stratified random sampling technique. The sampled group of students is diverse in terms of age, race, sex, ethnicity, culture and academic year of study. The research methods I have used are in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews were conducted with sixteen Rhodes University students. The purpose of using in-depth interviews was to conduct a form of a conversation where knowledge was produced by the

interaction between the researcher and the interviewee (Curtis & Curtis, 2011). The in-depth interviews conducted for this research were not highly structured and there was a schedule which contains flexible questions. During in-depth interviews a digital recorder was used to capture what the participants said. After collecting data, the recorded information was then transcribed. In terms of ethical issues, additional caution was taken to ensure confidentiality, safety and anonymity of the participants. Before agreeing to participate in the research, the participants were given a form that assures them of the ethics of the research. The ethical standards of this research are the ones from the Rhodes University Ethics Committee and I have complied with those rules throughout this research.

**Chapter 4** is based on the data analysis and the research findings and it informs the type of data analysis which was used to analyse the data collected. Because the aim is to investigate people's understandings and perceptions about transgender, the type of data analysis which was used is a thematic data analysis. In order to conduct a thematic data analysis, I needed to gather themes that arose during the in-depth interviews conducted and used them to make comparisons between what the literature says and what Rhodes University students understand about transgender people.

**Chapter 5** is the concluding chapter. This chapter is used to determine whether I have managed to achieve all my goals. Furthermore, I discuss the connections between what has been written about how people understand transgender people and how my interviewees understand transgender people. With all the findings and the data collected, I then make recommendations about a way forward on how to raise more awareness about transgender people, gender identities and gender variances in order for many people to fully understand them and many more.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1. Introduction

We live in societies where the traditional gender binary is largely enforced. From an early age children are socialized in ways that reinforces this gender binary. In African countries, specifically in South Africa, when one is born a female, she is expected to act in a feminine way and when one is born a male he is expected to act in a masculine way. This is done through the toys that they are allowed to play with, through the colours of their clothing, through their interactions with people, through the kind of work they are expected to perform, through the conversations they have with old people and many more. Furthermore, a female child is also taught how to be a “woman”, and trained how to act like a “woman”, whereas a male child is taught how to be “strong” and be a “man”. Because gender is socially constructed, the first stage whereby children are socialized to be either masculine or feminine starts at an early stage, the primary socialization stage. This dissertation seeks to discuss that which is said to be “against the gender norm”, that which is non-conforming, that which is not bound to what children are taught during the socialization period, that which is individually and socially constructed by individuals without conforming to the traditional gender binary, and that is what we call “transgenderism”. In this dissertation ‘transgenderism’ is used as a term that speaks of people who are liberating themselves from the traditional gender norms of our societies.

There is some research that is based on transgenderism but currently, a lot of research conducted on transgenderism seems to focus more on the challenges that transgender people encounter in medical centres, health care centres and in juridical contexts. See for example, an article written by Wilson, Marias, De Villiers, Addinall and Campbell (2014) titled “Transgender issues in South Africa, with particular reference to Groote Schuur Hospital Transgender Unit” entirely focuses on the medical centre, health care centre and medical issues that transgender people face. Another article is that which was written by Abigail W. Lloyd (2013) titled “Defining the Human: Are Transgender People Strangers to the Law”. In this article Lloyd discusses the issues and challenges that the transgender faces with the law when it comes to their identities. According to Lloyd (2013: 152) the law makes the identities of transgender people “impossible, invisible, and monstrous as to be outside of the laws protection”. Another example is that written by Dr Alex Muller (2013) for Gender Dynamix which is located in South Africa. The article is titled “Sexual and Reproductive Health for Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming people:

Guidelines for Healthcare Workers in Primary Care”. This article focuses on the issues that the transgender people encounter in healthcare centres and how healthcare workers should treat transgender people. This is not to say that the issues covered in the above articles are of no significance but they do not consider if many people understand what it means to be transgender in South Africa. If we are to bring about change and try and overcome the challenges that transgender people encounter in our societies, we first ought to educate the societies about what transgenderism is and make them understand the gender variances that are in existence. Despite the general invisibility of transgender people in our societies, their existence cannot be denied and societies must be educated about it. Therefore, the focus of this dissertation will be more on the social context of transgenderism.

In order to provide this social context of transgenderism, I begin this chapter with an application of two theoretical frameworks; symbolic interactionism theory and transgender theory. Following that is a discussion about how gender is socially constructed and I discuss this with a brief mention of the differences between sex, gender and sexuality. In order to strengthen my discussion of gender, I briefly mention the biological theory of gender. When discussing transgenderism, I make sure that I provide adequate information that will both show the various meanings of the term and the life experiences of transgender people in African and non-African countries. I also argue that gender variant behaviour is something that has been in existence in African societies for many years and I support this argument with reference to the history of the gender variant behaviours in African countries.

## **2.2. The symbolic interactionism theory**

The symbolic interactionism theory emerged in the mid-twentieth century from a variety of influential sociologists and anthropologists (Carter & Fuller, 2015). This perspective is largely influenced by the works of George Herbert Mead, Herbert Blumer, George Simmel, Charles Cooley, Manford Kuhn and Ervin Goffman (Mooney, Knox & Schacht, 2007). According to Carter and Fuller (2015), symbolic interactionism emerged as a response to the then mainstream theories on society. Moreover, this theory was developed to comprehend how societies operate using a bottom-up approach. It is George Herbert Mead who made a great breakthrough in understanding the basic properties of people’s social interactions (Dong, 2008). Mead’s theories largely focused on the relationship between the self and the society. But, Mead uses the self as his crucial concept. According to Dong (2008: 14), “the self and the mind are dialectically related to one another, neither can exist without the other”. Additionally, in his theories Mead states that

individuals learn about themselves through interactions with others based on gestures. In this case the term 'gesture' is used to mean an action that stimulates a response in another person. He also argues that the concept of self can only arise through social experiences (Mead, 1934).

Moreover, it is said that it is Herbert Blumer who coined the term 'symbolic interactionism'. Carter and Fuller (2015: 2) state that Herbert Blumer was the first person to formulate Mead's ideas into a more cohesive theory. Indeed, it is Blumer who developed the main variant of symbolic interactionism at the University of Chicago in the 1950s. Blumer (1969) laid the groundwork for new theoretical paradigms which altered in various ways the sociology's accepted forms of epistemology and methodology. According to Carter and Fuller (2015: 2), "Blumer's brand of symbolic interactionism has been the most influential in sociology and most interactionists' scholarship is aligned to some degree with his vision". In his symbolic interactionism theory, Blumer emphasized how the self emerges from an interactive process with joint action (Denzin, 1992). Similarly, to Mead, Blumer saw individuals as being engaged in a mind action. He also argues that humans do not ponder on themselves and their relationships to others but instead, they engage in mind actions where they manipulate symbols and negotiate the meanings of situations (Mead, 1934; Carter & Fuller, 2015). Blumer's symbolic interactionism mainly focuses of processes that actors use to frequently create and recreate experiences from the interactions they have with others. In addition, Blumer sees the society as a continuing process where agency and indeterminacy of action is emphasized (Collins, 1994).

Symbolic interactionism is concerned with the influence that broad aspects of the societies such as institutions and large social groups have on the world. It operates on a micro sociology level and it is concerned with the social psychological dynamics of individuals interacting in small groups (Mooney, Knox & Schacht, 2007). Similarly, within a micro-level theoretical perspective, the social interactionism theory addresses the manner in which people build and maintain society through face-to-face, continual and meaningful interactions (Carter & Fuller, 2015: 1). It also emphasizes that the definitions and meanings that are created and maintained through symbolic interactionism with others influence human behaviour. Similarly, Thomas (1966) emphasized the significance of definitions and meanings in social behaviour and its consequences. He suggests that people respond to their definitions of a situation rather than to the subjective situation itself (Thomas, 1966). He also noted that the situations that people define as actual become real in their consequences.

The symbolic interactionism theory also suggests that people's identities or sense of self are shaped by the social interactions they have with the other people. Indeed, people share their self-concept by observing how others interact with them or label them. By observing how others view them, they see a reflection of themselves through what Cooley calls the "looking glass self" (Mooney, Knox & Schacht, 2007). According to Dong (2008: 14) "the fundamental of symbolic interactionism is the manner in which the individual is connected to the social structure and the possible interplay between individuals and others". The symbolic interactionism theory also argues that it is through social actions that people engage with others on the basis of meanings that are acquired from social sources and their own experiences. Indeed, the meanings are learnt from other people and to some extent these meanings are shaped or reshaped by the ones using the symbols (Dong, 2008). Through the learning of how to use symbols and develop meanings for certain objects in their social context, people develop a mind that is both "reflective and reflexive" (Dong, 2008: 14). As Blumer states, the mind is a process that emerges from people's efforts to adjust to their environments (Turner, 2004: 345). What is central to symbolic interactionism is the idea that individuals utilize language and important symbols in their communication and interaction with others (Carter & Fuller, 2015). In this case symbolic interactionism shifts the human attention to the interpretation of subjective viewpoints and how individuals make sense of their world from a totally different point of view (Carter & Fuller, 2015).

Dong (2008: 14) states that the core of the self is its ability to put ourselves in other people's places. People become both actors and reactors and the human sense of self is the product and also the process. Moreover, the self is simultaneously shaped by the larger society. The symbolic interactionism perspective widely established the tenet that the self is formed in interaction with others (Dong, 2008: 14). There are numerous tenets of symbolic interactionism, but because of the limitations of this dissertation I will mention just a few. Carter and Fuller (2015: 1) mention four basic tenets of symbolic interactionism which state; firstly, "individuals' actions are based on the meanings objects have for them. Secondly, the interaction happens within a particular social and cultural context in which physical and social objects and as well as situations must be defined or categorized based on individual meanings. Thirdly, meanings emerge from interactions with other individuals and with society and lastly, meanings are continuously created and recreated through interpreting processes during interactions with others" (Blumer, 1969; Carter & Fuller, 2015). The most essential tenet of symbolic interactionism is that the self is an interactional accomplishment, formed in interaction with others and subject to on-going process

of maintenance, adjustment and change (Cooley, 1964; Mead, 1934). These tenets seek to explain how people's interactions with others result in them creating individual meanings.

It has been argued that the symbolic interactionism theory tends to sidestep discussions of the relationships between the body and the self and it overlooks systems of power and the ways in which they impact upon the self and the body (Gagne & Tewksbury, 1999: 59). Indeed, it does treat the body as if it is separate from the self. Whereas the body is the significant aspect of the self, and this is due to the social meanings assigned to the body, the ways other social actors react to and interact with the embodied individual, and the meanings social actors ascribe to their own bodies (Gagne & Tewksbury, 1999: 61). The 'self' acts as an active agent in its own creation but its subjectivity does not exist in a system of its own (Foucault, 1990). Furthermore, the self is not born into a body of its own choosing. It is the body that provides the vehicle by which the self can interact with society.

According to Dunn (1997: 688) "symbolic interactionism has made a great contribution to understandings of the self as an agent of interpretation, definition and action within a social field". But, its tendency has been to overlook the ways in which systems of power impact upon the self, for example it overlooks how other people's reactions and attitudes towards transgender people and the hegemonic discourse of gender affects transgender people (Gagne & Tewksbury, 1999: 59).

The symbolic interactionism theory can be applied to comprehend the interrelations between gender, identity, culture, emotions and personal change (Schrock and Padavick, 2007; Schrock & Schwalbr, 2009; Vaccaro et al. 2011). Many people find social interactionism very useful in order to understand the construction of gender and sexuality. West and Zimmerman's (1987) concept of doing gender demonstrates the socially constructed nature of masculinity and femininity as developing out of repeated, patterned interactions and socialization process. West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that gender is a result of an interaction, and this argument directly contradicts the normative perspective of gender as an innate state of being.

Symbolic interactionism also shows an interaction between society and social actors (Gagne, & Tewksbury, 1999: 60). In the case of this dissertation social actors are the transgendered people. In symbolic interactionism, agency appears to be more reflexive and innovative (Gagne & Tewksbury, 1999: 60). There is a need for empirical examinations of social processes, by which an internalized sense of self and identity is developed, maintained and modified and also on how the self is affected by hegemonic discourses (Gagne & Tewksbury, 1999: 60). Indeed, plenty of

theoretical work has been established to guide the thinking about actors' agency, resistance and conformity to discursive pressures in societies. Examinations of the lives of individuals (transgender people in this case) whose discursive practices go against the pressures of the hegemonic discourse provide a valuable means of gaining insight (Gagne & Tewksbury, 1999: 60). The social actors (transgender people) who unwittingly fail or willingly refuse to conform to social expectations will be seen as "deviant" (Gagne & Tewksbury, 1999). Furthermore, such deviant actors may temporarily or permanently internalize the dominant belief systems regarding their alleged immorality, perversity or sickness with negative effects on the self (Gagne & Tewksbury, 1999: 60). Indeed, in some societies being transgender is considered as being deviant, an illness or crime and the way these societies make transgender people feel as if they are sick results in them believing that their preferred gender identities are a form of illness and this then affects them negatively.

It is widely accepted that knowledge has an enormous influence on the development and maintenance of the self (Gagne & Tewksbury, 1999: 60). According to Gagne & Tewksbury (1999: 60) "individuals neither passively internalize the hegemonic discourse, nor are they free to change it into a system of their own". Individuals may resist but resistances are influenced by making discursive arrangements and relations of ruling (Smith, 1990). Hegemonic discourses have influenced social interpretations of the body as well as the physical form that the body acquires (Davis, 1995). Specifically, Butler (1993) emphasizes that hegemonic discourses make only certain behaviours, appearances, and bodily configurations culturally intelligible. Hence those who fall outside the hegemonic discourse are seen by others as deviant, abnormal, perverse and sick (Gagne & Tewksbury, 1999: 60). Social actors (transgender people in this case) are never free to experience their bodies as pre-cultural and non-cultural entities. In support to this statement, in this dissertation I discuss the gender-based challenges that transgender people face in societies. The hegemonic discourse is inscribed upon the bodies of social actors in ways that have only just begun to be recognized (Gagne & Tewksbury, 1999: 60). In this case the hegemonic discourse of gender is explained as traditional gender norms that are enforced, that is to say, men are expected to be masculine and women are expected to be feminine. Any cross gendering or anything that falls outside of that hegemonic discourse is considered as crime, unnatural, sick, and deviant. That is to say, transgendered people are in most cases perceived to be unnatural and referred to as having deviant behaviours.

The symbolic interactionism theories of gender are a most useful tool for analysing the persistence of gender inequality in South Africa. It is therefore important to use these theories

when discussing the gender inequalities that the transgender communities face in the contemporary South Africa. According to Schilt (2010: 6) “symbolic interactionism theories highlight how masculinity and femininity are not natural off-shoots of maleness and femaleness respectively, but rather social constructs achieved through interaction”. It is the cultural schemas about gender that shape social structures as deeply held ideas about how men and women are and what they should do and they are embedded in social institutions and reproduced in social interactionism (Schilt, 2010: 6).

In African societies it is commonly held that there are two genders that correlate with the appropriate sex of each individual, femininity for females and masculinity for males. According to these binary views it is assumed that the sexes are inherently opposite (Gagne & Tewksbury, 1999: 61). Using symbolic interactionism as the main theoretical framework for this dissertation I aim to explicate the ways in which knowledge systems as part of the larger gender discourse have been inscribed and resisted in the lives, selves and bodies of masculine-to-feminine transgendered people in South Africa (Gagne & Tewksbury, 1999: 60). Specifically, I argue that the self alone is capable of taking in and assimilating new information but while the self is an active agent in society, it is also subject to powerful social forces, specifically to hegemonic systems of knowledge (Gagne & Tewksbury, 1999: 61). Moreover, in this dissertation I argue that gender transgenderism is influenced by a sense of self that does not adhere to the traditional binary expectations that females will be feminine and males will be masculine. In looking at the social construction of gender, gender identities and transgenderism, I draw upon the central assumption of symbolic interactionism that the self is formed in interaction with others and that the establishment and maintenance of identity is a self-reflexive interactive process (Gagne & Tewsknury, 1999: 62).

### **2.3. The transgender theory**

The evolution of the transgender theory is an important next step in providing more complete and inclusive comprehensions of gender and sexual identities. The transgender theory can be applied to issues of comprehending transgender people, in empowering them and building coalitions between transgender communities and other socially oppressed groups of people such as the LGBTQ communities (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010: 432).

According to Nagoshi and Brzuzy (2010: 431), transgender theory is an “emerging theoretical orientation on the nature of gender and gender identity in understanding lived experiences of transgender and transsexual individuals”. This theory stresses the significance of the physical

embodiment of gender and sexual identities. Similar to symbolic interactionism theory, transgender theory integrates the physical embodiment of gender and sexual identities with the self and socially constructed aspects of identity by using the lived experiences of those with non-conforming identities (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010: 431). Moreover, transgender theory incorporates ideas of the “fluidly embodied, socially constructed and self-constructed aspects of social identity along with dynamic interaction and integration of these aspects of identity within the narrative of lived experiences” (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010: 432). Roen (2001) contended that the theory of transgender also includes a “both/neither” conceptualization of gender identity outside the male or female binary. In addition, transgenderism is seen as transgressing the gender binary, but not necessarily as physically transitioning from one gender category to the other (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010: 435). Further discussion on transitioning from one gender to another is discussed in the upcoming sections. In addition, the transgender theory provides a theoretical basis for reconciling the feminist and queer theoretical scholarships with social work practice and advocacy with regards to not only issues of working with transgender people but also to larger issues of group identity and social oppression (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010: 431). Because the transgender theory emerged as a critique to these theories a brief mention of them is vital.

According to Nagoshi and Brzuzy (2010: 431), “The feminist theory addresses the cultural and historical context and biological premises of gender as well as the issues of sexism and the intersectionality of multiple forms of gender oppression”. Moreover, feminist scholars have defined gender in numerous contexts, from an attribute to a type of social organisation and as an ideology to sex roles, power differentials and analytical categories. Similarly, gender organizes the relationships with others and develops meanings through natural and social events (Harding, 1986). Feminist theory is framed as a theory of gender oppression in which sexuality is assumed to be tied to gender (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010: 434). Feminist and queer theories locate social identities in the conflict between social and self-determinants. Indeed, most of the philosophical and political comprehensions of non hetero-normative gender identity and sexuality come from the queer theory (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010: 434). Queer theory challenges feminist theory and it developed from the feminist and de-constructivist theories that posited that normative and deviant sexual behaviours and cognitions are social constructs. Therefore, the transgender theory is an attempt to rework queer theories and a forum is being established through the publication of theories around transgenderism work (Roen, 2001: 253).

## **2.4. The social construction of gender**

When looking at the social construction of gender, the social constructionist theory states that gender identity is a social construct as well as the result of repeated performances of the expected behaviours of one's sex (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010: 434). Social constructionism conceptualises gender as something that is socially constructed. The problem with this theory is that it denies the body the sense of identity which continues to exist as a seeming self between the social performances of gendered behaviours (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010: 435).

The mainstream social construction of gender consists of only two choices of recognized genders: feminine and masculine, and two recognized sexes which are female and male (Dietert & Dentice, 2013: 26). Because of this binary arrangement, other genders are not recognized. Consistent with essentialism, the people who were born male are expected to be masculine and be sexually attracted to women, and the people who were born female are expected to be feminine (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010: 433). In some cultures, the social construction of gender supports the notion that gender identity should align with biological sex. For example, in the Zimbabwean cultures male born individuals are expected to be masculine and females to be feminine, anything that goes beyond that is considered as deviant and unacceptable by law. The social construction of gender position argues that if gender is a social construct, "the content of which is radically contingent", then the potential exists for dramatic change (Chambers, 2007: 308). The construct of gender consists of five major components. These are: membership knowledge, gender typicality, gender contentedness, pressure to conform and intergroup bias (Ryan & Diaz, 2010: 1581).

Early socialization from parents establishes gender norms where individuals are trained to be boys and girls, thereby setting the standards of gendered behaviour (Dietert & Dentice, 2013: 34). The discourse of gender originates in early socialization. From Foucault's (1990) perspective, gender discourse plays a significant role in socializing children to conform to a world adhering to a gender binary system that is most often than not inflexible. Primary and secondary agents of socialization serve as authorities of delimitation since they preserve gender binary arrangements through gendered practices and discourse (Dietert & Dentice, 2013: 39). Through the process of socialization, authorities of delimitation preserve gender binary arrangements (Dietert & Dentice, 2013: 39).

The process of socialization includes the development of a gender identity, the sense that a person has that physicality that she is a female or a male (Davidson & Kramer, 1979: 3-4). Conformity to gender roles and gender expression is enforced at all levels of society which contributes to family and societal rejection of people when they engage in gender-variant behaviour (Dietert & Dentice, 2013: 27). A person's gender expression may or may not be consistent with socially prescribed gender roles, and may or may not reflect his or her gender identity (American Psychological Association, 2006). Some people distance themselves from their birth assigned gender because they feel strongly that they properly belong to a different gender position to that which is stereotypically assigned to their sex (Stryker, 2008: 1).

Early socialization, specifically for gender-nonconforming behaviour in children, may result in varying reactions from family members. When children express gender variant behaviour, parents sometimes attempt to force the child's gender roles to align with his or her biological sex (Dietert & Dentice, 2013: 27). Conformity to gender roles and gender expression is enforced at all levels of society which contributes to family and societal rejection of people when they engage in gender-variant behaviours (Dietert & Dentice, 2013: 27).

## **2.5. Differences between sex and gender**

When dealing with sex and gender, many people describe sex as a matter of being male and female, yet also describe gender as a matter of being male and female. Even in application forms that require individuals to describe their gender or sex, they are regularly made to choose between male and female for both sex and gender categories. In this section I discuss the distinction between sex, gender, and sexuality. I argue that gender is not sex but many people use the terms interchangeably. Gender is the social elaboration of biological sex.

On the one hand sex is biologically defined and refers to the biological characteristics used at birth to assign an individual to a sexual category; natal sex, male or female (Wilson, Marais, De Viliers, Addinall, & Campbell, 2014: 1). Sex is that which is assigned at birth and it refers to one's biological status as either female or male. Furthermore, it is normally associated primarily with the physical attributes such as the external and internal anatomy. Sex is often assigned at birth based on the appearance of the baby's external genitalia. According to Holmes (2007) sex can be defined as a biological categorization that is based primarily on reproductive potential. Biological sex or natal sex consists of the physiological makeup of a human being.

On the other hand, gender is a social construct. Gender is traditionally assumed to be based on a binary, mandatory system that attributes social characteristics to biological sex. According to Wilson et al. (2014: 1) “Gender refers to the roles, behaviour and attributes that are labelled as masculine or feminine by society”. It refers to the socially constructed roles, actions, attributes that societies consider to be appropriate for boys and girls. Gender is a concept that is influenced by culturally constructed ideas based on the binary system of masculine and feminine. These roles then influence the ways that people interact or feel about themselves. A culture’s social systems are grounded in gender-based concepts (Kessler, 2000). Members of social systems learn gender roles that are consistent with these cultural beliefs along with the signs and symbols of these roles such as names and pronouns, appropriate ways to speak, move and dress and occupational choices (Martin & Yonkin, 2006: 108-109). Sociological theories hold that gender is a social construction and that gender role behaviours are maintained through social structures and practices that reinforce the greater power and status of male gender (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Eagly, 1987). In addition, conceptualizations of gender as dichotomous tend to consist of mainly overgeneralizations that ignore vast differences within the categories of male or female (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Indeed, the gender-polarised world that we live in where gender division is based on assumptions of dichotomous genders permeates the way we think and talk about ourselves and each other (Connell, 1999; Siann, 1994). It is important to note that while aspects of biological sex are the same across different cultures, aspects of gender may differ (American Psychological Association, 2006).

From Foucault’s perspective, the word ‘gender’ is not just a word. Indeed, gender is correlated with norms and practices specific to two exclusive categories (Dietert & Dentice, 2013: 30). A society’s comprehension of gender creates a discourse that sustains the binary categories (Dietert & Dentice, 2013: 30). When individuals place themselves within a discourse, they become subjects of that discourse. The discourse of gender originates in early socialization. Moreover, it may be very helpful to understand gender as a spectrum rather than a binary system. Devor (1989) states that, gender typically refers to the subjective, social status of a person as a woman or a man. According to Martin and Yonkin (2006: 108) “originally a linguistic term to designate masculine, feminine, or neuter nouns, the term gender was adapted in 1955 by sexologist John Money (1994) in order to better convey the relationship between biological and social influences on male and female identities”. Hausman (2001) argues that gender is an ‘epistemology’ for knowing and understanding the operation of culture in defining identities, whereby one’s perceptions and experiences of the world are attributed to a socially constructed narrative that is

based on one's belonging to a certain gender category. Gender is historical, it differs from place to place and culture to culture (Stryker, 2008: 11). Gender is a term that is often used to refer to ways that people act, interact or feel about themselves which are associated with girls or women and boys or men. In our societies the gendered binary socialization is viewed as being "natural" and thus not questioned. For gender non-conforming people, two identities, those of gender and of sex are always intersectional (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010: 434).

According to the American Psychological Association (2006), behaviour that is compatible with cultural expectations is referred to as 'gender-normative' and behaviour that is viewed as incompatible with these expectations constitutes 'gender non-conformity'. Because gender is embedded in people's actions, beliefs, and desires, it appears to people to be completely natural. Gender is not sex but it builds on biological sex, it exaggerates biological distinction and it carries biological differences into domains in which it is completely irrelevant (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013). Gender is not something we are born with, but something we acquire socially and then perform (Butler, 1990).

The main agencies of socialisation are the family, peer groups, schools and the media. In respect to gender socialisation, each of the agencies could reinforce gender stereotypes (Crespi, 2003). Gender differences appear during the socialization process, especially during childhood and adolescence stages (Crespi, 2003). According to Crespi (2003), "the family is the social and symbolic place in which difference, in particular sexual difference, is believed to be fundamental and at the same time constructed". While it takes a community to develop gender, not all participants in the community are equally involved in enforcing difference. In research on early gender socialization, both child and adult males have emerged as more engaged in enforcing gender difference than females (Crespi, 2003). Men are more likely than women to play rough with boys and gently with girls. According to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2013), one can look at this as that female activities and behaviours emerge as marked, as reserved for a special subset of the population and that male activities and behaviours emerge as unmarked or normal. While individuals are not able to fully escape the dictates of the binary system of knowledge about sex and gender, they are capable of devising alternative ways of 'doing gender' that more closely adhere to an internalized sense of self (Gagne & Tewsknury, 1999: 59). In the end an individual neither passively enacts nor completely escapes the dictates of the binary system of gender knowledge (Gagne & Tewksbury, 1999). Transgender people represent one of the groups of individuals who endeavour to present alternatively gendered selves within a social system that proclaims males to be masculine and females to be feminine.

According to Vidal-Ortiz (2008: 799), “Sex, gender and sexuality are analytical concepts of much importance in order to study transgender populations and their issues”. The field of transgender and transsexual studies is in constant development and there are significantly some tensions that could offer much newer theorizing, for example between the categories of transsexuality and transgender as an umbrella term (Vidal-Ortiz, 2008: 799). It is vital to note that aspects of biological sex are similar across various cultures but those of gender may vary. Furthermore, “biological theories assume that gender should be consistent with biological sex and that there are only two genders and two sexes, some propose that hormones regulate gender difference” (Martin & Yonkin, 2006: 109).

## **2.6. Gender identity, gender expression, gender stereotypes and gender variance/gender non-conforming**

Symbolic interactionism states that one’s identity, as a schema outlining the relationship of the self, body and society, is based upon internalized acquired information (Gagne & Tewksbury, 1999: 62). This then results in a dualistic split between theorists, whereby some contest that individuals are virtually passive enactments of hegemonic discourses on the body and the self, and some focus on the agency of individual formatives of identity and the construction of the embodied self (Davis, 1995; Smith, 1990). In this section I show the different gender identities, gender expressions and I also mention gender variance and gender non-conforming in order to show the internalization of gender identity and how in many cases individuals externally express their identities in ways that fall outside the hegemonic discourse of gender.

### **2.6.1. Gender identity**

Gender identity refers to “one’s sense of oneself as male, female or transgender” (American Psychological Association, 2006: 1). When one’s gender identity and biological sex are not congruent, one may identify as transgender. Knowledge system affects gender identity and the embodied self (Gagne & Tewsknury, 1999: 59). The term ‘gender identity’ has been used to describe an individual’s internal sense of self as male or female or an identity between or outside these two categories (Wilchins, 2002). Individuals whose biological sex assignment matches male or female gender identity at the range of related behavioural expressions deemed acceptable by societal norms may be referred to as “traditionally gendered” (Bilodeau & Renn, 2008: 29).

Gendered identity is often assumed to be predicated on the prior existence of dichotomously sexed bodies; penis equating to maleness and vagina equating to femaleness (Braun & Wilkinson,

2005: 509). We live in societies premised on two widespread and linked assumptions related to gendered identity. The first is that humans are discretely sexed into two categories. We live in a gendered-polarised world where gender division based on assumption of dichotomous genders permeates the way we think and talk about ourselves and each other (Connell, 1999; Siann, 1994). Kitzinger (1999: 494) refers to this as an “intransigent cultural ideology of two and only two sexes”. The second is that gendered identities map onto biological bodies such as that genitals are a crucial part of difference and identity. Garfinkel’s (1967) natural laws of gender identified genitals as the essential sign of gender and this natural attitude remains.

Individuals’ sex assigned at birth, gender identity, and gender expression complement each other in a way that society traditionally determines is “appropriate.” But, the individual’s sex may not complement their gender identity and expression in a way that society expects. Gender identity refers to how masculine, and feminine a person feels on the inside and how that person projects that identity to the outside world (Ryan & Diaz, 2010: 1581). Furthermore, gender identity can be defined as a social construct as well as a result of repeated actions of the expected behaviours of one’s sex (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010: 434). Significantly, gender identity does not dictate sexual orientation. Gender identity refers to one’s personal sense and experience of gender. In most people it is congruent with the natal sex, in some it is incongruent (Wilson et al. 2014: 1).

Many people believe that gender identity is rooted in biology, although what component of gender identity is biological might never be proved (Stryker, 2008: 4). Gender identity directly affects individuals; life choices, social relationships and sexuality (Jobson, Theron, Kaggwa & Kim, 2012: 162). It can be said that gender identity is that which is internally felt, private and invisible (Martin & Yonkin, 2006: 109). I tend to agree with Jobson, et al. (2012: 161) when they state that “an individual’s gender identity may also change during their lifetime” therefore transgender people may change their identities as time goes according to how they feel.

### 2.6.2. Gender expression

According to Crespi (2003), gender expression refers to the way in which people act to communicate gender within a given culture. In addition, gender expression can be defined as the communication of one’s gender through behaviour, choice of clothing, hairstyles, voice, accessories, and mannerisms. Brown and Rounslly (1996) argue that it can only be possible to know one’s gender if people choose to disclose their gender identity and whether it matches their gender expressions. Furthermore, a person’s gender expression may or may not be consistent with socially prescribed gender roles, and may or may not reflect his or her gender identity

(American Psychological Association, 2006). Similarly, gender expression may also include gender roles which are also defined by an individual's culture or society. Gender roles may include careers, expectations for dating, and household chores. Lastly, gender expression is an individual's outward appearance. For example, a transgender person can be someone who was born a female, but appears to be masculine and behaves like a man. Their masculine actions, dress codes and behaviours are their way of expressing their gender. In this case, gender expression does not necessarily mean that a female must act feminine and a male must act masculine, how they express their genders depends on which gender they identify with.

### 2.6.3. Gender stereotypes

According to United Nations Human Rights (2014: 1), "A gender stereotype is a generalised view or preconception about attributes, or characteristics that are or ought to be possessed by women and men or the roles that are or should be performed by men and women". Furthermore, a gender stereotype is a belief that may cause its holder to make assumptions about members of the subject group, women and or men. In contrast, gender stereotyping is the practice of applying that stereotypical belief to a person (United Nations Human Rights, 2014: 1). The gender stereotypes can be negative because they do not leave space for people to choose their own gender identities. The gender stereotypes are the social structures mentioned in the symbolic interactionist theory to which individuals connect (Dong, 2008). For each and every culture, the meanings that people construct of gender identities are based on the gender stereotypes of that culture. Gender stereotypes limit people from self-identifying themselves in ways that they prefer to. Indeed, the United Nations Human Rights (2014: 1) argues that "gender stereotyping is wrongful when it results in a violation or violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms". In this dissertation I mention the gender based violations of transgender people which are the result of the gender stereotype that men must be masculine and be with women and that women must be feminine and be with men. Moreover, Human Rights Watch (2011: 16) seems to agree with the above statement when it states that "the normalization of some behaviours and modes of gender-expression as appropriate or natural for women and men makes all men and women who go against these norms potential targets". Moreover, gender stereotyping is the practice of ascribing to an individual specific attributes, characteristics, or roles by reason only of her or his membership of the social group of women or men (United Nations Human Rights, 2014: 1). A gender stereotype is, at its core, a belief that may cause its holder to make assumptions about members of the subject group, women and or men. In contrast, gender stereotyping is the practice of applying that stereotypical belief to a person (United Nations Human Rights, 2014). Parents

reinforce gender stereotypes when they provide their sons and daughters with different toys, or when they describe general patterns about each gender (Crespi, 2003). Furthermore, parents provide children with their first lessons about gender. Possible ways that parents might influence children's gender development include role modelling and encouraging different behaviours and activities in their sons and daughters (Crespi, 2003).

#### 2.6.4. Gender variance or gender non-conforming

Individuals are said to be gender-congruent if their gender identity, gender role and all associated symbols are in agreement (Bullough, 2000). According to Devor (1998), gender-variant behaviour is when any of the aspects of self-identity or self-expression seem incongruent with the person's sex. Gender non-conformity or gender variance is when a person's gender expression differs from cultural expectations. Furthermore, gender non-conforming individuals such as boys who are more feminine than other boys or girls who are more masculine than other girls can be referred to as people who transgress social gender norms (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010). Even though non-conforming people express their identities differently, it is significant to note that not everyone whose appearance or behaviour is gender non-conforming would identify as a transgender person. Indeed, there are individuals who may or may not decide to label themselves as transgender. In our societies the people who do not assume the expected gender roles and characteristics of the gender associated with their biological sex often experience a myriad of negative consequences because of their non-conformity to these cultural roles (Ryan & Diaz, 2010: 1581). In addition, gender variation is not something that is fairly new, it has strong roots in the histories of many cultures.

### **2.7. A broad discussion of transgenderism**

There are a lot of theories on the development of gender identity but very few which examine transgender identities. According to Martin and Yonkin (2006: 109), "attempts to identify the bio-psychosocial processes that explain how and why transgenderism occurs have yielded inconclusive results". Furthermore, Gagne and Tewksbury (1998) state that one limitation of much of the research on transgender individuals is that it emerges from medical, psychiatric or deviance perspectives, and limited consideration is given to the social contexts in which transgender people live (Martin & Yonkin, 2006: 109). In this dissertation the aim is to discuss transgenderism using a social context in which transgender people live. According to Chambers (2007: 310), "Transgender is an umbrella term used to describe a range of identities and experiences, including but not limited to preoperative, postoperative and non-operative

transsexual people, male and female cross dressers, intersex individuals, and men and women regardless of their sexual orientation whose appearance, behaviour, or characteristics are perceived to be different that stereotypically associated their sex assigned at birth”. This definition provides a much broader view of what it means to be transgender and introduces us to many other identities that many people in our societies are not aware of due to the gender binary that is enforced to the people.

Transgender people are at the forefront of negotiations on the expectations of gender identity and gender expression (Cobos & Jones, 2009: 341). According to Stryker (2008: 1), transgender refers to “people who move away from the gender they were assigned at birth, people who cross over the boundaries constructed by their culture to define and contain that gender regardless their sexual orientation”. Furthermore, transgender refers to any individual who has a gender identity that is distinct from their natal sex or who expresses their gender in ways that contravene societal expectations of men and women (Bockting, Robinson, Forberg & Scheltema, 2005: 2). Anyone whose identity appearance or behaviour falls outside of conventional gender norms can be described as transgender, however it must be noted that not everyone whose appearance or behaviour is gender non-conforming will identify as a transgender person. Some people do not to attach labels to their gender atypical behaviours. The experiences of transgender individuals, those who do not conform to traditional gender binaries, raise compelling identities (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010: 431). As mentioned above, because of the traditional gender binaries according to which we grow and live, the reception of the transgender people is not always pleasant and they sometimes find themselves given these compelling identities by the people from our societies.

The term transgender may include cross-dressers, drag queens and drag kings, transsexuals, people who are androgynous, two-spirited people and people who are bi-gendered or multi-gendered as well as people who do not identify with any labels (Cobos & Jones, 2009: 341). Moreover, transgender is a term that is often held up as the designated ‘umbrella’ over the many self-identifying phrases and labels that manifest from inside and outside the various gender-variant cultures (Martin & Yonkin, 2006: 105). However, it is quickly giving way to the simpler and more impartial ‘transgender’, by itself and in conjunction with other terms. According to Martin and Yonkin (2006: 106), “transgender people may have their own understanding of terms and phrases that differ from those used by academics, and other professionals”. The possible self-identifying terms that gender non-conforming individuals and communities use may include

transgendered, transgenderist, gender-variant, gender different, bi-gendered, gender-queer and multi-gendered (Martin & Yonkin, 2006: 106).

Transgender is a term used for one's self-identification. Furthermore, Cobos & Jones (2009: 342) argue that transgender "is not a disorder" as some people would refer to it. Some transgender people may choose to dress in the preferred gender clothing and/or change mannerism and speech patterns while other transgender people may pursue medical treatment such as hormone therapy or sex reassignment surgery to complete gender identity treatment (Cobos & Jones, 2009: 342). The transgender population is a very diverse population with a wide range of terms for self-identification. These terms can be used interchangeably by the transgender community. The use and misuse of these terms can cause confusion and offend the transgender people (Cobos & Jones, 2009: 342). For example, calling someone who is a cross-dresser 'transgender' may offend that person if he or she does not consider him or herself transgender. Additionally, some terms are used by members of the community, whereas others may find them offensive. Certain terms are "yellow-flag" language and should be avoided (Cobos & Jones, 2009: 342). Furthermore, "the use of pronouns by people who do not identify as transgender may not be in agreement with the person's gender identity" (Cobos & Jones, 2009: 342). The easiest way to prevent unease is to ask the transgender person to specify his or her gender. Using transgender people's preferred or chosen names and pronouns shows respect to them, therefore people must learn to call transgender people using the names and pronouns they prefer to be called. For example, if a transman (a woman transitioned to male) changes his name to a male name, people must use the name that that transman prefers to use. The array of interchangeable terminology reflects the many ways that individuals experience and express gender, including biologically, psychologically, socially and culturally (Lombardi, 2001). According to Lloyd (2013: 150) transgender identities are by no means "monolithic or universally accepted by those who might fall in the 'transgender' community". For the purposes of this dissertation the term transgender is used in a way that incorporates all forms of gender variant people, including transsexuals, gender queer, intersex and many more. Transgender people have a range of expressions when articulating their gender identity and sexual orientation (Stevens, 2012: 9). The majority of transgender people discover their gender identities at a very young age (Kennedy & Hellen, 2010: 25). People transition from one gender to the other and live or sometimes wish to be permanent members of what, in terms of the dominant discourse is regarded as the gender non-conforming (American Psychology Association, 2006). According to Dietert and Dentice (2013: 24), "transgender individuals transgress the binary conception of gender by deviating from societal gender norms associated with assigned sex at birth". Furthermore, transgender people

either fall outside or between the traditional gender model and may identify as being neither man or woman, or a little bit of both, or they may prefer no label at all.

Transgender people experience a gender identity that is different to their ascribed sex and may seek to change their physical appearance to align with their perceived identity by undergoing cosmetic procedures, using hormones or undergoing sexual reassignment surgery (Stevens, 2012: 4). Some transgender people do not choose a physical transition but rather express their gender identity through diverse presentations and behaviour (Stevens, 2012: 4). Because transgender people are born female bodied or male bodied the societies expect them to act and conduct themselves in accordance with the norms and roles specific to the female gender and male gender (Dietert & Dentice, 2013: 39). In addition, because societies are shaped in a way that largely supports the gender binary, each and every individual is expected to act in ways that are fixated on that gender binary.

Many transgendered people embody complexity and contradictions and they challenge us to think in new ways about sex, gender and legal categorization. The transgender identity is fluid and variable and it reflects the contingent nature of both sex and gender (Chambers, 2007: 310). Being transgender is not easy and on a daily basis transgender people negotiate their gender identities within the confines of those categories which are often an impossible task for individuals who are gender variant or happen to deviate from expected gender characteristics assigned at birth (Dietert & Dentice, 2013: 26). For instance, transgender people also find themselves negotiating their gender identities in school environments that may not be tolerant, understanding or aware of gender variation (Dietert and Dentice, 2013: 28). Living in a situation where you are constantly asked who you are and what you are and having to defend yourself on a daily basis can be very daunting to anyone, whether one identifies as transgender or not.

Dietert and Dentice (2013: 26) continue to argue that transgender people are sometimes rejected by their families and harassed by their peers because of their gender identities. Often family members have a difficult time adjusting to a child who does not conform to the binary of male/masculinity and female/femininity (Dietert & Dentice, 2013: 26). For example, we have seen how some parents react when their children are gay or lesbian, the reaction they get after disclosing their sexual orientation differs for each and every family. While some families might be receptive and understanding, some might not receive it so well and some end up kicking their children out of their homes and even disowning them when they are gay or lesbian. The similar

thing happens when a child is transgender and decides to make their families aware of their gender identity. The reception differs for each and every family.

Stryker (1994) outlines two strands of meaning associated with transgender. The first which she describes as the original meaning refers to people who cross dress without seeking sex reassignment surgery (Stryker, 1994: 251). Stryker's definition of transgender is similar to the definitions of transgender mentioned above. This definition then gives us a broad sense of what it really means to be transgender as opposed to the definitions that people who are not transgender create for transgender people. Moreover, within this definition, Stryker also introduces to the meaning of what it means to be transsexual and a further discussion about transsexuality will be included below. The second depicts transgender as a far more diverse and expansive umbrella term 'that refers to all identities or practices that cross over, cut across, move between or otherwise queer socially constructed sex/gender boundaries' (Stryker, 1994: 251).

Research on transgenderism has assumed that it expresses either a genetic abnormality or an abnormal fetal environment (Martin & Yonkin, 2006: 110). In many cases where there is a lack of understanding and adequate knowledge about what it means to be transgender, some people tend to refer to it as a disorder or something that is not normal because their normal falls under the discourse of a gender binary. Apart from that, another possibility is that "transgenderism is not abnormal it exists among humans because it too has served an evolutionary purpose" (Martin & Yonkin, 2006: 110). In addition, Butler (2004) states that by looking at the bodies of transgender and transsexual women, we can reflect on the ways in which manifestations of gender are secured through specific forms of speech, dress and mannerism. In this logic gender is not something that exists prior to a subject, but something achieved in and through its repetitions. Transgender experiences puts emphasis on identities extinguished outside traditional binary constructions of gender (Bilodeau & Renn, 2008: 28).

In South Africa there is a lack of research on the transgender population. A possible reason for the lack of or close to non-existent research on transgender people in South Africa might be the fact that transgender people may be being overlooked in research due to researchers not knowing how to ask questions about gender identity (Jobson, et al., 2012: 160). The lack of research on transgender people in South Africa might be a result of the violence and victimization, (Jobson et al., 2012: 161). The almost total lack of research focusing on transgender people in Africa points to an important overlooked need (Jobson, et al., 2012: 162). Without improved understanding of

gender identity, transgender people and their needs will continue to be overlooked. Wilson et al. (2014: 2), state that there is also “limited professional training and severe research on transgender people and this is a result of the lack of undergraduate and limited postgraduate training in transgender issues severely restricts the number of trained carers”. An increase in the interests and involvement of reconstructive and other surgeons in the treatment of transgender people is much needed. The lack of local transgender research limits the development of evidence-based interventions (Wilson et al., 2014: 2). The social stressors of high levels of stigma, discrimination and persecution further burden the health of transgender people (Wilson et al., 2014: 2). Because of the limited and few studies on transgender people in South Africa, studies on men who have sex with men in South Africa continue to report that very few participants self-identify as transgender (Jobson, et al., 2012: 161). This then means that a lot of transgender people do not participate in studies of transgender people in South Africa. Furthermore, this could also explain the reason why there is minimal research on transgender individuals.

For example, where research on HIV risk and prevalence in Africa has included transgender people, it has primarily focused on the behaviourally defined category of men who have sex with men. The transgender people included in the research have been included as sub-categories of men who have sex with men and, to a lesser extent, women who have sex with women (Caceres, Konda, Segura & Lyerla, 2008; Haufiku et al., 2010). Research that focuses on men who have sex with men or women who have sex with women may fail to reach transgender individuals who are not linked to these populations’ social and sexual networks such as transgender people who completely ‘pass’ in heterosexual communities or who do not express their gender identity in their daily lives (Jobson, et al. 2012: 161). This lack of data available on transgender populations in Africa also contributes to a lack of funding for transgender-specific programmes and on-going provision of funding to programmes that focus on LGBTQ issues in general (Jobson, et al. 2012: 161).

### 2.7.1. Transsexuality

The terms ‘transgender’ and ‘transsexual’ are regularly confused by people. Transsexual is sometimes used as a category that falls under the umbrella term of transgender, and in other cases it is used as a term that stands on its own. Trans is an umbrella term that encompasses a diverse group of people whose gender identity or expression diverts from prevailing societal expectations (Bauer, Hammond, Travers, Kaay, Hohenadel & Boyce, 2009: 348). Trans includes transgender, transsexual, transitioned, gender-queer people as well as two-spirited people (Bauer et al., 2009:

348-349). Transsexuals are people who have transitioned from one gender to the other and they live or sometimes wish to be permanent members of what is regarded as the opposite gender (American Psychology Association, 2006). Moreover, the term 'transsexual' refers to people whose gender identity varies from the sex they were assigned at birth. According to Schilt and Wiswall (2006: 2), "transsexual people change or wish to change their bodies through hormones and surgery". In addition, transsexual people go through the process of changing their physical bodies in order to make them as congruent as possible with their gender identities. According to Markman (2011: 316) the term transsexualism means "having the desire to alter physical sex characteristics to change one's sex".

In contrast to transgender, transsexual is a medical term in order to better align their gender identity and bodies. Similarly, some individuals modify their bodies to conform to their gender identity. According to Markman, (2011) changing their bodies may include a range of modifications from taking hormones, having feminizing or masculinizing hormones, sex change surgeries, which can include electrolysis for hair removal, breast implants or breast reductions, and removal and/or construction of genitals and other reproductive organs. In addition to the above, Stryker situates "transsexuality as a cultural and historically specific transgender practice/identity through which a transgendered person enters into a relationship with medical, psychotherapeutic and juridical institutions in order to gain access to certain hormonal and surgical technologies for enacting and embodying self" (Stryker, 251-252). Based on these definitions of transgenderism and transsexualism, one can note that even through the terms tend to be used interchangeably, the two mean different things but one can be transgender before decided to go through the sex organ change and injections of hormones to look the way they identify with. Transgender seems to be based more on the appearance, choice of clothing and how one acts while transsexual seems to be based on the medical side and the actual removal or construction of genitals and other reproductive organs such as breasts.

### 2.7.2. Cross-dressing

A cross-dresser is a person who wears clothes that are considered by the mainstream culture to be appropriate for another gender. Indeed, the term cross-dresser refers to individuals who dress in the clothing of the opposite sex (Martin & Yonkin, 2006: 106). Cross dressers may be heterosexual, bisexual, or gay. People who cross-dress wear clothing that is traditionally or stereotypically worn by another gender in their culture. They vary in how completely they cross-dress, from one article of clothing to fully cross-dressing. Those who cross-dress are usually comfortable with their assigned sex and do not wish to change it. Some people cross dress

because of emotional comfort or sexual arousal and some cross dress just for fun or to express their gender identities (American Psychology Association, 2006). Cross-dressing is a form of gender expression and is not necessarily tied to erotic activity. The degree of societal acceptance for cross-dressing varies for males and females. Cross dressing allows some cross-dressers to simply express different parts of themselves and some to be men with feminine sides or women with masculine sides (Martin & Yonkin, 2006: 107). Cross dressing is also found among men with same-gender sexual orientation, who are more likely to cross-dress for entertainment or sexual purposes (Whitam, 1997). Cross dressers are the ones who make the most of the transgender groups, they wear clothes that belong to the other conventional sex (American Psychology Association, 2006). Even though cross-dressing may be a significant sign of being transgender, sometimes cross-dressing does not necessarily mean that one is transgender unless they consider themselves to be transgender and would like to identify as a transgendered person.

### 2.7.3. Intersex

Intersexed people are the individuals who are born with genetic or hormonal attributes of both male and female, with atypical external genitalia and or internal reproductive systems (Martin & Yonkin, 2006: 107). Intersex people may not necessarily identify as transgender. However, like transgender people they experience maltreatment and discrimination because their existence challenges the binary assumptions of sex and gender (Dregger, 1999). One known South African example of an intersex individual is Caster Semenya.

### 2.7.4. Gender queer, drag queens and drag kings

Gender queers, drag queens and drag kings are individuals who defy gender categorization. They may feel outside or between the traditional gender models and may identify as being neither man nor woman, or a little bit of both, or may prefer no label at all. According to Matebeni (2014: 7) “Queer pushes the boundaries of what is embraced as normative”. The queer position challenges various norms on gender, sexuality, existence and it offers a subversive way of being. Drag queens and drag kings may or may not identify themselves as transgender as they are biologically males and females who act as members of the ‘non-conforming’ gender for entertainment purposes (American Psychology Association, 2006). Furthermore, gender queer differs from person to person but most of the time the term includes a sense of blending or changing one’s gender.

## **2.8. Gender transitioning or reassignment**

According to Wilson et al (2014: 1), “the term transition refers to the process of physical and psychosocial adjustments undertaken by some people with gender dysphoria to achieve greater congruence between the natal sex and their experienced gender”. Furthermore, the term transition refers to the “process of bringing the body in line with the internal gender experience through surgery and or hormones” (Martin & Yonkin. 2006: 106). The transitioning process of changing genitalia applies more to the people who are transsexual and it is this process that sets the differences between transgender people and transsexual people. Moreover, gender reassignment therapy refers to “any number of endocrines and surgical interventions to enable physical feminisation or masculinisation to facilitate transition” (Wilson et al., 2014: 1). For example, there is someone who now identifies as a man, and whom I had an opportunity to know when he was still a woman during his years as a Rhodes University student. He is not very discreet about his transition and he posts on his Facebook every time he has to take testosterone in order for him to look more masculine. His current appearance is totally different from when he was still a woman. His name changed from a feminine name to a masculine name, he is in the process of having her reproductive organs removed and currently, because of the hormones he is taking, he has really transitioned and is a man now. To him, changing his clothing was not sufficient and he decided to go through the surgical interventions and currently feels more at ease with his identity.

There are a lot of challenges that come with transitioning from one sex to another sex. Kheswa (2014: 71) argues that “while a choice to transition is extremely rewarding for transitioning people one also needs to be prepared to lose it all”. Because of the challenges that transitioning people encounter, they need all the support they could get to withstand challenges that come with transitioning (Kheswa, 2014: 71). Even though there are numerous challenges that come with one’s gender reassignment the biggest challenge that most transgender people face is having access to identity documents (Kheswa, 2014: 71). Because after transitioning, one will have to change his or her identity documents and identify as the sex or gender one has transitioned to. In addition, I have mentioned above that the transsexual person that I know has changed his names from his female name to his new name. He will have to go through the process of changing the name from his identity document to his new name if he intends to do so.

## **2.9. The gender identity disorder**

In many cases where there is a lack of adequate knowledge and understanding about what it means to be transgender, transgendered people are said to have a “gender identity disorder”. I

tend to agree with Cobos and Jones (2009: 342) when they state that the “disorder” label imposed on the individual is controversial. In some cases, being transgender is considered as one having a mental disorder, before transgender people go through transitioning they get counselling and see psychiatrists just to make sure that they do not have gender dysphoria (Wilson et al., 2014: 1). According to Martin and Yonkin (2006: 113), “the central feature of gender identity disorder is an intense and persistent self-identification with the opposite gender, combined with enduring discomfort with the sex one is assigned”. Transgender people who are experiencing gender dysphoria are diagnosed of gender identity disorder (Cobos & Jones, 2009: 342). Gender identity disorder can be defined as a “psychiatric classification it describes the confusion related to transgender identity, transsexuality and transvestism” (Martin & Yonkin, 2006: 113). Among adolescents and adults’ self-identification with the other sex manifests itself through a variety of symptoms that include a “stated desire to be the other sex, frequent passing as the other sex, desire to live or be treated as the other sex, or the conviction that he or she has the typical feeling and reactions of the other sex” (Martin & Yonkin, 2006: 113). Discomfort with the assigned sex manifests itself in preoccupation with getting rid of primary and secondary sex characteristics or belief that he or she was born the wrong sex. The gender identity disorder diagnosis may also mark whether the person is sexually attracted to men or women, both or neither (Martin & Yonkin, 2006: 113). In many occasions GID produces feelings of despair, shame, guilt and self-hate leading to isolation, loneliness, hopelessness, depression and even suicide (Bockting, Knudson & Goldberg, 2006). The combination of any of these feelings can lead to transgender people seeking validation and conducting high risk behaviour (Cobos & Jones, 2009: 342).

Diagnosing a transgender person with ‘dysphoria’ brands the individual with a mental pathology instead of recognizing the person’s location outside a binary gender construct defined as normal by society (Bockting et al., 2006). According to Cobos and Jones (2009: 342), “gender dysphoria refers to variable levels of mental distress associated with gender incongruence”. Since the term transgender describes individuals whose natal sex, gender identity and gender expression are incongruent, in some cases this may be associated with variable levels of distress (Wilson et al. 2014: 1). For example, a person assigned male at birth may transition and present as female and a person assigned female at birth may transition and identify as male (Wilson et al., 2014: 1). The diagnosis of GID and the term gender dysphoria have recently been met with resistance from the transgender community. Instead of understanding the social side of being, some medical doctors and other people involved tend to think that anyone who is gender non-conforming is experiencing some kind of an illness and is in need of medical help. As much as some people

would like to believe, a proper understanding of what it means to be transgender will result in the eradication of beliefs such as the idea of a gender identity dysphoria. Furthermore, “there has been ongoing and critical debate around the diagnostic classification and terminology of disorders related to transgender identity” (Wilson et al., 2014: 1).

## **2.10. Transgenderism and Sexual Orientation**

There still remains the conflation between homosexuality and transgender as sexuality is bound up with gender identity. According to Dietert and Dentice (2013: 29), “gender and sexuality are connected in a way that gender presentation is often correlated with one’s sexuality”. People’s sense of who they are sexually is very much connected, in complicated and varied ways with their understanding of masculinity and femininity. The relationship between gender and sexuality is much more complicated than the binary conceptions would suggest which are male versus female and heterosexual versus homosexual (Kheswa, 2014: 71). I tend to agree with Kheswa (2014: 71), when he states that “in many African countries, transgenderism is confused with homosexuality and homosexuality is criminalised”. The problem comes from people including queers, policy makers, government officials and haters thinking that gender identity and sexual orientation are one and the same thing (Kheswa, 2014: 71). Some people cannot think of gender as something that is different from sexuality. It cannot be denied that there are connections that exist between ‘transgenderism’ and ‘homosexuality’, but it is important to note that essentially the two terms are indeed different (Kheswa, 2014: 71-72). The connection between transgenderism and homosexuality emerges from the fact that both groups fight against social and cultural norms and expectations (Kheswa 2014: 72). Furthermore, being transgender alone is about a deep sense of a person’s identity as a man or as a woman and it is about an individual’s gender identity. Whereas homosexuality concerns attraction between people of the same sex although these are often fluid, meaning it is between people who identity as lesbian or gay (Kheswa, 2014: 72). Cross-dressing is also not indicative of one’s sexual orientation.

According to Morrow and Messinger (2006: 4), “A person’s sexual orientation and gender expression are in themselves neutral”. Specifically, they argue that it is incorrect to assume that all transgender people are gay, lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual (Morrow and Messinger, 2006: 5). One’s gender identity does not dictate one’s sexual orientation. Similarly, transgender people are often included in Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual movements as a result there is a movement called the LGBTQ movement that consists of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender and queers. Within this group, transgender people are placed under their own category as opposed to being

placed under the category of gays and lesbians. Gender variant experience is not related to sexual orientation as trans-people and intersex people experience the same variety of sexual orientation identities as other people do (Martin & Yonkin, 2006: 106).

It is important to note that, while these transgenderism and homosexuality terms are more commonly manifested in the United States, in a number of African societies, transgender identities are defined with a unique terminology reflecting cultural norms (Bilodeau & Renn, 2008: 29). For example, because of a lack of knowledge that exists in our societies, transgender individuals tend to be referred to as gays or lesbians as opposed to being referred to as transgendered individuals. In these contexts, gender identity and sexual orientation are frequently presented as more integrated identities compared with the Western medical and psychiatric tradition of segmenting sexual orientation and gender identity into distinctive categories (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005: 29). I tend to agree with Bilodeau and Renn (2005: 33), when they state that “sexual orientation and gender identity development differ in scope format and underlying epistemological assumptions”. Therefore, even though gender identity and sexual orientation are often regarded as the same, the two are not the same and people need to separate them.

I tend to agree with Bilodeau and Renn (2008: 29) when they state that “research on college or university students is rare and differences between sexual orientation and gender identity are not always well understood”. It is because of this gap that the writer of this dissertation decided to use a university space, Rhodes University to be specific, to conduct this kind of research about transgendered individuals in order for them to be understood and to raise awareness about the many other genders that exists as opposed to the traditional gender binary. The lack of understanding and lack of knowledge about transgendered individuals may be the reason why some are not well received by other people, especially in spaces such as universities that are diverse.

### **2.11. The History of Gender-Variant Behaviour in African Countries**

Transgender people have been documented in many cultures and societies from antiquity to the present day. According to Jobson et al. (2012: 161) “historical and anthropological research across Africa has shown that in the past cultures across the continent historically recognized and often accepted gender non-conformity individuals as members of their communities”. But, nowadays gender non-conforming behaviour among consenting adults is criminalized in most African countries (Jobson et al., 2012: 161). In the current context, transgender people face a number of challenges where only a few sources of social support exist for them (Biblarz & Savci,

2010: 489). Nonetheless, anthropological and historical research suggests that the cross-cultural and historical presence of females who behaved like males and males who presented themselves as women has existed for a long time (Gagne & Tewsknury, 1999: 61). Historical and anthropological research across Africa has shown that cultures across the continent historically recognized and often accepted gender non-conforming individuals as members of their communities (Jobson, Theron, Kaggwa & Kim, 2012: 161). However, the current context is one in which same-sex behaviour between consenting adults is criminalised in most African countries.

According to Green (1998), there is evidence of gender variant experience throughout history and across cultures. People of gender variant experience are found throughout the world today. Because conceptions about gender are socially constructed, manifestations of gender variance and their meanings are shaped by social and cultural influences (Nanda, 2000). Accordingly, gender-variant people have been understood in a variety of ways among cultures and across history (Martin & Yonkin, 2006: 105). Furthermore, cross dressing is something that has often been accepted across cultures and throughout history, especially in the context of the performing arts (Martin & Yonkin, 2006: 106). According to Keenan (2006: 5), “South Africa also has a long history of same sex partnerships and the existence of people who crossed lines of gender are undeniable part of the South African history”. To date, there is an increasingly visible culture of cross-dressing among lesbians who may self-identify as drag kings or butches (Warren, 2001). In addition, to date, there are communities that refer to themselves as the transgender or transsexual communities and they are vocal and represented by a few movements that exists such as the LGBTQ movement.

## **2.12. The South African law for transgender people**

In the last several years, a small transgender rights movement has emerged in South Africa. This organised movement of transgender men and women demanding legal rights and social understanding has only just begun to emerge (Keenan, 2006: 4). South Africa has come a long way concerning the legal treatment of transgender people. According to Kheswa (2014: 72), “there is a law for transgender people in South Africa and it is called The Alteration of Sex Description and Sex Status Act 49 of 2003”. This piece of legislation serves as recognition of transgender people’s reality and existence. Moreover, this law states that “one is not required to have surgery to change one’s gender marker legally” (Kheswa, 2014: 72). Furthermore, this law states that “medical treatment” (hormonal therapy) is enough to change gender markers on one’s

national identity documents (Kheswa (2014: 72). In support of this law, Kheswa (2014: 72) states that “our enabling legal environment makes South Africa a place of choice for many persecuted transgender and gender non-conforming people who are seeking refuge from other African countries”. Some African countries do not have laws that liberate transgender people or gender non-conforming people, they fight against it. It is evident that in other countries people are targeted with violence or could be imprisoned because of their sexuality and gender identity. This is not to say that in South Africa transgender people do not get targeted with violence: they do, but the law does not condemn transgenderism as a criminal offence. Meaning, being transgender in South Africa is supported by the law and according to the law, one will not get arrested for being transgender. As much as being transgender is considered legal in South Africa, there are some transgender people who are still targeted with violence, exclusion and discrimination in South Africa for being transgendered (Kheswa (2014: 72). Furthermore, transphobia is not something that only exists in countries that consider being transgender illegal, it also exists in those countries whereby transgender is not criminalized (Kheswa, 2014). Examples about the violations that transgender people encounter in South Africa will be mentioned below.

According to the Human Rights Watch (2011: 12), “the 1996 South African constitution enshrines a Bill of Rights, which includes in Section 9 a guarantee of equality and a prohibition on discrimination on many enumerated grounds including gender, sex and sexual orientation”. With this in mind, it is evident that the focus is not equal when it comes to gender, sex and sexual orientation and this is evident from the South African State Report that was presented in Banjul in 2016 (Gender DynamiX, 2016). The State Report that was presented was highly challenged by the transgender movements because it was not representative of the transgender population or non-conforming gender identities. Furthermore, the State Report neglected to address the widespread human rights challenges faced by transgender and intersex people in South Africa (Gender DynamiX, 2016). Gender DynamiX (2016) argues that the state report “merely contains a brief section on ‘sexual orientation’ and gender identity but the main focus is on sexual orientation, same-sex marriage and homophobia and refers primarily to gays and lesbians”. In addition to this argument, Gender DynamiX argues that there is a lack of representation of the transgender people in the state report and their argument also feeds into the discussion we had above about gender identities being wrongfully connected with sexual orientation. In addition, the South African State Report lacks an understanding of human rights concepts of gender identity, gender expression and bodily autonomy in relation to transgender and intersex people (Gender DynamiX, 2016). According to Gender DynamiX (2016), the State Report did not show

any awareness of the shortcomings in South African legislation, policies, practices and services that affect the transgender population (Gender DynamiX, 2016). In order for the human rights of the transgender people to be represented in the South African legislation, Gender DynamiX (2016) suggests that the South African government needs to take action.

In the creation and implementation of laws that are said to be for the transgendered people, the South African government needs to distinguish between human rights related to gender identity and gender expression. They also need to know the differences between body diversity, particularly intersex variations and other non-binary bodies and that the state needs to offer greater recognition and protection of these rights (Gender DynamiX, 2016). It is not only the government that needs to be able to distinguish these, the people in our societies, schools, universities and other spaces need to also learn how to distinguish them. Even though there is a hiccup in the South African legislation when it comes to the transgender people, many LGBTQ activists are the most progressive worldwide from a legal point of view.

### **2.13. Challenges that transgender people face**

Transgender people face a number of challenges in the context where a few sources of social support exist for them. Butler (2004: 30) makes a compelling argument that “when considering transsexual and transgender people, the question of violence is central”. Furthermore, she considers “why violence against transgender subjects is not recognized as violence and why this violence is sometimes inflicted by the very states that should be offering such subjects protection from such violence” (Butler, 2004: 30). It is unfortunate that transgender people lack the kind of support that fully accepted members of society automatically expect (Stryker, 2008: 6). Additionally, it is apparent that transgender individuals are more marginalized and excluded than those who do not identify as transgender (Kennedy & Hellen, 2010). People who do not conform to hetero-normative societal values are mostly at risk of being victimised. According to Jobson et al. (2012: 161), “in South Africa transgender people are exposed to violence, victimization and social inequality”. In addition, Keenan (2006: 48) states that in South Africa, there are men who are not transgender who commit acts of sexual violence against masculine women in order to teach them a lesson that they were not born to be masculine and they should not dress or act in a masculine manner. We hear these cases a lot but when we hear about them transgender people are always referred to as gays or lesbians. Furthermore, in the same research conducted by Keenan (2006:48), one of the transgendered participants argued that “Black masculine women are targeted a lot more for rape in South Africa and that they are given a hard time by men”. This

statement shows an inequality between women who are masculine and men who are feminine and racial inequalities. Furthermore, transgender people of colour also face particularly high rates of violence and discrimination, related to the high level of scrutiny for the gender performances of people of colour in general (Wernick, Kulick & Inglehart, 2014: 928). In general, women tend to be the main victims of rape whether they are lesbians, cisgender or transgender. It is not only in the societies that transgender people experience marginalisation, they also experience disproportionately high rates of violence, harassment and discrimination in workplaces, schools and child welfare systems (Lombardi, Wilchins, Priesing & Malouf, 2001; Sperber, Landers & Lawrence, 2005). Moreover, in Africa the lack of research on the transgender population might be connected to the tragic encounters of transgender people. I tend to agree with Jobson et al. (2012: 160) when they state that there is a possibility that the “invisibility of transgender people in epidemiological data from Africa is related to the criminalisation of same sex behaviour in many countries and the subsequent fear of negative repercussions from their participation in research”. In South Africa transgender people are visible as people who are not conforming to gender and sexual norms in their societies and this visibility results to their exposure to violence and victimization Jobson, et al. (2012: 161). In some African countries transgender people cannot come public with their transgender identities because of the repercussions that might result due to it not being legal or to people being transphobic.

Due to current policies that include transgender people, almost by default into gays or lesbians, there has been little to no attention on the ground to specific needs of transgender people when it comes to sexual health and HIV prevention (Stevens, 2012: 6). Most of the information available is woefully inadequate and services are clearly not capable of addressing the questions of transgender people in this regard. Moreover, service providers are unable to provide transgender friendly services due to prevailing ignorance about transgender people impacting the accessibility of HIV prevention, treatment and care to transgender people (Stevens, 2012: 6).

Research focusing on HIV risk among transgender people worldwide has shown that these populations often have high HIV prevalence rates and increased risk of HIV transmission. In spite of the recognition of the increased risk of HIV infection for transgender people, there remains very little data available about transgender HIV risk and prevalence in Africa and transgender populations remain largely invisible in HIV related epidemiological data from the continent (Jobson, Theron, Kaggwa & Kim, 2012: 161).

The barriers in the way of obtaining transition-related services as well as stigma and discrimination have resulted in some transgender people, out of desperation, exposing themselves to significant harm, including HIV infection in seeking non-conventional treatments. Judging from studies conducted across the world, we can assume that transgender people in South Africa are particularly susceptible to HIV infection (Stevens, 2012: 4). Health services are discriminatory and health workers provide sub-standard care to transgender people (Stevens, 2012; 23). Furthermore, stigma and abusive behaviour is a barrier to transgender people accessing care including HIV testing and ART (Stevens, 2012: 23). Similarly, in South Africa, health workers have disregarded the law and constitutional provisions, and declared transgender people illegal (Stevens, 2012: 23). These health workers deprive the transgender population of their lawful rights.

When it comes to getting employment, transgender people are also vulnerable (Stevens, 2012: 23). Bullying and teasing at school is something that many transgender people can relate to. In some instances, transgender people would say teachers would join in ridiculing them for the way they present themselves. Incidents like this lead to depression and academic underperformance. Many transgender youth drop out from school at a young age due to intimidation, ridicule and ostracising (Theron, 2009: 38). Prevalence of gender based violence amongst any community is harmful.

Moreover, the language of religion, culture and tradition is often used to speak against sexual and gender diversity in Africa (Matebeni, 2014: 7). According to Matebeni (2014: 7), “gender non-conforming individuals have been alienated in Africa, they have been stripped of their belonging and their connectedness”. Furthermore, transgender people are an invisible group and they are the most marginalized (Matebeni, 2014: 7). Transgender people may face the effects of social stigma such as shame, low self-esteem, secrecy and loneliness which can contribute to individuals engaging in high risk sex (Jobson, et al., 2012: 162). When marginalised, the transgender individuals may seek affirmation of their gender identities by taking particular roles in sexual encounters. Similarly, transgender people affirm their identities through the transitioning process (Jobson, et al., 2012: 162). Lack of acceptance of transgender people in South Africa is an important measurement of how far this country must go to realize its promise of equal opportunity. Within the health care context, transgender individuals may also experience invasive or inappropriate questions regarding sexual practices or genitalia, leading transgender people to be suspicious of providers and health care institutions (O’Brien, 2003). These inappropriate questions result in transgender individuals having an awkward feeling and a sense

of being outcasts. Transgender people who are in conflict with their sexual anatomy may be hesitant to discuss significant issues regarding health care, including sexual practices or parts of the body that are biologically identified with sex or gender (Cobos & Jones, 2009: 341).

Gender-nonconforming behaviour may result in varying reactions from family members. Transgender people are sometimes rejected by their families and harassed by their peers. When children express gender variant behaviour, parents sometimes attempt to force the child's gender roles to align with his or her biological sex (Dietert & Dentice, 2013: 27). Conformity to gender roles and gender expression is enforced at all levels of society which contributes to familial and societal rejection of people when they engage in gender-variant behaviour (Dietert & Dentice, 2013: 27). Often family members have a hard time adjusting to a child who does not conform to the binary of male and female (Dietert & Dentice, 2013: 26). Another major challenge that transgender people face in South Africa, is access to appropriate hormone therapy and surgery. Getting access is very difficult and most transgender people who wish to transition in South Africa never get the chance to transition (Jobson, et al. 2012: 162). This lack of access to appropriate therapies may be very stressful for transgender people and it may contribute to low self-esteem and poor mental health (Jobson, et al., 2012: 162). The challenge has been to find a balance between providing diagnostic categories that facilitate access to healthcare and medical insurance for transgender people, while protecting them from potential stigmatisation that may arise from being diagnosed with a "mental disorder in order to receive treatment" (Wilson et al., 2014: 1).

Social stigma which is learned and internalized through childhood socialization shapes the minority individuals' identities. Because of this internalization, Goffman (1963) proposed that minority individuals share the majority's belief that they are a failure and abnormal. This knowledge leads to self-hate and self-derogation. Because they are stigmatised people, transgender individuals are uncomfortable during interactions with the majority groups and often try to limit such contacts (Poteat, German & Kerrigan, 2013). Consequently, the formation of the transgender identities involves dealing with social expectations of what is normal (Eliason & Schope, 2007: 5). Stigma has been defined as a social process of "othering, blaming and shaming that leads to status loss and discrimination" (Deacon, 2006: 418). Discrimination can be defined as the process by which stigmatized groups are devalued through the exercise of social, cultural, economic and political power (Link & Phellan, 2006). The stigma and discrimination faced by transgender people have been associated with increased risk for depression, suicide and HIV (Poteat, German & Kerrigan, 2013: 23).

Numerous needs assessments and research studies published to date have consistently indicated the numerous and interlocking challenges that transgender people experience in their day-to-day lives (Bauer et al., 2009: 349). Little attention has been focused on understanding how and why transgender people come to experience marginalization in such pervasive ways (Bauer et al., 2009: 349). On their daily basis, transgender people often experience direct harassment and discrimination in institutional and broader social contexts (Feinberg, 2001; Hill, 2003)

Despite consistent documentation that trans people are routinely exposed to direct and indirect experiences of discrimination, are harassed and are often unable to access health and social services, analyses that have attempted to explain how such marginalization gets produced have been notably absent (Bauer et al., 2009: 350). When explanations for the exclusion that transgender people experience have been provided, the tendency has been to attribute the marginalization as a consequence of transphobia (Bauer et al., 2009: 350). Transphobia is a stereotyping or hatred of transgender, transsexual and other gender non-conforming individuals because of their preferred gender identities (Gay, Lesbian Straight Education Network, 2002; Whittle, 2006). In addition, transphobia may be a useful concept in comprehending the motivations underlying the actions of individuals, its use as an explanation has obscured the more systematic nature of transgender marginalization by isolating the particular problem to act, rather than embedding the problem in broader cultural and political contexts (Bauer et al., 2009: 350). Thus the pervasiveness of transphobia to explain transgender people's experiences of marginalization has obstructed the development of analyses that help us to understand the mechanisms that underline, sustain and give rise to the challenges experienced by transgender people in their daily lives (Bauer et al., 2009: 350).

Moreover, transgender people encounter discrimination and prejudice in every facet of life, including "housing, public accommodation, credit marriage, parenting and law enforcement" (Lloyd, 2013: 153). This discrimination is rooted in the same stereotypes that have fuelled unequal treatment of women, lesbian, gay, bisexual people and people with disabilities, stereotypes about how men and women are "supposed" to appear. For the most part, in other words, anti-transgender discrimination is not a new or unique form of bias, but rather falls squarely within the parameters of discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation and or disability (Lloyd, 2013: 153). Furthermore, many transgender people face horrendous social punishment from institutionalization to gang rape, from beatings to denial of child visitation. This brutalisation and degradation strips transgender people of what they could achieve in their individual lifetimes. No one knows how many transgender lives have been lost to police brutality

and street-corner bashing (Lloyd, 2013: 154). The lives of transgender people are so depreciated in the society that many murders go unreported, some transgender people are deeply scarred by daily run-ins with hate, discrimination and violence (Lloyd, 2013: 154). Judith Butler posits in *Gender Trouble* (1990) that the regulatory repetition of certain cultural configurations of gender come to signify what is real in society and consolidate societal hegemony through what she characterises as “felicitous self-naturalization” (Lloyd, 2013: 157). In other words, social conceptions of the “natural” or “material” actually emerge from the repetition of norms formulated through societal power relations. By casting transgender bodies as monstrous and unnatural the society contributes to the “felicitous self-naturalization” of its vision of the normal man and woman (Lloyd, 2013: 158).

Young transgender people are at increased risk of bullying, harassment and negative mental health and academic outcomes compared to the general transgender population, as well as compared to other members of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning and similarly identified communities (LGBTQQ) (Wernick, Kulick & Inglehart, 2014: 927). In the United States a growing body of research has established that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning and similarly identified young people are disproportionately victims of bullying in schools (Wernick, Kulick & Inglehart, 2014: 927). Furthermore, “transgender students experience particular forms of violence in school; for instance, gendered facilities (bathrooms, locker rooms) may not be safe for transgender students especially if students are required to use the bathroom associated with their sex assigned at birth” (Wernick, Kulick & Inglehart, 2014: 928).

Securing correct estimates of the number of transgender students in schools is difficult, only recently have some nationally representative studies begun to inquire about sex and gender beyond male or female (Wernick, Kulick & Inglehart, 2014: 928). Even when more inclusive options are included in surveys, there is no consensus about how to most effectively inquire about transgender identities (Moradi, Worthington, & Fassinger, 2009). The systems of violence that transgender people encounter also interact with sexism, racism and heterosexism. For instance, one study investigating the experiences of young transgender women in Detroit found that acceptance of one’s gender identity was contingent on successfully performing highly scrutinized versions of femininity related to one’s appearance and dress (Wernick, Kulick & Inglehart, 2014: 928). This high rate of violent hate crimes against this population shows the particular danger that this confluence of forces can cause (Wernick, Kulick & Inglehart, 2014: 928). Within the complex systems of genderism, transphobia, sexism, anti-trans harassment

serves as a potent means of policing gender expression and reinforcing binary gender norms (Wernick, Kulick & Inglehart, 2014: 928).

### 2.13.1. Examples of transphobia and gender based violence against transgender people in South Africa

According to Human Rights Watch (2011: 14), “over the past decade, activists in South Africa have recorded and analysed dozens of incidents of sexual and physical violence against lesbians and transgender men, including rape and murder”. Furthermore, the issue became extremely serious in the mid to late 2000s when several incidents of physical and sexual assault and murder based on sexual orientation and gender expression occurred in close succession (Human Rights Watch, 2011: 14). In addition, violence against transgender people and other gender non-conforming people happens within the context of an epidemic of gender based violence in South Africa (Human Rights Watch, 2011: 14). Negative attitudes exist towards LGBTQ students in university communities regardless of efforts of some in the South African government to acknowledge and uphold their rights. Studies show that heterosexual students in Gauteng universities have negative attitudes towards LGBTQs and that gender roles, religious, and cultural beliefs have a negative influence on attitudes towards LGBTQs (Arndt & de-Bruin, 2006: 16).

In South Africa the only human rights organisation that focuses its work on transgender, transsexual and gender non-conforming sector is Gender DynamiX. This shortage of organisations that focus on transgender people shows a need for more representation of the transgender population in South Africa. Moreover, the South African incidents of gender based violence written in this section are those that were documented by Gender DynamiX president Liesl Theron in 2009 and two transphobic incidents that recently happened at Rhodes University and in the Idols South Africa show.

According to Theron (2009: 37), “trans people find themselves rejected to a very isolated space on the far side of the boundaries of society where they are many times rejected from mainstream society”. Furthermore, the level of violence and discrimination against transgender people in South Africa shows that the promise of equality remains elusive (Human Rights Watch, 2011: 13). It is important to note that, not all hate crimes and gender based violence against transgender people in South Africa are reported (Theron, 2009: 37). This is a result of the fact that many transgender victims of crime fear secondary victimisation from the police (Theron, 2009). The police tend to respond to gender based violence cases in a way that is humiliating towards

transgender people. According to Reid & Dirsuweit (2009) the police's response to gender based violence is not just humiliating but is also extremely traumatic. There are a lot of gender based violence cases in South Africa that Theron (2009) presents but for the limitations of this dissertation I will only mention a few. I do not intend to indicate that the only cases that exist are those reported by Theron, there are numerous gender-based violence cases out there but because of the limitations of this dissertation I have decided to only include those reported by Theron, one from Rhodes University and the one from the Idols SA show.

According to Theron (2009: 37) "on the 2nd of June 2008, Daisy Dube who proudly self-identified as a drag queen was shot and died on the scene and it was confirmed that the motivation for her killing was her gender identity. Before Daisy was killed, she and her friends were harassed and called "izitabane" (lesbians)". Another incident took place when "a transwoman who was raped by a gang of six men said she could not report the case to the police due to her fear of the police and the terrible things she heard about the police" (Theron, 2009: 37). Furthermore, "in July 2008 another trans woman was in a house where the police performed a random drug raid. All the house mates were taken to the police station and upon being discovered as transsexual, she was kept in the holding cells much longer than the others. She was body searched by just about every police officer in the station and she also mentioned being assaulted" (Theron, 2009: 37).

According to Theron (2009: 37), "in 2007 an intersex woman was taken into a police station for a traffic offence, she was also body searched, assaulted and ended up with bruises". In addition, this case was only reported at Gender DynamiX the victim refused to go and report it to the police. Moreover, "one transgender woman related how her dad and other male family members raped her and assaulted her repeatedly in her early childhood as a result of her "effeminate behaviour" and called her a "moffie" (gay person). She was also forced to perform sexual acts with a dog to teach her a lesson" (Theron, 2009: 37). Lastly, "on the 25th of December 2007 another trans woman reported that she wanted to commit suicide as a result of rejection by her community and family. She was severely beaten up by her then wife's family members" (Theron, 2009: 37). There are many other cases related to the violations of transgender people in South Africa, transgender people continue to experience these violations from all spheres. Cases of gays, lesbians and transgender people' violence continues and we see and read about these cases from the media.

In the Idols South Africa show judges were accused of trans-shaming a transgender contestant who went to auditions for Idols. According to (Huffpost, 2017) one of the judges made comments about the transgender contestant's body. Comments such as "Yeses your body's banging girl! Oh, walk like a lady! Yes', shouting at the transgender contestant. After the transgender contestant left, another judge started to question the gender of the transgender contestant asking questions such as "is it a girl? Another judge responded by saying "No it's a girl". Two male judges responded by saying "it is a boy" (Huffpost, 2017). They continued to discuss the contestant in ways that resulted in the viewers saying the judges were being transphobic and that the comments they made were very inappropriate and transphobic. Some viewers went as far as saying the comments were "violent", "disgusting" and unacceptable". When the contestant was in front of the judges, no one asked him about his gender and what he identifies with despite his feminine appearance. This incident shows that how other people talk about the transgender individuals and questioning their genders without involving them forms part of the marginalisation and violations that transgender people encounter in their daily basis.

Another example of transphobic behaviour emerged late 2017 when there was uproar at Rhodes University about a lecturer who made a transphobic joke during an exam. According to The Daily Vox (2017) a black trans student who was present at the venue when an invigilator made a trans joke about "ensuring that men strictly used the men's bathroom while women used the women's bathroom and that he hoped that there were no boys in dresses in the exam venue" is one of the students who went to the social media and raised awareness about such transphobic jokes. The student who was in attendance was not the only one who was not happy with the joke, many students went to the social media and a hashtag #JustAnotherTransJoke was started and more awareness was raised about the transphobic jokes that transgender people deal with.

In conclusion, this chapter outlined the theoretical frameworks that feed into the self, the body and how individuals form their own identities. Different theorists' views about the impact of interactions have on individuals' identities feed into the way transgender people form their identities and the way that societies form their own meanings through interacting with the transgender people. Moreover, a discussion about the social construction of gender was also discussed and the aim was to highlight how people construct their own gender and how people are socialised in ways that society and culture believes to be the best ways based on the traditional gender binary. Furthermore, because the term transgender is one that is not very popular at schools, societies and other spheres, the transgender theory was incorporated in order to raise awareness about how it emerged and what it entails. The lack of knowledge about what

transgender and transsexual means, the uncertainties about the differences between gender and sex lead to a much broader discussion about these terms and what they really mean. In many cases the transgender term is used as an umbrella term. In this section the identities that fall into that umbrella term were discussed and differences between them were also made available so that people can learn and be aware of their meanings. People are more familiar with the notion of sexual orientation and when they encounter someone who falls outside the traditional gender binary they tend to associate that person with being gay or lesbian. In this section I provided different views from different theorists about the differences between transgender and sexual orientation, and they indeed highlighted that being transgender does not mean that you are either gay or lesbian. Being transgender is not something that is new, in this chapter the history of transgender was also discussed and the challenges that transgender people face on their daily basis. Lastly, the application of the lived experience, challenges and violations of transgender people is used to debunk the atrocities that transgendered people encounter in their societies due to people not understanding, being ignorant, being unaware and being stuck with the traditional gender binary because that is how they were socialised to perceive the world.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Introduction

This chapter will focus on how I designed my research in terms of data collection or fieldwork and the methodological paradigm in which this process is situated. Also, I show how the research design is ultimately linked to the nature of the research question which underpins this research paper. Furthermore, included in this chapter are the main objectives of this dissertation and an explanation of the type of research approach I used, specific methods applied, and ethical considerations. The research approach that I have used is qualitative research, thus the concepts that have been developed in the course of this research and the type of data collected are non-numerical, interpretive, and hermeneutic in nature (O’Leary, 2010; Curtis & Curtis, 2011; Bryman, 201 2; Walker, 1985). There are definitive characteristics of qualitative research and the qualitative research paradigm allowed me to direct my research question at capturing the subjective understandings which people construct around transgender people on a South African university campus. For this dissertation, the South African university campus which this research was conducted on is the Rhodes University campus.

#### 3.2. Rationale and goals

The title of this research is “An Analysis of Understandings of and Attitudes towards Transgender People on a South African University Campus”. The main question that this dissertation seeks to enquire is “Do Rhodes University students understand the notion of transgender and how do they react towards transgender people on campus?” It also seeks to investigate whether Rhodes University students are aware of the differences between transgender people and transsexual people.

##### 3.2.1 The Goals of the Research

The main goal of this dissertation is to investigate and determine how Rhodes University students understand the notion of transgender and their tolerance or acceptance towards transgender people at Rhodes University and in the society more broadly.

Secondary goals:

1. To explore how people think transgender is constructed.

2. To study the understandings of Rhodes University students about the differences between transgender and transsexual.
3. To interrogate Rhodes University students' attitudes towards transgender people.
4. To study how people's perceptions shape the challenges that transgender people face at Rhodes University.

### **3.3. Methodological paradigm**

In order to ascertain the levels of understandings that Rhodes University students have about transgender people I used a qualitative research design. According to Creswell (1994: 1) qualitative research is an enquiry process of comprehending social and human problems, it is formed with words and it reports detailed views of informants and it is conducted in a natural setting. This research consists of texts, words and more direct narratives about transgender people. Moreover, this explanatory type of research design intends to determine what things exist, it is explicitly creative, interactive, interpretive, personal, and can be made more responsive to the needs of the participants and to the nature of the subject matter (Walker, 1985: 3). Indeed, it has been argued that “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meanings people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world” (Merriam, 2009: 13). To further support Merriam's statement, as the qualitative researcher of this research I am interested in the understandings and meanings that people have constructed about transgender people at Rhodes University.

Parkinson and Drislane (2011) define qualitative research as a type of research that uses methods such as interviews, participant observation, focus groups or case-studies which result in a narrative and descriptive account of a setting or practice. Moreover, Denzin and Lincoln (2005: 3) go on to state that qualitative research is a “situated activity that locates the observers in the world”. Indeed, qualitative research is made up of a set of interpretive and material practices that bring about more visibility of the world (Denzin & Lincoln 1994: 2). It consists of a naturalistic approach of the world and this means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, trying to make sense of the phenomena in terms of the meanings people have about them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005: 3). The natural settings that I have used for the interviews are different venues at Rhodes University in which participants felt comfortable. The more natural the setting, the more comfortable the participants felt. Nkwi, Nyamongo and Ryan (2001: 1) define qualitative research as “any research that uses data that does not use ordinal values”. By ‘ordinal values’, they mean that qualitative research does not consist of any numerical data,

Similarly, qualitative research uses writing, the data takes the form of words, texts, images and narratives and the aim of it is to interpret and reinterpret events (Curtis & Curtis, 2011: 6). This dissertation does not aim at producing statistical outputs but rather aims to look towards garnering participants' understandings and narratives as the key research outputs.

The qualitative research methods that were employed in this research answer the “why” and “how” of human behaviour, understandings, opinions and experiences. The data collection method that was used in this research is a method that produced textual and audio data (through in-depth interviews) as a “proxy for experience and as a means to comprehend the social, cultural and physical context in which behaviour occurs” (Ryan & Bernard, 2000: 770). The “behaviour” refers to the reactions of Rhodes University students towards transgender people. The methods that were covered are in-depth interviews. Indeed, as, Ryan and Bernard (2000: 771) claim, the quintessential feature of in-depth interviews is the fact that they use open-ended questions which enable the researcher to further interrogate or examine the participants' answers. Because ‘transgenderism’ is something that is close to being invisible or inaccessible in African countries, open ended questions were essential to collect data as they enabled the researcher to explain when the participants did not clearly understand the questions.

### 3.3.1. Advantages of qualitative research designs

Qualitative research is advantageous because it focuses on the operation of social processes in greater depth. It can also reflect inconsistencies and contradictions within and between individuals' accounts as a significant focus for analysis (Burman and Parker, 1993). It can also allow researchers a degree of flexibility in the conduct of a particular study, and facilitate the examination of sensitive or difficult topics if a relationship of trust develops between the researcher and the person being researched. It is also advantageous because it gives people a chance to avoid reliance on the researchers' pre-determined assumptions and the ability to focus on the meanings of key issues for participants. According to Griffin (1986: 3), qualitative research “can enable one to tackle sensitive issues, to appreciate the wider context of people's experiences and to make connections across different areas of participants' lives. In addition, it enables the researcher to make connections between different aspects of people's lives such as domestic spheres” (Griffin, 1986: 6-7). Qualitative research makes it easy for the researcher to record exchanges between participants and analyse their significance. This type of research is suitable for this dissertation because the aim is to get the understandings of people and the only

way to do that was by conducting qualitative research whereby people used words to discuss the topic.

### 3.3.2. Limitations of qualitative research designs

It is vital to also note that qualitative research has limitations which present challenges to researchers and must be taken into consideration. It can be expensive and the collection and the analysis of research information can be time-consuming. Qualitative research has problems with generalization. Qualitative research is based on what a small number of a group of individuals in a certain locality or organisation has to say and it is difficult to know to what extent the findings can be generalised to other settings (Bryman, 2012: 406). For example, for this dissertation sixteen people were interviewed. The scope of the findings of the qualitative research investigations is restricted, it relies on a small number of participants and this often results in the reluctance of many academics and practitioners to employ qualitative research (Griffin, 1986: 3). Qualitative research is said to be too impressionistic and subjective. The findings rely a lot on the researcher's "unsystematic views about what is important" (Bryman, 2012: 405). It is difficult to replicate qualitative research. According to Bryman (2012: 405) qualitative research is unstructured and depends on the researcher's ingenuity and this makes it hard and almost impossible to perform a true replication. The responses of the participants to researchers who conduct qualitative research might be affected by the characteristics of the researcher such as; gender, age and so on. For example, because I am a Xhosa woman who is feminine, conducting research about transgender people might result in me being a bit biased because in my culture the notion of 'transgenderism' is challenged. Qualitative research has a lack of transparency, sometimes it is difficult to establish what the researcher did and how she arrived at the study's conclusion (Bryman, 2012: 406). For the purposes of this dissertation, the researcher does not draw much conclusion because the intent is to reflect on the understandings, perceptions and experiences of Rhodes University students and analyse them. In qualitative research there is some sort of vagueness about how people were selected for observation and it is not often obvious how the data analysis was conducted. In this dissertation how participants were selected is made clear, the selection was through a stratified random sampling of Rhodes University students and data analysis was done through thematic data analysis. According to Carr (1994: 719), in qualitative research there are possible problems with an assessment of reliability because of how the process is under-standardized and how it mostly relies on the insights of the observer.

### **3.4. Participants of the study**

In each and every research study conducted the sampling process is very crucial. Sampling is the process of selecting particular settings, persons, or events in order to provide important information (Maxwell, 1996: 70). Researchers employ the sampling technique to systematically select a relatively small number of representative individuals from a pre-defined population to serve as data sources. I decided to sample in a way that the sample consisted of students from the different cultures that Rhodes University students come from. In terms of the participants, I approached students, informed them that I needed participants for my research and I explained my research topic to them and they agreed to take part in it. The group of students I interviewed come from different countries, cities, cultures, age groups, gender, sex and academic status. As a researcher my initial aim was to select students who do not identify as transgender but due to the availability of some students who are non-gender conforming I decided to include them so that they can share their experiences on the campus. The interviewed students consisted of: one female student from Zambia, four students from Zimbabwe (two males and two females), one female student who is coloured from Johannesburg, one female student who is both Zulu and Sotho, one White female student, one Pedi female student from Limpopo, four Xhosa students (two females, one transgender and one who is a lesbian that cross-dresses), one Indian female student, one Zulu female student, one male Tsonga student and one Sotho male student. The participants consisted of students of different sexes, genders and sexualities, most of them were cis-gender. There were only three students who do not identify as cis-gender, one student identifies as a transsexual, and two females cross-dress but do not identify as transgender, one of them identifies as a lesbian and the other one identifies as queer. More discussion of the differences between lesbians and queers was discussed earlier in Chapter 2. Furthermore, the sample of this dissertation ended up being divided into two groups – a certain number of whom is gender conforming and the other in which they are not. Thirteen participants did not identify as transgender and three participants fall under the umbrella term of transgender but two of them choose not to identify themselves as transgender.

Sampling procedures in social sciences are often divided into two groups; probability, and non-probability sampling (Teddlie & Yu, 2007: 77). This research adopted non-probability sampling and the type of non-probability sampling which I used is ‘purposive’ or ‘theoretical’ sampling. According to Bryman (2012: 418) the aim of purposive sampling is to sample participants in a strategic way, so that those sampled are relevant to the research questions being asked. Indeed, when I selected the participants I used a strategy to not select individuals based on their

knowledge of the topic, but any student, whether they are aware of the topic or not. I also selected individuals who fall under the transgender umbrella term because of their relevance to the research that I conducted. Moreover, because the research is based on questioning the understandings of Rhodes University students of transgenderism, it is of relevance to only choose a sample that is representative of Rhodes University students. The participants of my research were purposively selected in line with my focus on the understandings of Rhodes University students of transgender people. I have chosen this area to exemplify different kinds of social mix, students etc. and some students who have had contact with and some who might not have had contact with transgender people. Because this is a mini dissertation, my sample size consists of only sixteen participants who are Rhodes University students. Because Rhodes University is a diverse institution I was interested in getting a sample from a diverse group of students and have them represented in my sample. The diverse group of students consists of students of different ages, races, sexes, genders, ethnicities, years of study, and cultures.

According to Tongco (2007: 147), “the purposive sampling technique is a type of non-probability sampling that is most effective when one needs to study a certain cultural domain with knowledgeable experts within”. Purposive sampling strategies are designed to improve the way we understand selected individuals’ or groups’ experiences, and for developing theories and concepts (Devers & Frankel, 2000: 264). There are four strategies that fall under the non-probability sampling and these are; quota sampling, purposive sampling, self-selection sampling and snowball sampling. Because of the limitations of this research paper, I will only explain purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is also known as selective, judgemental or subjective sampling. From whom and how data is obtained must be done with sound judgement. With this type of sampling the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge and experience (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016:2).

### **3.5. Data collection**

The research methods that were used are in-depth interviews. The purpose of using in-depth interviews was to have a form of a conversation where knowledge was produced by the interaction between the researcher and the interviewees (Curtis & Curtis, 2011: 32). Interviews can be structured, semi-structured and unstructured. During in-depth interviews a digital recorder was used to capture what the participants say and notes were written down. According to Davidson (2009: 36) “audio and video-recordings are a major source of qualitative research today”. For this dissertation, audio recordings were used when collecting data and after collecting

this data, the recorded information was transcribed. Davidson (2009: 37) argues that transcription has been defined as a “political act whereby the recording of speech reflects the transcriber’s analytic or political bias and shapes the interpretation and evaluation of speakers, relationships and contexts depicted in the transcript”. The interviews were transcribed as they were and I did not tamper with them or transcribe them in a way that is inaccurate.

### 3.5.1 In-depth interviews

The in-depth interviews which were conducted in this research were not highly structured because the intention is not to restrict the participants when data is being gathered. In-depth interviews are interviews that are focused, not directive, they are open-ended and active (Curtis & Curtis, 2011: 29). There was a schedule which contains questions or topics and these questions were flexible. Questions were skipped or changed due to the data the participants were providing. The framing of in-depth interviews was fluid. Similarly, this entailed inevitable changeability between data and notions during the course of the interview. This framing allows for a thorough revision of the interview questions as the research progresses (Curtis & Curtis, 2011: 29). For example, where one defines transgender using the definition of transsexual and vice versa, I explained it to the participants so that they would be able to answer the remaining questions. The questions the researcher used for this research were open-ended. The reason for using in-depth interviews is that, interviews can be easy to manage, the researcher can focus on a single person, and rapport-building is easier than self-completed questionnaires. According to Phellas, Bloch and Seale (2011: 182), the interview is a more flexible form than the questionnaire, it can be used to gather information of “greater depth and can be more sensitive to contextual variations in meaning”. The participants were willing to share personal information without worrying about being judged by other people. Another reason is that when information which was not anticipated emerged, there was more time to pursue it. Interviews were an hour long or less.

There were questions about the differences between transgender and transsexual which the researcher asked the participants, the aim was to get their everyday perceptions, knowledge and understandings about transgenderism. The main reason for choosing to interview Rhodes University students was that they are at a stage in their lives in which the gender binary or gender identities are being questioned and challenged. With their indigenous knowledge of gender identities, I wanted to hear what they had to say about transgender people and also hear if they know and understand what being transgender means.

### **3.6. Data analysis**

Because the aim was to investigate people's understandings of transgenderism, the type of data analysis which was used is a thematic data analysis. My decision to choose this type of data analysis is inspired by my interest in generating themes and patterns from the interviews I have conducted with Rhodes University students. Data analysis requires that the researcher be comfortable with developing categories and making comparisons and contrasts with the data gathered (Creswell, 1994: 153).

According to Braun and Clarke (2006: 79), thematic data analysis is a qualitative analytic method for identifying, analysing and reporting themes within data. Indeed, thematic analysis is a type of qualitative analysis and it organizes and describes data sets in rich detail. Very often thematic data analysis goes as further as interpreting various aspects of the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 79). Furthermore, thematic data analysis offers an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analysing qualitative data. It is often argued that thematic analysis should be seen as a foundational method for qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic data analysis provides core skills that are useful for conducting many other forms of qualitative analysis. Boyatzis (1998) characterizes thematic analysis as a tool to use across different methods. In thematic analysis content is the exclusive focus. It is used to analyse classifications and present themes that relate to data. It illustrates the data in great detail and deals with diverse subjects via interpretations (Boyatzis, 1998). Furthermore, thematic data analysis enables all possibilities of interpretations. The thematic data analysis process analyses the data without engaging pre-existing themes, which means that it can be "adapted to any research that relies only-on upon participants' clarifications" (Ibrahim, 2012: 42).

I have chosen this type of data analysis for many reasons and for the sake of the limitations of this chapter I will only mention a few. I have chosen thematic analysis because it is considered to be the most appropriate form for any study that seeks to discover through the use of interpretations. Thematic data analysis also provides a systematic element to data analysis and it allows the researcher to associate an analysis of the frequency of a theme with the whole content (Ibrahim, 2012: 40). For the cases of this dissertation, if the majority of the participants seemed to have similar understandings of the content, the researcher was able to analyse those understandings as a frequent theme of the content of this research. In return this confers accuracy, intricacy and improved the analysis. Moreover, thematic data analysis gives an opportunity to comprehend the potential of any issue more widely. It allows the researchers to

determine precisely the relationships between concepts and compare them with replicated data (Ibrahim, 2012: 40). Thematic data analysis is also appropriate for interpretation; it is capable of detecting and identifying factors that influence any issue generated by the participants; it is appropriate for deductive and inductive approaches (Frith and Gleeson, 2004; Hayes, 1997); it can be appropriate for studying the individual in a social context; it is appropriate for coding and categorizing and it provides the opportunity to code and categorize data into themes. For example, how gender identity issues influence the perceptions of participants (Ibrahim, 2012: 40-41). In the data analysis chapter, I have coded and categorized the data collected during in-depth interviews. The interview questions were written in a way that dealt with clear possible themes. For example, where transgender and sexual orientation questions were asked, the theme was ‘transgender and sexual orientation’. Theories on transgender and sexual orientation were used to analyse the collected data on transgender and sexual orientation.

### **3.7. Ethical considerations**

In terms of ethical issues, additional caution was taken to ensure confidentiality, safety and anonymity of the participants. Before agreeing to participate in the research, the participants were given consent forms that assured them of the ethics of the research (see Appendix 1). The ethical standards of this research are the ones from the Rhodes University Ethics Committee and I complied with those rules. This consent form makes transparent the issues under research, the aims and rationale of the research as well as the rights of the research subjects to confidentiality and to full anonymity in the final essay. Consent is regarded with the utmost importance in the process of data collection for this project. Before conducting the research, informed consent was obtained. Informed consent is a process that involves informing a participant about the research as fully as possible and obtaining the voluntary consent of the research subject to act as a participant (Bordens & Abbott, 2008: 188). Before conducting this research, participants were informed about the topic, and the purpose of this research. Before agreeing to participate in the research, the participants were also given full information that assures their participation as voluntarily and informed. Participants were informed that this research may be for publication, and that it is for a Masters academic research project. This is in line with Rhodes University Ethics Committee and its ethics guidelines which states that; “Participants should be accorded the respect and dignity that is due to them. For this to be achieved researchers and teachers should adhere to the principles of respect and dignity, transparency, accountability and integrity” (Rhodes University Ethics Standards Committee, 2014: 23). The informed consent form used for this research is included in the final dissertation as an appendix (Appendix 1). The use of living

organisms, whether human or animal, in research imposes upon the researcher an obligation to treat those subjects in a humane, respectful, and ethical manner.

In terms of confidentiality, no real names were used in this dissertation, only pseudonyms. The participants' confidentiality was protected and their names were not disclosed. According to Smith (1975: 14) "the researcher should keep in confidence all information obtained about research subjects". The individual's privacy was also protected. When there were questions about sensitive issues that the participants would rather not answer, she or he was respected. The participants also had a right to discontinue with the interview. Deception was not used as a strategy in this research project. Participants were told the truth about the research and no information was withheld from them. To ensure them that they would not be deceived, I granted them a right to review the dissertation before the final submission to the department. If they did not understand some parts of this dissertation or have problems with it, I would communicate with them about it and solve the problems that they find in this dissertation. I emailed the dissertation to each of the participants before the final submission and none of them objected to the way they were represented.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

#### 4.1. Introduction

This chapter serves as a platform to report the content, findings and meaning of themes from the data collected through in-depth interviews. In addition, it consists of the information gathered from the in-depth interviews which were conducted at Rhodes University with Rhodes University students. The aim of this chapter is to describe and explain the findings of this research and determine whether insights can be garnered to shed light on the research issue at hand. The interviewees' responses were analysed according to the theories mentioned in Chapter 2 in order to make sense of the gaps, overlaps, and the contradictions between transgenderism and the understandings that people have of the term. The type of data analysis that I have used is a thematic data analysis. Furthermore, thematic data analysis was used in a way that offers accessible and theoretically-flexible approach to analysing the qualitative data that was collected.

##### 4.1.1. How the data analysis was conducted?

In order to have data for analysis, key in-depth interviews were used in order to construct thorough meanings, understandings, views and opinions that Rhodes University students have about transgendered people. The questions that the participants were asked consisted of different set of themes, some questions focused on the definitions of transgender and transsexual to see whether the definitions that Rhodes University students have are similar to the definitions of transgenderism found in theory and from the transgender community at large. Moreover, some questions were around the uncertainty of how many genders there are, and most questions were focused on the broader discussion of the transgendered people at Rhodes University.

The initial step in analysing data is to transcribe the conducted interviews, the process of transcribing data assisted in familiarising myself with the data I needed for this chapter. According to Bird (2005: 227), the process of transcribing can be "a key phase of data analysis within interpretative qualitative methodology". It is through this process that meanings were created. The time I spent transcribing the in-depth interviews informed the early stages of this data analysis and I developed thorough understandings of the data collected through having transcribed it. Secondly, after transcribing, I started generating codes from the transcribed in-depth interviews. I started by reading through the transcriptions and wrote down a list of ideas about what was in the data. Additionally, I identified the codes from the data and matched them up with the extracts from Chapter 2. Thirdly, I went through the process of searching for patterns

of meanings and issues of potential interest from the data collected during in-depth interviews. In order to provide accurate analysis, I went through the process of constantly moving back and forward between the transcribed interviews, the coded extracts of data that I was analysing and the analysis of data that I was trying to produce. After searching for meanings, I looked for the themes that were coming out of the data collected on which this analysis was conducted on. Lastly, I wrote this analysis chapter in order to produce and provide the essence of the point that I am trying to demonstrate in this dissertation.

#### **4.2. Understandings of gender**

We live in a gendered-polarised world where gender division based on assumption of dichotomous genders permeates the way we think and talk about ourselves and each other (Connell, 1999; Siann, 1994). The issue of how many genders there are remains a continuous one. Our societies are so fixated into the traditional gender binary of either being feminine or masculine. According to Dietert & Dentice (2013: 26), the mainstream social construction of gender consists of only two choices of recognized genders: feminine and masculine, and two recognized sexes which are female and male. Consistent with essentialism, the people who were born male are expected to be masculine and be sexually attracted to women, and the people who were born female are expected to be feminine and also be sexually attracted to men (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010: 433). This became apparent from a number of responses that came out when the participants were asked how many genders exist. For example, when **Person A** was asked the question she replied by saying:

*Ha ha ha ha, that's a tough question. I feel like two genders exist, but it depends on what you feel like as a person. Because, even if you're female but if you feel male then I think that's a formal gender. I think it's just two because you're either, haaaaa my Understandings of gender goodness, that's a tough one ha ha ha ha. I don't know because if you think about it, it's either you feel more male or female, I don't think there's the other or ja... (Person A, 2016).*

In addition, Person A was not the only one who insisted that there are only two genders, other participants further stated that:

*I don't know how many genders exist but I know there's a gender that's missing, which is the one that's better than the men that we have, which is man plus, that's my man plus (jokingly). To my understanding of the term gender, I'd say there are two genders (Person B, 2016).*

Person B sounded uncertain about the number of genders that exist and even joked about “a man plus” as another gender. The thought of a “man plus” as another gender showed that she did see a possibility of there being other genders as opposed to the two genders that exist. Even though Person B had that thought, her final answer was that there are two genders. Her final response was similar to other participants’ responses. See for example:

*Mmmhh I think two, I think it’s masculine and feminine. And I say this because even people who go through the transitioning of either their gender or their sex. They either identify themselves as either feminine or masculine (Person E, 2016).*

*Two? From what I know, masculine and feminine. Is there a semi-feminine or semi-masculine? Is there such a thing? Okay four (Person G, 2016).*

The traditional gender binary that our societies enforce in us results in us not being open to the idea of there being other genders to the ones that are assigned to our sex during the socialisation period. The participants also raise a point of there being masculinity and femininity and that raised questions about the fact that even transgender people fall into the two categories but the difference is that they are not conforming to the genders that were assigned to their sex. While some participants decided to stick with the gender binary, some participants’ responses were influenced by this research and its content. Their responses seemed to slightly shift from the traditional gender binary to an addition of what this research is about. For example, some participants added transgender and transsexual as other genders because they were asked questions about them.

*I think, now that you’ve explained, I think only three genders exist, male, female and transsexual. And then the other stuff like, queer and bisexual, I think that’s just sexual orientations, what you choose to identify as, but it’s not a gender (Person C, 2016).*

*Well according to society there’s two but when you now get to talking about transgender and all these things you realize that there’s actually more. There are more genders (Person L, 2016)*

*Mmh, I am not sure. I can say there’s two biological and then the other ones like transgender. I don’t know what to call them. Maybe we can say three. Maybe we can make transgender broad. It can be a broad thing, including maybe like gays, lesbians, transsexual and all. I’m not sure how many we have (Person D, 2016).*

Moreover, during the study it became apparent that most of the participants are all aware of the gender binary, and where they are aware of the other genders that exist, it is a result of a change of environment to university or some studies that they have done or because they themselves identify as transgender. See for example:

*Yhooo... I grew up being taught that there's only male and female until I went to university where you start learning the terminology and you start reading. I don't know, five? I'd say five (Person I, 2016).*

Person I touched on the issue of early socialisation whereby families and societies enforce the gender binary, but the exposure she got from university had an impact on how she was socialised and made her see gender in a totally different way. Another participant also mentioned a US study she read about there being many genders as opposed to the gender binary. See for example:

*Well according to the study that was done in the US by the university in Germany or something like that 61 or 100 and something. I really don't know, but to me personally, I think there are only two and it's a matter of a person's perception (Person J, 2016).*

Person J comes from a country whereby gender-non conformity is criminalised. Even though, she read this US study about the many genders that exist, she was still adamant that there are only two genders. Unlike the people who said there are two genders, Person N had a different opinion about the number of genders that exist. See for example:

*Definitely not two, there's so many different, oh my word like there's so many different things like you can't really put it like it's just masculine and feminine. It's very fluid, it's very complex. I can't give a number because a person is a person and immediately when you say a person is a person you really dig deep; you're constructing that definition of what gender is. Gender could be anything but it's definitely not what it is now and it's definitely not two things (Person N, 2016).*

It is imperative to note that a society's comprehension of gender creates a discourse that sustains the binary categories (Dietert & Dentice, 2013: 30). It is because of this comprehension that when it comes to gender, for many people it is just black and white and there are no grey areas. Additionally, gender is traditionally assumed to be based on a binary, mandatory system that attributes social characteristics to biological sex and for some societies it is difficult to look beyond this binary and discover other genders. Because some individuals place themselves within this gender binary discourse, they become subjects of that discourse. In order for people

and societies to comprehend and accept that there are not only two genders, they have to understand gender as a spectrum and question the traditional gender binary system in order to draw thorough comprehensions about the people who are non-gender conforming. Reading about the possibility of there being other genders would be a right step towards raising awareness and understanding gender as a spectrum.

### **4.3. Transgenderism understood as being trapped in a wrong body**

This dissertation aims at investigating the understandings of people about what it means to be transgender. The term is not one that is largely used as anyone who is non-gender conforming is assumed to fall into the categories of either gay or lesbian. According to Stryker (2008: 1), transgender refers to “people who move away from the gender they were assigned at birth, people who cross over the boundaries constructed by their culture to define and contain that gender regardless their sexual orientation”. Furthermore, Bockting, Robinson, Forberg and Scheltema (2005: 2) define transgender as a term that refers to any individual who has a gender identity that is distinct from their natal sex or who expresses their gender in ways that contravene societal expectations of men and women. The study revealed that majority of the participants seemed to have quite similar definitions of what it means to be transgender. For example, when asked what they understand the term transgender to mean most of the participants gave definitions that are only limited to one being “trapped in a wrong body” and moved away from the fact that transgender means transitioning from one gender (masculinity) to another (femininity). Additionally, the definitions they provided oppose the idea that gender is socially constructed. According to Nagoshi & Brzuzy (2010: 434), the social constructionist theory states that gender identity is a social construct as well as the result of repeated performances of the expected behaviours of one’s sex. Furthermore, Wilson et al. (2014: 1) state that “gender refers to the roles, behaviour and attributes that are labelled as masculine or feminine by society”. When one transitions from one gender to another, it does not necessarily mean that they transition from one sex to another. Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, actions, attributes that societies consider to be appropriate for boys and girls.

See for example:

*Okay, uhm... Basically what I understand is the idea of someone being born in a wrong body. So, for example, if someone feels more female internally but they’ve been born into a male body. So, they obviously have male organs and then... or someone being female but internally they feel more male. So I think that’s my general understanding (Person A, 2016).*

During the study, the definition provided by Person A of a transgender person being one who is born or trapped in a wrong became a common definition from many other participants. For example:

*For me, it means that a person that was born and feels like they were born in a wrong body or the wrong sex that is. So they identify the opposite gender (Person B, 2016).*

*My understanding of transgender, I think it's someone who was born with two sexes (who is both female and male), then ultimately they'll have to choose one. Or someone who is transgender can be someone who was born with one sexual orientation but does not feel comfortable in that body (Person C, 2016).*

*I think it means that uhm, scientifically I don't know. I'm not sure, I stand on the correction, but from what I understand. It's basically in simple terms a woman trapped in a man's body or a man trapped in a woman's body. The people are not gay, or maybe they are in like a technical sense but the thing is with them is that they are not gay as in "I'm a man I'm fully masculine but I'm attracted to another man". It's "I'm a man and I'm attracted to another man, but kahle kahle, inside of me there's a woman living inside". That's what I understand about it. Then that's when it begins, and then they start taking steps towards doing certain changes to their bodies so that their personalities fit or their inside fits their appearance (Person E, 2016).*

*Uhm, it is the third gender, the third non-binary gender, there's female and male, and then there's transgender. Someone who was born in a body which they do not feel correlates with what they feel inside. Someone who is not cis-gender (Person F, 2016).*

*From what I understand, it's when one person was born into a... you're born a certain gender right? But you feel as though you were born in a wrong body so if a man feels like they are actually supposed to be a woman, they feel more feminine, they feel like "yes I was born with these particular genitals, yes I've been socialized to be like this but actually I feel like I'm supposed to be the opposite of what I am" (Person I, 2016).*

*Okay, so my understanding is not really like great, I have to be honest. I don't really understand but I know that being transgender means that whatever, sort of like, you were born with an incorrect gender, you were born in the wrong physical/sexual body. Uhm, I would say people who are transgender are people who do not identify as the way they look (Person M, 2016).*

I tend to agree with Butler (1990) when she says that, gender is not something we are born with, but something we acquire socially and then perform. Gender is not sex but it builds on biological sex, it exaggerates biological distinction and it carries biological differences into domains in which it is completely irrelevant (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013). The definitions provided by the participants highlighted that they understand transsexual more than they understand what it means to be transgender. In many cases being trapped in a wrong body falls into the category of being transsexual where a transsexual person would want to alter his or her body in order to be what they identify with. According to Schilt and Wiswall (2006: 2), “transsexual people change or wish to change their bodies through hormones and surgery”. Furthermore, Markman, (2011) states that changing their bodies may include a range of modifications from taking hormones, having feminizing or masculinizing surgeries, which can include electrolysis for hair removal, breast implants or breast reductions, and removal and/or construction of genitals and other reproductive organs. At the same time the term transgender may include cross-dressers, drag queens and drag kings, transsexuals, people who are androgynous, two-spirited people and people who are bi-gendered or multi-gendered as well as people who do not identify with any labels (Cobos & Jones, 2009: 341).

Apart from the participants who understand transgender to mean being trapped in a wrong body, some participants expressed definitions that match those mentioned by the likes of Stryker, Chambers and many more in Chapter 2 according to which gender is understood as a social construct and they reveal that it is more about the appearance, the actions and behaviours as opposed to sexual anatomy.

For example:

*I think transgender is like a social construct it might include different things. Or maybe tomboys, I don't know if we can put them under transgender. It's not like a natural thing, it's a way of life that people chooses, maybe like in terms of dressing, maybe hairstyle, and maybe more physical appearance (Person D, 2016).*

Person D's response reveals an adequate understanding of gender as a social construct which is mentioned about under the social constructionism theory. Other participants had similar understandings of gender as a social construct, see for example:

*Transgender is a term that is used to describe a person born male or female and feels that their true gender is opposite to their sex. So, basically transgender refers to socialization, they were*

*supposed to be socialized as a woman because their sex does not coincide with their gender (Person J, 2016).*

*Okay, someone's gender is based on whether they are female or male. When you're transgender it's like now, my gender is being a female. It is a matter of being comfortable in another gender, even though I am female, I feel like I'll be more comfortable if I was male. That's how I understand transgender (Person L, 2016).*

*Uhm, the definition of transgender... Okay, based on my understanding of the term and it's something I've learnt in Anthropology. Transgender are usually people that practise cross dressing. So, if you are male and you cross dress into female clothes, and vice versa. That's the definition that I am used to. But, transgender people are not conforming people (Person N, 2016).*

#### **4.4. Transgenderism confused with sexual orientation**

In many cases non-gender conforming people are referred to as homosexuals, anyone who falls outside the gender binary discourse is sometimes assumed to be either gay or lesbian. This may be a result of a misunderstanding or being used to hearing a lot about gays and lesbians as opposed to hearing about the transgendered individuals in African societies. According to Dietert and Dentice (2013: 29), "gender and sexuality are connected in a way that gender presentation is often correlated with one's sexuality". Furthermore, the connection between transgenderism and homosexuality emerges from the fact that both of them fight against social and cultural norms and expectations (Kheswa 2014: 72). However, the connections do not necessarily mean that a transgender person is gay or lesbian. It is important to note that being transgender has to do with one's gender identity, behaviour, attributes, appearance and more. It may or may not mean that a person is homosexual. The study that I conducted revealed that in many instances, some participants referred to transgender people as people who are gay or lesbian. When asked what it means to be transgender some participants replied by saying:

*I think transgender is like a social construct it might include different things like maybe lesbians, gays and I don't know the other, or what I can call them... (Person D, 2016).*

Similar to Person D, Person K associated transgender people with people who are gay or lesbian. See for example:

*Umh, I'm not really sure what transgender is. But from what I know, it might be, maybe if you're a male you'd identify yourself as a gay male, it's the same thing with females, you'd want to identify yourself as a gay female. Gender is what is believed to be a socially constructed form (Person K, 2016).*

*Transgender? It's more like a reversal, more like we have gays and lesbians. Those who want to be men but they are women, those who want to be women but they are men. So I feel like that's what transgender means (Person O, 2016).*

Additionally, when asked if being transgender means one is gay or lesbian some participants stated that being a transgender person means you are gay or lesbian. Even the one person who identifies as a transgender person and in the process of transitioning and become a transsexual stated that transgender people are not straight. See for example:

*I think ja, there are no two ways about it. Trans, it means that you are disregarding your sexuality in favour for another sexuality that you are not. Turning your body into a woman, definitely you will date a man (Person O, 2016).*

*Transitioning from one gender to another means you become homosexual. I think these concepts are difficult to separate (Person P, 2016).*

*I think there is a link, personally, I believe there is a link because I identify as a transgender person and I identify more to be feminine. My sexual orientation is more inclined to a more masculine person, a more masculine guy. I like that, it makes me feel comfortable (Person N, 2016).*

*It's actually very interesting because as well I also think that immediately when you are transgender, you are definitely not straight. I have my own beliefs about sexualities, I don't believe people are straight, I think people are straight because we think they are straight. I think people are straight because we were taught at a very young age that if you are female, you like males and vice versa. I think a lot of transgender people don't identify as homosexuals. But at the same time I think, because there are some transgender people who literally wear a dress, act masculine, they are themselves and it's just the feeling, they just like wearing dresses. For me, they really make me feel uncomfortable, because in my head as well I conform in all my relationships that I've had. My queer relationships, we conform, in there there'll be a male in the relationship and there'll be a female, it's very tricky (Person N, 2016).*

*I'm going to speak for myself. The minute I saw this guy that I am talking about, I first thought he is gay. As we started talking I realised that he identified as a transgender so he then opened up to me and told me that he is gay. So for me, I immediately connected the two. I then thought it means that if someone is gay they are more likely to be transgender and vice versa. He is not the only one, most of the people that I know who are transgender they are more likely to be gay or lesbian (Person L, 2016).*

During the study there were times when the participants would stop using the term “transgender” and simply refer to them as gays and lesbians. But, it is important to note that while some participants could not see any difference between transgenderism and sexual orientation, some participants highlighted that the two are not the same. See for example:

*I don't think they are gay or lesbian. I think they are transgender, on its own it's got its own definition. They are distinct in the fact that they want to be a woman or a man. It's not I am a man, but I will behave like a woman, or I am a man I like other man. It's not necessarily that, it's “I am a woman and I want to live like a woman, and because I am a woman, I will be with a man” kinda thing. So I think that's the whole thing and it is unfortunate that in our culture it's shun upon, it's not even accepted (Person A, 2016).*

Person A was able to differentiate between gender identity and sexual orientation. Person A gave a confident response about the issue of transgenderism and sexual orientation. Other participants had the same confidence when they argued that being transgender does not mean that one is gay. See for example:

*Ja, I think most of them are. No, not necessarily, I don't think they are gay, you can be transgender but still be straight. For example, there's someone I know who is a tomboy but she's interested in males, so they don't have to be gay or lesbian (Person C, 2016).*

*No. Gay and lesbian are sexualities, so sexual orientations differ from gender. I fail to believe that they are gay or lesbian. No I don't think that they are gay. I don't see transgender as being a sexual orientation (Person F, 2016)*

*No. Gender does not determine sexual orientation. I think that's another aspect that confuses people when it comes to this particular topic (Person I, 2016).*

*I think the whole narrative about being gay or lesbian is a whole different one. 'Coz I've seen couples that are transsexual, one used to be a male and has changed to a female, the one that*

*was female changed to a male and they are still in the relationship. In a strict sense it's probably still a heterosexual relationship. However, knowing that they are both transsexuals is confusing so I don't think you can say that (Person J, 2016).*

*No I don't think so. I think it's also how the world understands Caitlyn Jenner. She transitioned but she does not want to date men and people are just like 'are you lying?'. That's not the same thing, because I am female does not mean I wanna date... I don't think it's the same because humans are more complex in that. By virtue of being a female doesn't mean that I wanna date males. Being a female does not mean that she wanted to date men, she could have dated men as Bruce. It's not the same thing and I think it would simplify things a lot. Also, not accounting for the complexities of being human because then you are just like "oh you've transitioned to this is A, B and C. Some transgendered people do drag, and being a drag queen doesn't mean you are trans (Person M, 2016).*

According to Morrow and Messinger (2006: 4-5), "a person's sexual orientation and gender expression are in themselves neutral and it is incorrect to assume that all transgender people are gay or lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual". During the course of the study the above participants shared similar views about transgender and sexual orientation. It is also vital to mention that, some transgender people do consider their sexualities to be gay or lesbian. As confusing as it might seem, it is incorrect to make assumptions about one's sexual orientation without that person disclosing it to you. Being transgender alone is about a deep sense of a person's identity as a man or as a woman and it is about an individual's gender identity. While homosexuality is all about attractions between people of the same sex although these are often fluid, meaning it is between people who identity as lesbian or gay (Kheswa, 2014: 72). Gender identity refers to how masculine, and feminine a person feels on the inside and how that person projects that identity to the outside world (Ryan & Diaz, 2010: 1581). Therefore, one's gender identity does not dictate one's sexual orientation.

#### **4.5. The issue of using pronouns when referring to transgender people**

Individuals' sex assigned at birth, gender identity, and gender expression complement each other in a way that society traditionally determines is "appropriate". But, the individual's sex may not complement their gender identity and expression in a way that society expects. It can be said that gender identity is that which is internally felt, private and invisible (Martin & Yonkin, 2006: 109). Therefore, it can only be possible to know one's gender if people choose to disclose their gender identity and whether it matches their gender expressions (Brown and Rounsly, 1996). The

transgender population is a very diverse population with a wide range of terms for self-identification. The use and misuse of these terms can cause confusion and offend the transgender people (Cobos & Jones, 2009: 342). Furthermore, certain terms are “yellow-flag” language and should be avoided when it comes to the transgender individuals. Similarly, “the use of pronouns by people who do not identify as transgender may not be in agreement with the person’s gender identity” (Cobos & Jones, 2009: 342). In other words, gender conforming people must be weary of the pronouns they use when referring to transgender people as they might not be what they identify with. During the study, when asked which pronouns they would use to refer to transgender people, the participants revealed that the choice of pronoun will depend on the pronoun that the transgender people say they must use. See for example:

*I try to call them by their original sex, their old sex, if you’re a male you are a male and it depends on the individual. You have like drag queens and stuff and for them it is fine when you say girl to them. Sometimes, there are people who are transgender it creates kind of awkwardness when you misinterpret their gender, so it depends on the person (Person C, 2016).*

Person C raised the issue of using pronouns that the transgender people do not prefer and then mentioned that how one addresses a transgender person will depend on that transgender person. If a transgender person prefers to be addressed based on their current identity, that is how they should be addressed and vice versa. Other participants also shared similar views, see for example:

*I don’t change. I never change it even when I can see that someone is transgender. But if you’re the one who wants to, I can call you the way you want to be called (Person D, 2016).*

*I’ve been missing gender pronouns all my life, so uhm if you know someone personally and they tell you what they prefer being called then that’s fine. But if you do not know someone and you’re not sure or don’t wanna ask about their gender, then use “they” or “them”, you use plural pronouns (Person F, 2016).*

*How they want to be addressed. It becomes so awkward; the dominant side depends on how the person behaves or acts. Like with me, I don’t know coz people really mistaken me, I get called “bhuti” and then I’m like “ndingusisi ma”. It’s all about how the person prefers to be called (Person H, 2016).*

*You respect the pronouns a person tells you that they refer. You don’t judge, you don’t say “but you look...” Because I think other people could have waited, like once the person has*

*transitioned, then I'll say "she". When I met the girl, she looked male, but I knew that she was using the female pronoun and you must female pronoun. And then in transitioning you also do see that the person is female (Person M, 2016).*

*I think what one chooses to be. I think it's because I watch a lot of reality shows like I'm very guilty of that. I've seen how people are very sensitive when it comes to things like that. Like in Mistresses, where there's a person who was once a woman and the now he has transitioned into a man but you can't even tell that he was a woman before. He got into a relationship with another woman, and when he explained that he's actually trans, that woman flipped. And that man was like "but I don't see what the issue is" tya thing. So I can see how very sensitive they are to it. I just think that if honestly you're someone who just believes in just taking people as they are, you just go for it, like listen, I'm a woman, hey whats'up, we're girlfriends then. If you're a dude, cool I'm just gonna treat you like I treat every other guys with respect to my relationship. It's nothing personal, I'm gonna treat as you identify yourself as (Person E, 2016).*

The study revealed that some participants are aware of the confusion that might come from using and misusing pronouns that might offend the transgender people. The study also showed that some participants have respect for transgender people's gender identities hence they would prefer to use the pronouns that the transgender people would like to be used. In order to avoid misusing pronouns that will offend the transgender people and to prevent unease it is better to ask the transgender person to specify his or her gender. Using transgender people's preferred or chosen names and pronouns shows respect to them, therefore people must learn to call transgender people using the names and pronouns they prefer to be called.

While some participants showed respect for the transgender people, some participants revealed that, no matter what gender the transgender people identify with, they will use their original genders. This then shows that some participants hold the gender stereotypes. Gender stereotyping is the practice of applying that stereotypical belief to a person (United Nations Human Rights, 2014). The gender stereotypes limit transgender people from self-identifying themselves in ways that they prefer to.

#### **4.6. Cultural beliefs influence individuals' perceptions of transgender people**

The concept of gender is influenced by culturally constructed ideas based on the binary system of masculine and feminine. A culture's social systems are grounded in gender-based concepts (Kessler, 2000). According to the American Psychological Association (2006), behaviour that is

compatible with cultural expectations is referred to as 'gender-normative' and behaviour that is viewed as incompatible with these expectations constitutes 'gender non-conformity'. Many African cultures are not open to gender non-conforming individuals as they are said to not be complying with their cultural beliefs. Furthermore, in African societies it is commonly held that there are only two genders that each correlate with the appropriate sex of the individual, femininity for females and masculinity for males. During the study the participants were asked to talk about their first encounters with transgender people and some participants revealed that their reactions towards transgender people were deeply influenced by their culture and their societies. See for example:

*I think a little bit of both. Society-wise, it's the idea that people are shaped to think a certain way, male and female. Uhm... Society-wise it is believed that a female belongs in a dress. So I think my shock was based on I can see this guy's bodily aspects as a man but he's in a female dress. Culturally, I feel like, based on my specific culture, as a man you cannot be wearing a dress and you cannot be putting on a dress. So it's a little bit of both (Person A, 2016).*

Reactions towards transgender people seemed to be largely influenced by the participants' cultures as the majority of them mentioned that culture and society has an influence on how they react towards transgender people. See for example:

*To a large extent, to a large extent it was. Can I give a context of South Africa? When I came, I almost experienced a culture shock, 'coz in Zambia this is not common. When you see such things, it's not even South Africa, let me give an example of TV. When you see such people, I'm not surrounded by that, I don't see it so often, so it's not normal to me so when I see it obviously my reaction will be "wow, what is it?" I'll have questions (Person G, 2016).*

*Yeah, I can safely say so because as I've already said that back home, in Zimbabwe this is something that is not common. We believe that a man has to be a man and a woman has to be a woman. When we came here of course it's a shock, we are coming from an environment where those things are not happening to an environment where these things are happening. Things that are disregarded in your country are allowed in another country (Person O, 2016).*

*When it comes to genders my culture is quite fixed to male and female and if anyone is in between they may be confused of growing up wrong (Person M, 2016).*

*My initial reaction was influenced by my society, that's how I was raised. Like, a man is a man. A man, where I come from is the one that shoots the cow and does manly things. Now to see*

*someone who does not want to start a fire because men must start a fire. I just look at him like he “oh you’re actually the man”. I feel like most of our opinions on how things work are influenced by society. I feel like we don’t question certain things because that is how we were raised. Society dictates that we do things a certain way and we just do it (Person L, 2016).*

*It was, coz I hardly saw men and women who are transsexual. It was influenced by my cultural beliefs coz in the Xhosa belief, if you’re a woman, you’re a woman and if you’re a man, you’re a man (Person H, 2016).*

Based on the study it is apparent that for each and every culture, the meanings that people construct of gender identities are based on the gender stereotypes of that culture. The participants revealed that their different cultures continue with the gender stereotypes of a man dressing and acting like a man and a woman dressing and acting like a woman as opposed to being transgender. In many different cultures that have these gender stereotypes, the gender stereotypes limit transgender people from self-identifying themselves in ways that they prefer to. According to the United Nations Human Rights (2014: 1), “gender stereotyping is wrongful when it results in a violation or violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms”. Within the South African context where being transgender is legalised, the gender stereotypes held by many cultures violate the constitutional rights of the transgender people.

#### 4.6.1. Cultures deny people the rights to choose their own genders

As mentioned previously, societies and cultures enforce the traditional gender binary on children during the socialisation stage. The process of socialization includes the development of a gender identity, the sense that a person has that physicality that she is a female or a male (Davidson & Kramer, 1979: 3-4). Conformity to gender roles and gender expression is enforced at all levels of society which contributes to family and societal rejection of people when they engage in gender-variant behaviour (Dietert & Dentice, 2013: 27). During this stage, children are mostly not given a chance to be what they would like to be, for example, they are not given a chance to choose their own genders. Foucault’s (1990) perspective states that gender discourse plays a significant role in socializing children to conform to a world adhering to a gender binary system that is most often than not inflexible. Gender is historical, it differs from place to place and culture to culture (Stryker, 2008: 11). In an attempt to understand how each culture deals with the issues of gender, the participants were asked if their cultures leave space for individuals to choose their own genders. Their responses were as follows:

*No! Unfortunately, my culture doesn't. It has become so problematic that you become shun upon if you choose to live a transgender or a transsexual life. I think transsexual is worse because now you are trying to transform yourself into what you feel you are comfortable in. I feel like you're not accepted, it's become very difficult. Especially if you're born a girl and everyone knew you as a girl, then you rock up... whether you grow up in the township or rural areas, you come back twenty years later and you define yourself and call yourself a man. No one, people are not used to that (Person A, 2016).*

*My culture, what is my culture? For Xhosas, I am Xhosa. For Xhosa, I don't think so. Like "Ukwaluka" (initiation) for example, some people who are transgender they don't want to go through that phase and someone would say "Yhoooo hayi awuyondoda nton nton nton nton" (Yho, no you're not a man so on and so on). It ends up being awkward for future stuff. And a transsexual, I don't know whether, let's say you're 21 and you want to be transsexual and now you must yhooo... I don't think they have space for people to choose (Person C, 2016).*

Similar to person A and B who are based in South Africa, it appeared that the issue of culture not leaving space for individuals to choose their own gender is not only in South Africa. See for example:

*Mmmhh not exactly, I don't think the Zambian culture it tells someone "you have to act like a girl, you have to act like a boy". I think it's just embedded in societies, it's just there, so I don't know whether I'll say it's our culture, it's just there. You're expected to act a certain way, if you act in another way that you're not expected to act, you're obviously looked at in a weird way, you shock people. People will be like "why are you the abnormal one" everyone is acting a certain way and you're more like the abnormal, girls are acting a certain way and boys are acting a certain way. Maybe to some extent actually, because societies shapes a person. So maybe to some extent I would say people are forced even if it's not written somewhere or stated somewhere in the constitution or written and formally signed and said you have to act like this, but because of the way people are going to react you're obviously forced to act a certain way. Coz you know people will judge you (Person G, 2016).*

*Not really hey, the Xhosa culture is a strict culture. It doesn't leave space for people to choose their own preferred gender. I think the young generation is loosening up to the idea, but for old people it takes some time for them to even understand that there's gender fluidity. So really it doesn't leave space for them, unless it depends from family to family (Person H, 2016).*

*The kinds of communities that I come from are not very accepting yet on this particular issue. Coloured communities are very homophobic, they perpetuate the stereotype of bashing and being against anything that is not normal. I think coloured people are among the most homophobic people I know and it's so normal to them, the language that they use, it's so normal for them. Like my cousin, it's very normal for them to tease him about being... "you're so girly, like you're so fragile", everybody would laugh. Coloured communities are not so accepting and it doesn't make it easy for you to identify as what you want to identify as. It doesn't make it easy. And to have your own mother say "if you put a lipstick again I'm gonna hit you" that says a lot about how accepting they would be if my cousin comes and says "I identify as this etc" (Person I, 2016).*

*No it doesn't. I mean my culture says that anything like genderism, like being transgender and transsexualism, it's all kind of nonsense, it's confusion, it's mental confusion, there's something wrong with you. Amademon (it's demons). That's the way I was socialized to look at things. It really does have an impact in the way I look and perceive things (Person J, 2016).*

The above participants' responses show that many African cultures are not accepting of or tolerant towards genders that do not fall under the traditional gender binaries that they uphold. Furthermore, from this study it is apparent that no matter how legal being transgender might be in South Africa, cultures like the Xhosa culture will continue to close doors on individuals wanting to choose their own genders. From some early age children will continue being socialised in ways that conform to the gender binary and anything that falls outside that gender binary will be labelled deviant. Similarly, conformity to gender roles and gender expression is enforced at all levels of society which contributes to family and societal rejection of people when they engage in gender-variant behaviours (Dietert & Dentice, 2013). Because most African cultures do not leave space for individuals to choose their own gender identities, transgender people are sometimes rejected by their families and harassed by their peers because of their gender identities. Often family members have a difficult time adjusting to a child who does not conform to the binary of male/masculinity and female/femininity (Dietert & Dentice, 2013: 26).

Historical and anthropological research across Africa has shown that cultures across the continent historically recognized and often accepted gender non-conforming individuals as members of their communities (Jobson, Theron, Kaggwa & Kim, 2012: 161). According to Keenan (2006: 5), "South Africa also has a long history of same sex partnerships and the existence of people who crossed lines of gender are undeniable part of the South African history". But despite this

historical existence of gender variances, some African cultures still deny people their rights to choose their own gender identities. Instead of leaving space for individuals to choose their own gender, gender non-conforming behaviour among consenting adults is criminalized in most African countries (Jobson et al., 2012: 161). Moreover, the people who are gender non-conforming individuals get alienated in African cultures, as they have been stripped of their belonging and their connectedness (Matebeni, 2014: 7).

#### **4.7. Challenges that transgender people face**

Being transgender within a space that enforces a traditional gender binary is very challenging. Transgender people encounter challenges because of their gender identity which does not conform to the gender binary discourse. According Kennedy and Hellen (2010), transgender individuals are more marginalized and excluded than those who do not identify as transgender. Furthermore, being transgender is not easy and on a daily basis transgender people negotiate their gender identities within the confines of those categories which are often an impossible task for individuals who are gender variant or happen to deviate from expected gender characteristics assigned at birth (Dietert & Dentice, 2013: 26). For instance, transgender people also find themselves negotiating their gender identities in school environments that may not be tolerant, understanding or aware of gender variation (Dietert and Dentice, 2013: 28). Bullying and teasing at school is something that many transgender people experience. In some instances, transgender people say that teachers would join in ridiculing them for the way they present themselves. Incidents like this lead to depression and academic underperformance. Many transgender youth drop out from school at a young age due to intimidation, ridicule and ostracising (Theron, 2009: 38). Moreover, the Human Rights Watch (2011: 16) states that “the normalization of some behaviours and modes of gender-expression as appropriate or natural for women and men makes all men and women who go against these norms potential targets”.

According to Jobson et al. (2012: 161), “in South Africa transgender people are exposed to violence, victimization and social inequality”. In addition, Keenan (2006: 48) states that in South Africa, men who are not transgender commit acts of sexual violence against masculine women in order to teach them a lesson that they were not born to be masculine and they should not dress or act in a masculine manner.

When it comes to getting employment, transgender people are also vulnerable (Stevens, 2012: 23). Prevalence of gender based violence amongst any community is harmful. It is apparent that transgender people encounter challenges from different spheres. In order to draw understandings

about the Rhodes University students' views of the challenges that transgender people face, the participants were asked to name the challenges that they think or know that transgender people face and their responses are as follow:

*The society of 'coz, like you'll be labelled "deviant". They'll be like aa that one is offside, that one if a "moffie". We as Christians, it's quite difficult for us to locate these things. According to our bible, our script, our love is based on this script, on the Christian bible. It's a taboo even in the bible, it's not tolerated. We have many case studies in the bible when our Lord condemned it. Like for example, Sodom and Gomorrah. The fact that they are struggling to locate themselves makes us struggle how to call them (Person P, 2016).*

According to Matebeni (2014: 7), the language of religion, culture and tradition is often used to speak against sexual and gender diversity in Africa. Person P revealed that the bible speaks against transgenderism and as Christians they are struggling to come to terms with something that the bible condemns.

*I think the main thing it's where you are, that is something that I have come to understand and it's that for me, at home I've always acted like this because I've always been like this, they've never seen anything else but this. So, it was fine in that space. But then, I couldn't fully express myself because they didn't know or I didn't express that I love dresses and I identify as the opposite sex at an early age. I think it's the space, where you are because immediately when I left and came to Grahamstown, at Rhodes University I could breathe a bit more, I could put on a dress when I wanted to, I could change my hair and everything. But, at the same time we are in this liberated space but I still felt suffocated, I still feel I can't express myself truly because of the looks they give me, of the implicit queer-phobic behaviours. At the same time, even when I go to the dining hall, I feel uncomfortable going to the dining hall and see the mamas. I feel very uncomfortable although they seem to be very accepting. I just feel uncomfortable because when I see them I see umama, I see an old person, I see who has her views. I think it's because they are very traditional and they are very religious and it's a feeling of "we need to discuss this; we need to talk to you". It's that feeling of "we need to help you find a way". It's a feeling of not understanding, it's a feeling of not being exposed to this environment as well (Person N, 2016).*

The participants had a number of challenges that transgender people encounter and from each participant, something new or something similar emerged from their responses. See for example:

*I think it's societal expectations, the fact that if you're a boy, you need to act like a boy and you need to marry a woman. But, the ideas of institutions in a society, the fact that people need to behave in a certain way. Culturally speaking, the fact that when you're a boy or a guy, you're expected to go to the bush, that's specifically in certain African cultures. So, it's things like that, that make people struggle to come out of their shell. Uhm, it's a fact of an embarrassment, some people don't want to embarrass their families, some people don't want to shame their families. To an extent that's why you find that a lot of transgender people, they're living their actual lives as male, then they would express their selves as female because they don't know how to, they struggle to and they struggle to get a form of acceptance (Person A, 2016).*

*A whole lot I guess, religious factors, economic factors, the social circles. It depends from person to person. 'Coz personally I think if I was transgender, I have a very supportive family, I don't think my family would be a problem. Economically, I don't think I can afford to be trans or to go to transition so I'll have to wait until I can actually afford surgery. I think the biggest obstacle would be my community. I think those would be the biggest influences. But for other people I am not so sure, even with my friend, she has a very supportive family, we have people on campus that are very supportive, but then again we have people that are still trans-phobic, so, I think it depends from person to person (Person B, 2016).*

*It is difficult to express your preferred identity because of, like I've mentioned, cultural norms and society. Also the biggest fear is of judgement, like you don't know what to expect. Also there's violent tendencies towards transgender people. Basic stuff, even having to go to the bathroom, and sitting in restaurants, you might be identified as a woman, then someone calls you a "Sir" and then you have to explain that stuff (Person C, 2016).*

*It can be maybe the way that they think people will react to it. For example, some people are homophobic, some people discriminate. So, some people might be scared to show out their true gender identities. They might be scared to come out because they might think of the consequences that might come with that because of their societies and how the societies react to it (Person D, 2016).*

*I think societies, society at large, they are scared of being judged. I even think that they've moved past the whole being judged thing. I just think that for them they're scared of what people will do to them. There are people who believe on burning them, there are people who believe that these are the people who are going to stop the human race because it's unnatural, you can't have children that way and all sorts of ways. That's why you find the cases of abo after 9, where now*

*you're going to be a man or a woman during the day but after 9 behind closed doors then you have this type of situation happening, because you're scared of what society will actually do to you. I don't think it's more of what people will say or whatever. It's almost like xenophobic attacks, you know, during that heightened time. I think this is what the people who are part of the LGBT community are basically fearing on a regular basis. That is life for them, it's difficult, that's what adds more and more to their challenges on a daily basis. It's got very little to do with how people see them. But mostly of "aa wena you're gay we gonna burn you or aa wena". Even people, they are not even accepted by their families, abanye. Some people believe that if you beat this child, you're going to whoop this demon out of them and it's not even the case. There are other factors that resort to it and because society does not wanna be open to education about it, it becomes a serious problem (Person E, 2016).*

*Culture, tradition, long standing tradition of the binary, you can either be this or that and there's no other way. There's A or B, there's no C and I think that's the main cause of people not wanting to express themselves the way they feel. That creates violence within people who feel comfortable identifying either as A or B, when they see C it does not make sense to them and it creates discrimination and the violence. It creates the other, there's like the other "who are you?". It does not make sense (Person F, 2016).*

*Fear of being judged. No one wants to be judged, the person is obviously thinking if I express myself in a certain way they are going to judge me. Secondly, fear of being accepted also, because you feel like people will accept you lesser than they would have. Fear of just being looked at like a normal well-being. So obviously, people will tend to look at the other person with less value than the person that's normal, normal (Person G, 2016).*

*There are various factors. The Zimbabwean society is generally very conservative. That conservative nature is coupled with strict Christianity. If you're a homosexual, you'll also be sent to prison for corrective rape. It's either you die in jail or you'll die at the hands of the police, because you'll have an accident or you'll disappear, or it will be a mob brutality type of thing. This is if you're a regular citizen. It's a very harsh way of conducting relations between people. The other influence comes from the president who says "we don't like people who are homosexual, we don't accept it, if you gonna live in my country you're either gonna straighten up or I'm gonna kill you" (Person J, 2016).*

From this study I discovered that transgender people encounter diverse kinds of challenges. The participants mentioned violence, Christianity that states that being transgender is not in the bible

and making it hard for Christians to accept transgender individuals. The society and communities that enforce traditional gender binaries contribute a lot to the challenges that transgender people face. It is important to note that the participants mentioned a number of challenges but the commonality between these challenges is the fact that they are all a result of a gender binary that does not include the genders of those who do not conform. The people who do not-conform find themselves faced with these challenges because the people who marginalise them, the people who violate them, judge them and tease them are the people who were brought up under the discourse of this gender binary. It is therefore correct to say that, the traditional gender binary that is enforced in societies is the main challenge that creates the other challenges that transgender people face.

#### 4.7.1. Transgender students also face challenges at Rhodes University

As mentioned above, transgender people face numerous challenges in all spaces including school environments such as Rhodes University. In addition to the above challenges the participants were asked to mention the challenges that they think Rhodes University transgender students face at Rhodes University. Their responses were as follow:

*Like I said, Rhodes is a very diverse institution, there's a variety of backgrounds at Rhodes. There's certain people who'd be accepting to it, there's certain people who would shun upon it completely. We come from cultural backgrounds, we come from religious backgrounds so acceptance would vary. Unfortunately for someone who does choose to explicitly behave in a transgender way and display whether they are transgender, there'll be a lot of eyes. Already, uhm, this is slightly going out of topic, but already the gay and lesbian community, already are looked at differently by certain groups of cultures, by certain groups of religions or individuals from those groups and religions, so ja (Person A, 2016).*

*I think it's because of how these spaces don't really allow that. If I was a transgender person on this campus I would still be required to either choose female or male bathroom and if I go to a female bathroom, females are going to look at me like "what's going on?" and if I go to a male bathroom I don't feel comfortable because that's their bathroom. I think those are the things that make it difficult for you to be yourself. Because what you gonna have to do is gonna like let me go to the male bathrooms. It suppresses you and you can't be who you are. It's in things being separated in the bible as female and male, anything that goes that way kind of already alienates you from being who you are (Person M, 2016).*

*Constantly having to explain themselves, like why are you wearing that and being forced to perform a gender they are not through toilet and the residence system and the general public. Sometimes people stare at you like, duh! So, constantly having to be looked at, the language which is used, being referred to by the wrong pronouns and constantly having to say “noo I prefer being called by this pronoun” and constantly having to correct people (Person F, 2016).*

*When I first came to Rhodes, I felt so uncomfortable, am I dressed the wrong way and I felt so unwelcome and it was hard to find friends. It got worse when my Facebook account got hacked. Someone posted about me having been raped hence I am a lesbian. It was hard for me to even come out of this space. But now things changed. It's better now, everyone is out there and everyone is embracing their sexuality (Person H, 2016).*

*Okay, what I do know is that (must I be honest?). Working in the library for example I always get uhm, there are guys who come and complain. There's this one guy who came literally yesterday and he told me that he felt uncomfortable because there's this person, this guy, who I know him to be gay who is always acting inappropriately around him and he is always sitting next to him and he is doing “girly and uncomfortable things”. So, he hates that and just interacting with like a lot of males, they hate that, they hate it so much. They do not like it when “these people” act the way they do and dress the way that they dress. It makes them very uncomfortable. But, because Rhodes is a very liberal university and they are all about accepting people the way they are whatever. Most of these people pretend like they are fine with it but when you actually sit down with them and discuss these kind of issues you realise that they hate it. They do not agree with how these people live, they do not understand why anyone would actually even be or act that way and they also feel like it's just a phase that these people need to just fix in a bottle (Person L, 2016).*

*Very uncomfortable. They were very uncomfortable. Uhm, they were just not comfortable with it. Although they did not say words that show they were homophobic or queer-phobic rather, you could just feel it and you could just see their behaviours, the reactions. In my house Jan Smuts people still carry those implicit queer-phobic behaviours, where I'd use the bathroom and they literally don't use the same bathroom as me. It's things that have happened and I understand why they happen, it's things that I am noticing that this space is very hetero-normative, this space is very conforming, it's very traditional. It's not as liberal as we think it is. So the reactions from students here it's really uncomfortable, and it's really, really sad (Person N, 2016).*

The challenges that transgender students face at Rhodes University are not distinct from those that transgender people face at a societal level. The study revealed that being at a diverse institution like Rhodes University is quite challenging because different students from different countries, cultures, religions and many more react differently to transgender people. Gender is different for culture to culture. Moreover, it is apparent that while some students are accepting towards transgender students at Rhodes, some students are against it. The lack of understanding also seems to be another challenge that they face. When it comes to such a small space it is easy to sense when people are being judgemental towards them and it is because of that, that transgender students feel uncomfortable being in such a space.

#### 4.7.2. Gender neutral bathrooms at Rhodes University

During the study participants mentioned that they do not think Rhodes University caters for transgender students. They went as far as stating that Rhodes University as an institution seems to be liberal but it is not as liberal as they thought it was. Most of the students mentioned that there are no gender neutral toilets at Rhodes University. See for example:

*The institution itself, they do try but I don't think it's good enough. They do have neutral bathrooms, they do have transgender bathrooms I saw on the Out Rhodes page but it's not everywhere. They can make it everywhere. I don't really have a problem with the institution itself, but another thing that one of my friends did mention is that she always sometime uses the male bathroom. They also need to put sanitary pads in male bathrooms as well. This whole gender and sex thing must be deconstructed by having feminine things in male bathrooms and vice versa (Person N, 2016).*

*Maybe I just don't know any, I know there was a bathroom being built but I don't know if it has been built. I haven't heard about the bathroom and I haven't heard anything other than the students talk about it. Maybe there are things but we just don't know (Person M, 2016).*

*No. It doesn't. because if it did, they would have like unisex bathrooms. It would have unisex facilities. Rhodes would also emphasise that 'listen we understand that there are people who are a particular way and in order for them to be comfortable we want... Rhodes would enquire, they would know that okay there are students who are different and then they would try to accommodate those students by actually fulfilling some of their needs, like unisex bathrooms and all those ideas. As much as Rhodes says that, it's accepting of everyone and whatever. Truthfully*

*speaking, the acceptance is more abstract than reality. The reality part of it is by the university doing things that actually show that they are accepting (Person L, 2016).*

*Like I said, in terms of Rhodes as a place, we don't have gender neutral bathrooms, so for some transgender people that would make them a bit uncomfortable. Looking into the bathroom, there are sometimes when you go to the bathroom and you're transgender, let's say you are a drag queen, some guys would make fun of you and say "Ja are you not a girl?". Or basically if you are a girl and you dress like a male, they ask "Are you not a male?" So it's those kinds of stuff that makes it uncomfortable to be at Rhodes and also like in residences they don't speak about those kinds of stuff. Even if they talk about sex, they talk about the normal, male and female. They don't talk about transgender issues (Person C, 2016).*

*No! There's no toilets that cater for them, I mean there are no mixed residences that will allow a person to live. So by being transgender, you have to live off campus. You've to immensely fit into an assigned gender, unless you're in postgrad then. So I don't think they cater for transgender students at all (Person B, 2016).*

In 2017, there was a debate around the issue of gender neutral bathrooms at Rhodes University. Students were divided based on their knowledge, some said there was one gender neutral bathroom at Rhodes and some said there are no gender neutral toilets at Rhodes University. Similarly, the same thing happened during the course of this study, only one student seemed to know of this gender neutral toilet and the rest said Rhodes University does not have such toilets. The invisibility of these toilets is problematic, male and female toilets are so visible and accessible, but when it comes to the gender neutral toilets only a few people seem to know where they are. Because of that, the participants stated that having gender neutral bathrooms will liberate transgender students from using bathrooms that they will be uncomfortable in.

#### **4.8. Students willingness to share residences with transgender students at Rhodes University**

Currently Rhodes University has male and female residences. These residences have no option for one to choose to go to the other, for example for a trans-woman to choose to go to the female residence or for a trans-man to choose to go to a male residence when they want to. At Rhodes University there are also no residences that are set aside for transgender students, if you were born a male you will go to a male residence and if you are a female you will go to a female residence no matter what your gender identity is. One of the main goals of this dissertation is to

investigate and determine Rhodes University students' acceptance of tolerance towards transgender students at Rhodes University. One way to do it was through putting them in spaces where they will have to co-live with transgender people and see how they will feel about it. As a way of suggesting solutions to the issue of male and female residences at Rhodes University that do not accommodate for transgender students, the participants were asked if they would accept sharing their residences with transgender students. The participants' responses were as follow:

*Would I share? I would actually share some res with a transgender person, I would actually prefer that stuff to be in some res with a transgender person. Considering other students from other places, I think, we cannot accommodate everyone and change is going to be uncomfortable. So we have to realize that this is a transformation that we are trying to bring into a society, we are trying to make it a space that is comfortable for the minority as well. Because, even if you say it's for a few people, it's a few people who are really suffering at Rhodes because of this problem of not being identified as transgender. I think international students might react but we have to realize that this is our country, if we can actually educate them. It's going to take time, at least if we give it a year to just educate people, to have workshops and stuff like that. We educate international students, as well as South Africans not just international students, there are South Africans who come from very strict families. Educate them about this and most importantly give a voice to the transgender people and then you never know, it can work out if the university is serious (Person C, 2016).*

*Sure! I'm literally just thinking about the worst case scenario, one thing that would make me uncomfortable like any other female, is sharing a shower with a transgender person. But at the same time, with females it's not like we walk to the shower naked and there are females who are not comfortable with other females walking naked around them, so no I don't have a problem with sharing a shower or living space with someone who is trans (Person B, 2016).*

*I would personally share my residence as a person, but... Actually I may go back on my word. I don't feel like Rhodes as an institution would allow that, and that's unfortunate. So I don't think Rhodes does cater to the idea of transgender because they don't take that into account. That's why they classify you either as male or female, it doesn't really matter. Even the bathrooms, you're either male or female. You can't say I am male I identify myself as female and walk into a female bathroom and not cause any reaction or stir from females (Person A, 2016).*

*I don't know, I think I would, but I think it is fine. I would prefer to have residences for them because even if they put them there, some people might accept them, some people might not*

*accept them. As for me, I wouldn't mind but then still it is a man. Still, they have biological and sexual organs of a man. I really don't know, this is complicated, being transgender can change anytime. I think it is a bit complicated, what happens when they decide to change again? I am really not sure (Person D, 2016).*

*Yes, I wouldn't have a problem because I have trans friends in my dining hall, eating together in the same table (Person F, 2016).*

*I'll be okay with it; it wouldn't bother me. If you feel you're meant to be female do that. I wouldn't mind I'd probably be friends with that person (Person I, 2016).*

*Honestly in first year I would have been like "oh my God what is this, what's happening?" and then I'm used to it, now I feel like okay. I think it would really be a situation of, first year me would have been shocked and maybe uncomfortable. But now, the me now says "actually I feel like that should happen so that anyone who's first year me must just learn. I think that should happen (Person M, 2016).*

Despite the different cultures and different beliefs, the majority of the participants stated that they will not have a problem sharing residences with transgender students at Rhodes University. Having discussed the challenges and what it means to be transgender and understanding the term fully during the course of this study, the participants seemed willing to create a space that is comfortable and shows acceptance to the transgender students. Despite their willingness to share, it is also vital to note that the students who took part in this study are a small sample that is representative of the different cultures at Rhodes University. It would therefore be wise to conduct a similar research using a larger sampling of students from all cultures. In addition, the study revealed that the participants are willing and open to transform the residence space at Rhodes University so that it can accommodate the transgender students.

#### **4.9. Conclusion**

This chapter consisted of discussions that outlined the themes that emerged from the data extracts. The themes are in relation to the objectives and goals of this dissertation. The issues concerning how Rhodes University students understand transgenderism were incorporated in the first theme. The second theme dealt with how the participants understood transgender as a gender that is a social construct and how some participants could not link the two when discussing transgender individuals. Furthermore, in Chapter 2 it was discussed that one's gender identity does not determine one's sexual orientation and that people tend to confuse the two, the third

theme looked at the issue of transgenderism and sexual orientation. Moreover, this chapter considered the confusion of using correct and incorrect pronouns when referring to the transgender individuals.

The whole gender binary discourse is embedded in our cultures and societies, our cultural beliefs and how we were socialised in our society's shape how we see and view the world. A discussion about the impact and influence of culture was also incorporated to broaden the perceptions that people who are not transgender have about transgender individuals. Furthermore, because of the traditional gender binary, gender variant individuals are more prone to challenges as compared to the people who are conforming to the gender binary, challenges that transgender people face in societies and at Rhodes University were also discussed. Rhodes University is criticised for not being accommodating for transgender students, but Rhodes University will not be a university without the students, if transformation has to take place, the students must give consent and raise their opinions about something.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

#### 5.1. Concluding remarks

The main aim of this dissertation was to discuss and analyse the understandings of Rhodes University students about transgender people. In support of the main aim, I have decided to unpack broad discussions about the genders that exist. I opened the discussion with an application of the symbolic interactionism theory in order to provide a broad discussion about how individuals form meanings through interactions with others. According to Mooney, Knox and Schacht (2007) symbolic interactionism operates on a micro sociology level and it is concerned with the social psychological dynamics of individuals interacting in small groups.

During this discussion, I applied the views of different theorists that fall under the same theory and I also provided critiques of these theories. The main purpose of applying the symbolic interactionism theory was to discuss the “self”, how people form their own meaning about the “self”. I tend to agree with Dong (2008) when he states that, the meanings are learnt from other people and to some extent these meanings are shaped or reshaped by the ones using the symbols.

I also included a discussion about the social actors, being the transgender people in the case of this study. Moreover, in order to understand transgender as a gender that stands on its own as opposed to the traditional gender binary, I applied the social constructionism theory which mainly focuses on how people construct their genders. The social constructionist theory states that gender identity is a social construct as well as the result of repeated performances of the expected behaviours of one’s sex (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010: 434). Indeed, gender is socially constructed and during the socialisation period, our families, societies and culture enforce a gender binary starting from an early age. I gave examples that during primary socialisation, the gender of children depended on their sex, if one is born a male one will be taught to be masculine and if one is born a female one will be taught to act in a feminine way. Anything that is non-conforming to the traditional gender binary is considered to be deviant, not normal and many more similar sentiments. The aim of this theory was to show how the socialisation period and enforcement of the traditional gender binary shape the meanings that we have of how one has to act and behave and how one has to express oneself. Because of the traditional gender binary that is considered to be normal, people find it difficult to be receptive towards the people who do not

conform to the gender binary. From this theory, one can argue that how one understands the self is influenced by the gender binary that is enforced in different societies.

I also applied the transgender theory. According to Nagoshi & Brzuzy (2010: 413) “the transgender theory is an emerging theoretical framework on the nature of gender and gender identity in comprehending the lived experiences of transgender people”. Transgenderism is not something that is discussed a lot, or something that is understood by many. Most people are not familiar with the term and most people tend to not understand what the term alone contains. In order to understand what it means to be transgender, I applied the transgender theory. From this theory, I was able to provide definitions of the term and unpacked gender and gender identities in a broader sense. Furthermore, the theory highlighted that there are a lot of categories that fall into the umbrella term of transgender.

In order to understand what it means to be transgender, I included a discussion about the differences between sex and gender. According to Holmes (2007) sex can be defined as a biological categorization that is based primarily on reproductive potential. On the other hand, “gender refers to the roles, behaviour and attributes that are labelled as masculine or feminine by society” (Wilson et al., 2014: 1). The two terms are used in ways that are intertwined, some people understand gender to be a matter of being female or male and some understand gender as being masculine and feminine. In order to strengthen the discussion of this study, I used the discussion to highlight that gender refers to masculinity and femininity and that sex refers to being female or male. I also provided a discussion about how gender is socially constructed as opposed to being born with it.

After discussing gender, I provided a much broader discussion about transgenderism and the gender identities of transgender people. From this section, one was given a clear understanding of the terms that fall under the umbrella term of transgender and that being transgender does not mean that one is homosexual. According to Chambers (2007: 310), “Transgender is an umbrella term used to describe a range of identities and experiences, including but not limited to preoperative, postoperative and non-operative transsexual people, male and female cross dressers, intersex individuals, and men and women regardless of their sexual orientation whose appearance, behaviour, or characteristics are perceived to be different that stereotypically associated their sex assigned at birth”. Accordingly, this section provided much needed information about transgender people, transsexual people, cross-dressers and many more. The differences between all these terms were highlighted so that one can be able to distinguish the

gender identities and understand the gender variances. The chapter then ended with practical examples of the challenges that transgender people face in South Africa. The main purpose of this inclusion is to raise more awareness about how challenging it is to be transgender in societies that continue to enforce the gender binary.

Additionally, the findings that came from the analysis chapter revealed that most students do not understand what it means to be transgender and that they identify transgender people as people who are gay or lesbian. In many cases transgenderism is understood as a sexual orientation, if a female cross dresses to male clothes, that female is labelled a lesbian and if a man looks more feminine and acts in feminine ways that male is automatically labelled a gay person. According to Morrow and Messinger (2006: 4), “A person’s sexual orientation and gender expression are in themselves neutral”. Therefore, identifying a transgender person as someone who is a homosexual is not a true representation of their gender identities. The investigation into the Rhodes University students’ understandings of transgender revealed that the students who took part in the research have minimal understanding about the transgender people and their gender identities. The majority of the participants are not aware that there are more than two genders.

The findings also show that the participants are only aware of the traditional gender binary that is enforced in our societies and that their attitudes towards transgender people are more influenced by their cultural beliefs, religion and societies. Their attitudes are based on tolerance as opposed to acceptance. Most participants mentioned that in their cultures being transgender is not acceptable and in some countries it is even criminalised and referred to as a deviant behaviour that goes against the norms. The students who are not from South Africa mentioned that before they came to Rhodes University seeing a gender non-conforming person was a “taboo” for them because they were not used to it. They also mentioned that their initial attitudes towards transgender people were influenced by their cultural beliefs but because Rhodes University is diverse and that being transgender in South Africa is legal, they have grown to tolerate the gender non-conforming people. The South African participants mentioned that their African cultures do not leave space for transgender people. The findings then revealed that some students’ attitudes towards transgender people are influenced by their cultures and those who are more accepting towards transgender people are the ones who have read and understood transgenderism. Lastly, I was able to achieve the goal of analysing the students’ attitudes towards transgender students through a discussion about sharing space with them, some were hesitant and some mentioned that they would not mind sharing their living spaces with transgender people.

## 5.2. Recommendations

This dissertation revolves around the understandings of Rhodes University students about the transgender community. During the course of the interviews, the participants revealed that there are transgender students at Rhodes University and the findings revealed that the students have minimal or non-existent understanding about what it means to be transgender. The students who have knowledge about the transgender community mentioned that they acquired the minimal knowledge they have from reading about it. Moreover, the findings also revealed that transgender students are not well accommodated at Rhodes University as opposed to the students who do not identify as transgender.

Based on the findings, I recommend that Rhodes University raise more awareness about the fact that there are more than two genders. Knowledge and lessons about the many genders that exist will result in the students and other people realising that there is more to gender than the traditional gender binary. This knowledge will also save transgender people from constantly having to explain their gender to other people. Rhodes University can raise awareness about the numerous genders by adding it into the gender studies that are taught at Rhodes University, for example the Sociology of Gender Studies in the Sociology Department. If the notion is to debunk and critique, there should also be studies about how students can learn to debunk the atrocities of the traditional gender binary that is constantly enforced to us by our cultures and society. The students must be given a chance to critique the gender binary through learning. In addition, the course must also include studies around the transgender community, what it means to be transgender, where it emerged and all the information that is needed to raise awareness about their existence. This will also assist in distinguishing between sexual orientation and transgenderism, transgenderism and transsexualism and all the categories that fall under the umbrella term of transgender.

Another recommendation would be to support and encourage more movements that are inclusive of the transgender community, be it through seminars or hosting guests who identify as transgender to come and educate people about transgender people and the challenges they encounter on their daily basis. Some students are not aware of the discomfort of being asked what you are, why are you like this, which gender are you, why are you dressed this way and more. Knowing about the social challenges that transgender people face especially at Rhodes University will make a difference in improving such challenges.

The students also mentioned the lack of visibility or non-existence of gender neutral bathrooms at Rhodes University. Some students mentioned that there are no gender neutral bathrooms at Rhodes University and some said they have heard of one or there is one but no one could tell where this bathroom is located. Rhodes University can publicise the location of the bathroom and have more gender neutral toilets in a more visible and accessible area. This issue of gender neutral bathrooms has been in discussion among the students and the participants also revealed that there are students who would love to have them as they do not feel comfortable using female or male bathrooms.

It is also important to note that the students revealed that in their view Rhodes University as an institution is inclusive of the transgender students to some extent but in many cases transgender students and students who are not transgender feel like more needs to be done. For example, some students mentioned the sanitary pads movements which meant only installing pads in female bathrooms, they stated that the sanitary pads must also be made available in the male bathrooms.

Lastly, I would like recommend that Rhodes University consider the issue of residences that are only for males, and females. This research showed that some students stated that they are against the idea of sharing their residences with transgender students. The participants are from different cultures, countries and they have different beliefs but they are willing to be considerate of transgender students and understand that they also need to be catered for and be recognised as part of Rhodes University.

Apart from everything else, the discussions about transgender people keep increasing slowly but surely, there should be an increase in extensive and intensive discussions about them so that more awareness can be raised and that they become fully understood as opposed to them being ignored and referred to as homosexuals in many cases.

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## 5.4. Appendices

### 5.4.1. Appendix 1

#### **Consent Form for Participation**

I Xolelwa Thandokazi Mantungo, the person responsible for this research project hereby guarantee you that your identity will not be disclosed in the course of the study. Instead of real names, I will utilise pseudonyms. In cases where you are quoted directly, I will give you a name such as, Person A, or B, or C etc. which will be used as opposed to stating your real name. During the interview you will be recorded, it is purely for transcribing purposes, therefore you are entitled to confidentiality and anonymity.

Before the interview I will make sure that I explain what this research is about and I will explain its purpose, and goals and the interview will not begin before you get a full understanding of what this research is about. For ethical reasons, you have every right to withdraw at any stage if you feel like you cannot continue with this study. For the duration of the interview, you are free not to answer any question if you feel uncomfortable or find the question too personal. You are allowed to say when you feel like you don't understand a question and it will be asked in a way that is suitable for you. Where language tends to be a barrier, the language of your choice will be used throughout the duration of the interview. Your participation is highly appreciated and I value your participation in this research project and I also highly value your input.

The objectives and purpose of the research have been thoroughly stated and I understand them clearly. I hereby voluntarily agree to take part in a research project conducted by Xolelwa Thandokazi Mantungo.

Name :

Signature :

Date :

## 5.4.2. Appendix 2

### **In-depth Interview Questions**

1. In your own understanding, what do you understand the term transgender to mean?
2. In your own understanding, what do you think the term transsexual mean?
3. How do you identify a transgender person from someone who is transsexual?
4. How many genders do you think exist?
5. How do you think the people who identify as transgender construct their gender?
6. Have you ever seen a transgender person before?
7. What was your reaction towards them?
8. Was your reaction influenced by your own cultural beliefs?
9. Does your culture leave space for people to choose their own preferred gender identities?
10. What is it about transgender people that make you think they are transgender?
11. Do you think transgender people are gay or lesbian?
12. How do you call a transgender person who identifies more as the other gender? Do you call them by their preferred gender or you stick to what they were born with?
13. How do you think transgender people's genders are received as compared to the genders of the ones who do not identify as transgender?
14. What factors make it difficult for transgender people to express their preferred gender identities?
15. As far as you are aware, are there any transgender individuals at Rhodes University?
16. If there are transgender students at Rhodes University, how do you think they are treated as compared to those who do not identify a transgender?
17. What are the challenges that you think transgender people face at Rhodes University?
18. Do you think Rhodes University caters for individuals who identify as transgender?
19. In terms of residences, would you share a residence with a transgender person if they choose to stay in a residence that they most identify with?