"Oh, you have a 'she'?": Exploring the lived experiences of black same-sex females living in Grahamstown, South Africa.

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ABSTRACT

The South African Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of a variety of factors including race and gender and sexual orientation. This inclusion came in 1996 after an oppressive apartheid regime was overcome, also positioning the South African Constitution amongst the more liberal, especially in the wider African context. This inclusion and the contextual disparity has caused curiosity about the realities of same-sex sexualities, especially taking into consideration media reports on violence and perceived social opposition of same-sex sexualities in South Africa.

Much of this attention has motivated research studies on same-sex sexualities. Within this research, however, black female same-sex sexualities have been positioned as vulnerable and victimised within the heteronormative context, with much of this research focusing on 'corrective/curative' rape. There has however been increasing efforts in moving away from this limiting position by a select few (e.g. Zanele Muholi and Zethu Matebeni) in a more explorative direction in attempts to investigate black female sexualities as complex and expressive rather than passive.

This study is an interpretive phenomenological investigation of the lived experiences of black female same-sex sexualities and the plurality of identities that influence their everyday experiences. This took into account intersectionality, heteronormativity and queer theory, which provided a theoretical framework for this study. During the interview process, participants described their experiences as black same-sex females in a variety of contexts including their experiences and influences of external factors (such as family and university.

From the results of this research, experiences and identities of participants are presented as complex, fluid, expressive and to some extent political. Participants also expressed the difficulties encountered with misinformed friends and families and describe ways in which they assert themselves within their social and personal contexts.

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"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel". - Maya Angelou

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I can only hope that one day I can have the positive influence of helping someone towards achieving their goals the way these people (and other who's names I might not know and faces I might not remember) have.

DEDICATIONS

"I am madly in love with humans. Especially the strange ones. For it is ever so beautiful to be strange. To do things differently than others. To see things in a rare light. To me, that is such gold to carry". –Christopher Poindexter

This is dedicated to everyone that has ever felt like they did not belong and anyone that has ever been rendered voiceless.

"The free bird leaps
on the back of the wind
and floats downstream
till the current ends
and dips his wings
in the orange sun rays
and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks
down his narrow cage
can seldom see through
his bars of rage
his wings are clipped and
his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with fearful trill
of the things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom

The free bird thinks of another breeze

and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn-bright lawn
and he names the sky his own.

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom." – Maya Angelou

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Chapter 1: INTRODUCING THE CONTEXT

"It isn't that it's questionable when you speak up for the right of people with different sexual orientation. People took some part of us and used it to discriminate against us. In our case, it was our ethnicity; it's precisely the same thing for sexual orientation. People are killed because they're gay". –Desmond Tutu

1.1 Introduction

On the 10th December 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations implemented and declared the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Declaration stipulates in Article 1 that universally, all humans have the right to and "are born free and equal in dignity and rights". It was further stipulated that all humans "are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in brotherhood" (The United Nations, 1948, p.2). Article 2 goes on to add that all humans are "entitled to all rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration without distinction of any kind". Most constitutions, including the 1996 South African Constitution claim to respect the rights of all human beings. It is evident, however, that in societal actions and in the media that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other Constitutions that have followed suit are not followed in social and cultural practices. There have been contradictions and spontaneous exclusions based on a variety of factors of one party that aids to stigmatise and marginalise the other and, in so doing, impeding on the rights of another. Some current examples of this are the racial profiling in America, the sexual assaults of women in Germany, human trafficking in Namibia and South Africa, crimes committed on the basis of race, nationality and/or religion worldwide, LGBT rights and discrimination, and acts of terrorism are just a few examples of what we are confronted with on the news. Our actions towards each other as human beings are not always in the spirit of unity which renders some voiceless.

This research was motivated to a large extent by curiosity about the thoughts and actions of some and the effect on others. This curiosity extended to wanting to document the lives of those that face multiple 'othered-ness'; stories that the average person has previously not been privy to. This then became a curiosity about black lesbian lives. The opportunity was taken to provide a platform and a voice to a group of black lesbian women, to provide a

glimpse into their lived experiences. This research is an attempt at giving voice to some black lesbian women, who are thought to suffer multiple oppression in most societies.

This research paper answers a call for more research to be done on the experiences of black lesbian women in a way that does not portray a picture of violence or victimization. More specifically, this research attempts to build on Zethu Matebeni's 2011 doctoral thesis on the experience of black lesbian women in the Johannesburg context. This chapter will explore the use of language (i.e. lesbianism, blackness and womanhood) and the theoretical framework, Queer Theory, which includes intersectionality, heteronormativity, and gender performativity. Furthermore, this section will include some historical context and previous research conducted within the South African context, which will briefly include examples outside of the South African perspective to provide comparison.

1.2 Language please: Blackness, Lesbianism and Womanhood

For the most part, South Africa is a religiously conservative, heteronormative, patriarchal society with a history of racial oppression. As a result, black lesbian women face three levels of prejudice and discrimination as the "three-times 'othered'"; for being a) black, b) women and c) lesbian (Anguita, 2013, p. 490; Muholi, 2013). This section briefly unpacks these three identity categories so as to show the importance of language used, while keeping the current South African context in mind.

Blackness

Blackness is not only a physical, biological characteristic but comes with a history of oppression and violence. Franz Fanon talks about the black man being regarded as an "animal", "bad", "mean"/savage, "ugly" and "dirty". Fanon (1967, p. 110) further adds that "not only must the black man be a black man, he must also be black in relation to the white man". Blackness seems to come with a sense of being less, and in opposition to being white. This perceived opposition(-ness) seems to be constructed in a hierarchical order with blackness being inferior to whiteness with skin colour no longer just a metaphysical phenomenon, but a political struggle and tool. Sibinda (2012) echoes this sentiment when she describes that Blackness and Whiteness (I add that this goes beyond this binary and include all other racial categories) are terms used to describe different race groups and responsibility should be taken to not neglect or mislead others into thinking racial categories assume

homogeneity within those groups. Sibinda (2012) adds that there are vast differences such as language, culture and history (to name a few) that illustrate a difference within racial categories. Especially with a history of apartheid in South Africa, race is a historical, social, and political construct.

The approach currently dominating the discourse on race is a social constructionist approach. This approach asserts that race transcends metaphysical characteristics that in the past have been and are currently still being used as a means to identify groups of people and race is described as an illusion used to justify differential treatments of these groups. It further explains that social conceptualisations of race do not occur in isolation and different cultural groups formulate race differently. For these reasons Omi and Winant (2002, p. 123) suggest that "effort must be made to understand race as an unstable and 'decentred' complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle". For this reason, it is important to start "unmaking race" (Erasmus, 2008) so that different groups are not marginalised or discriminated against because of their race. This is however an ongoing process. As we live today, however, race and interpretations thereof are an everyday reality. Until such a time that race is no longer a struggle, race, and in this case, blackness, needs to be addressed in all directions (good and bad) and made visible so that changes in social thinking about race can be made. Similar to race and blackness, sexuality has political significance.

Same-sex Sexualities

Queer theory is a social (de)constructionist theory that positions sexuality as fluid, unstable and flexible (Marcus, 2005). This theory builds on Gay and Lesbian Studies and is praised and criticised for being categorically vague in an attempt to deconstruct binaries (i.e. masculine/feminine, heterosexual/homosexual) (Graber, 2001). Queer Theory suggests that doing away with these categories would allow for sexualities to be understood as on a continuum, and in so doing same-sex sexualities would no longer be positioned as in opposition to heterosexuality but rather another form of sexual identity and/or expression. In reacting to this, Guess (1995) suggests that categories should not be given up as long as same-sex sexualities are stigmatised. Lesbian as a term used has various connotations that are problematic such as the assumptions of promiscuity and value-lessness. Msibi (2009) describes that African politicians speak about same-sex sexualities (including lesbianism) in

order to devalue and render the identities invisible. This is at times to gain support of a majority conservative population. Guess (1995) adds that because of this politicisation, maintaining the term 'lesbian' challenges the hegemonic reality that politics (in some societies) tries to uphold. He goes on to add that the term 'lesbian' should not be given up as long as it remains stigmatised and holds political significance (Guess, 1995; Rump, 2001). Giving up 'lesbian' would imply retreat and surrender. Rump goes on to say that practically, using the term same-sex (over 'lesbian/gay) lumps together identity phenomena that are quite different (see LGBTIAQ+). It can however be argued that the term 'lesbian' has a limited area of reach, making it as problematic as same-sex is proposed above.

Women

Being a woman might not be as socially controversial as being lesbian. However, similarly to being lesbian and/or black, being a woman has meant being treated differently in opposition to the dominant other. This is especially true taking into account that most societies are patriarchal. Women's sexual identities and bodies have been subject to continual policing throughout history as well as in modern day media (Padake, 2013). Women are expected by society to be a certain way and if they deviate from this socially 'normed' way of being, they are retaliated against, often in the form of aggression; be it physical, emotional or sexual.

This research explicitly looks at three identity categories; race, sexuality and gender. Although people do not always consciously think about these as factors that interplay and influence lived experiences, they do. By placing these three identity categories next to each other, the black lesbian identity becomes a racialized, sexualised and gendered identity category that interplays within itself (Matebeni, 2011).

1.3 Conclusion

This chapter looked at the contextual knowledge surrounding this research. This was done by explaining the examiners reasons for conducting this research as well as giving an overview of definitions of the three identity categories that this research attempts to study.

Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

"Any fool can know. The point is to understand." — Albert Einstein

2.1 Introduction

This research draws on concepts of Queer Theory intertwined with heteronormativity and intersectionality as a theoretical background upon which this research is based. To begin with, intersectionality and identity are introduced as part of the theoretical framework, after which Queer Theory and heteronormativity will be discussed.

2.2 Theorising Same- Sex Sexualities

Over the years it has been theorised that the sexual identities of people who identify as heterosexual and those that identify as somewhere on the LGBTIAQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Asexual, Queer/Questioning, and more) spectrum develop differently. Two models of development of same-sex sexual identities have been used popularly in this sense. Cass (1979), attempted to explain sexual identity development in same-sex sexualities using a six stage model, based on the assumption that people were able to form positive same-sex sexual identities. This model was also based on an individual's perception of their own behaviour depending on their social surroundings. Simply put, Cass' (1979) model positions identity as a process. Cooper and Brubacker (2005) on the other hand, contest "identity' as a concept, especially due to its seemingly elusive nature. To some extent this points to the fact that identities cannot be measured, and do not seem to be consistent over time. In this argument it is also worth noting that identities seem to be linked to social influences, which in themselves are also ever changing. This instability can also be linked to the fact that people have multiple identities that interact amongst each other and with external factors at any given time. This multitude and interaction can be understood as an aspect of intersectionality.

Intersectionality has been criticised to have multiple definitions (Crenshaw, 1989). However, these multiple definitions could also point to the complexity of the concept, and also how it is played out in reality. Intersectionality is understood to be an interplay between multiple identities (McCall, 2005) and a process that occurs where these multiple identities meet

(Choo & Feree, 2010). Intersectionality gives an alternative to the dominant understanding of identities, where relationships between race, gender, class and sexuality and numerous other identities are superficially categorised for purposes of examination and at times politics (McCall, 2005). In reality, according to theories on intersectionality, these identities occur simultaneously, and can therefore not be separated or categorized. Black lesbian women have multiple identities, and as a result of this, are marginalised, ignored and at times retaliated against with violence and abuse, because they do not fit into the 'norm' of being white, male and heterosexual.

Foucault's writing plays a vital role in the development of Queer Theory as he became prominent in discourses around gender and sexuality. Foucault (1997) explains that sexuality and gender are social constructs and as such are constantly evolving as they do not have clear demarcations or boundaries in time. Additional to the fact that these social constructs are linked to politics, which is an ever evolving practice, Foucault argues that one cannot put constructs such as these in binary opposition. This, he argues, is because social identities are employed as a way to maintain social control over conceptions of identities to guarantee that they suit the heteronormative ideal. Foucault (1997) further adds that discourses, similar to queer and feminist discourse, create opportunities to form, reinforce and reproduce old and new identities. This speaks directly to Foucault's (1997) dual conceptualisation of power, as an oppressive force towards minorities, while it can also be used as an empowering force to resist, challenge and transform the same oppressive systems of power. An example of this are the systems that work to maintain heteronormativity, such as the current African political climate against same-sex sexualities. These powers in turn also have influential power over the expression of identities.

Queer theory offers a post- modern perspective and allows for a critique of the construction of identities (Jagose & Seidman, 2005). Jagose and Seidman (2005) go on to describe that Queer Theory sees identity categories as unstable and incoherent social constructions and as such attempts to deconstruct these identity binaries (i.e. male/female, feminine/masculine, heterosexual/queer etc.). Within queer theory, the focus is on the excluded and the devalued counterparts of these binary systems as opposed to the socially privileged or dominant.

Eagleton (1983) postulates that the illusion of dominance is dependent on the exclusion of the opposite, and therefore an opposition between the dominant "one" and the alternative "other".

Queer theory attempts to deconstruct terminology used by society to disempower minorities. Eagleton (1983) explains that minorities are disempowered through the exaggeration or ignoring of contexts and knowledge about their circumstances. An example of this is the term "un-African". Van Zyl (2011) argues that contrary to societal beliefs that same-sex sexualities are a modern fashion trend or a colonial import, same-sex sexualities and relationships are, not new to Africa, but rather same-sex sexual practices existed pre-colonialism and, therefore, one cannot imply that same-sex sexualities resulted from exposure to 'western' societies. Reddy (2001) goes a step further to say that colonialization did not bring with it or inspire same-sex sexualities/practices nor are same-sex sexualities deviant. To the contrary, Reddy (2001) argues that colonialism brought with it a strong sense of heteronormative dominance and oppression. Colonialism brought with it religion, specifically Christianity, which to a large extent is conservative and opposed to same-sex sexualities. South Africa echoes these conservative, largely religious views which work to marginalise people that identify and perform in a way that deviates from the heteronormative, which includes lesbian women.

Queen, Farrell and Gupta (2004) state that one cannot understand same-sex sexualities without understanding heteronormativity. Heteronormativity refers to the ideology, or dominant way of thinking, where social institutions and policies reinforce the idea that human beings fall into two distinct categories of sex and gender: male/man and female/woman. The purpose of maintaining and reinforcing this binary is to ensure that heterosexuality is regarded as the most natural, normal, moral, and acceptable way of being. As such, anyone that does not fit within this normative stance is ignored, silenced or becomes a victim of violence. Heteronormativity is different from homophobia; however, homophobic behaviour is the result of living within a heteronormative society. Homophobia refers to behaviours which stem from the prejudiced and discriminatory belief that same-sex sexualities are unnatural, amoral and 'unAfrican' and, as such, do not deserve the same rights that heterosexual groups do, and includes verbal, emotional, sexual and/or physical violence

(Graham & Kiguwa, 2004; Luthra, 2004). In many ways black lesbian women deviate from the heteronormative system and face retaliation as a result.

Fish (2008), explains that research around experiences of women have focused primarily on white, middle class, able-bodied, heterosexual women. These findings are also often used in ideas of feminism and women empowerment. Because of this, information around women as a group is often misleading, since the intersection of identities is not taken into consideration. As mentioned previously, Crenshaw (1993), explains that people have multiple, simultaneous identities, and as a result of these identities, people may experience oppression and inequality in different ways. This means that the experiences of a black lesbian woman would differ from that of a white lesbian women and black heterosexual women.

2.3 South African Context of Same-Sex Sexualities: Constitution vs the people

The current South African Constitution is a far cry from what it was before 1996, with the eradication of the apartheid regime. Prior to the inclusion in the current constitution, similarly to interracial relationships, same-sex sexualities were violently oppressed during apartheid, and conduct relating to same-sex sexualities was not only excluded from legal recognition across races, but was also deemed a punishable crime during the apartheid era (Christiansen, 2000; Louw, 1997; Reddy, 2009). This, at the time, meant that part of the population had to hide their sexual identities for fear of punishment. This also had the effect of instilling misconceived notions about same-sex sexualities that are felt to this day.

At the end of apartheid, however, the 1996 Constitution promised to ensure that all South Africans be granted equal rights and be liberated from any form of discrimination. This along with the international pressure and extensive lobbying from South African gay rights activists such as Simon Nkoli, 'sexual orientation' was explicitly included in what became one of the most liberal Constitutions to date (Christiansen, 2000; Louw, 1997). As it currently stands, the 1996 South African Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of race and gender amongst other human characteristics; this was done in efforts to protect against oppression of any kind reminiscent of apartheid. The Constitution extends this protection, to explicitly include protection against discrimination on the basis of one's 'sexual orientation' in the Equality Clause of the 1996 Constitution (Act 108, 1996).

There is, however, an indication in both research and media that South African society does not echo the Constitutional promise of equality and non-discrimination. This is evident in the hostility and violence directed towards the LGBTIAQ+ community in post-apartheid South Africa (Arndt & Bruin, 2006). This points to the fact that social attitudes towards same-sex sexualities do not always support this liberal stance portrayed by the Constitution. A recent international survey (PewResearchCentre, 2013) to establish the level of acceptance of same-sex sexualities globally showed that even though South African legislation prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, only 32% of the population are of the opinion that same-sex sexualities are acceptable. This shows that the liberal Constitution of South Africa is not echoed by public opinion.

This is further supported by research done in South Africa, which shows that the public still, after almost twenty years, is not accepting of same-sex sexualities as the Constitution would allow for (cf. Arndt & Bruin, 2006; Reid, 2003). In reality, the representation of legal rights in laws and constitutions and their integration into everyday lives of people are two different and sometimes conflicting entities (Duarte, 1994, as cited in in Louw, 1997). South Africa remains a largely conservative country and, for this reason, the liberal constitution is not in line with the practices and the beliefs of the people that have to act in accordance with the laws. In light of this, same-sex sexual conduct and relationships are still regarded as deviant, immoral and 'un-African' in both cultural, traditional and religious paradigms (Graham & Kiguwa, 2004; Graziano, 2004).

A study conducted by Wong (1984) suggested that exposure to information, especially at a tertiary level, should breed more understanding and acceptance regardless of gender. However, a 2006 survey by Arndt and Bruin to establish attitudes towards same-sex sexualities amongst 880 students in Johannesburg, showed that there are still negative attitudes towards same-sex sexualities, with these negative attitudes being particularly strong amongst male students. (Sears, 1997; Wellings, Field, Johnson & Wadsworth, 1994). Majority of research supports the findings that discrimination and negative attitudes are still present in modern day South Africa. Similarly, Reid (2003) echoes that negative attitudes towards same-sex sexualities still exist and adds that modern day same-sex relationships are

pinpointed and dismissed as being a "fashionable" practice instead of an integral part of identities. The consequence in this case is then on the identities that are not being taken seriously and are being dismissed and ridiculed. This is however not to say that there has been no change in the acceptance of same-sex relationships since apartheid and it must be acknowledge that the negative attitudes towards same-sex sexualities are not isolated to the South African context but also exist in the majority of states in so-called 'developed' countries such as America.

The United States (USA) in this case lends itself as comparison not only because of the accessibility of American literature and popular culture in the South African context, but also due to continuous media presence around legalisation of "gay marriage" country wide in June 2015 and celebrity advocacy for same-sex equality. Although somewhat different to the South African context, the USA is still somewhat conservative with religious influences that call for modesty and lend themselves to a normative culture with many religious groups protesting for the legalisation of same sex marriages to be reversed as it is seen as "immoral" and "unnatural". It should also be acknowledged, however, some leading religious figures have taken a stance against discrimination against same-sex sexualities (Bowleg, 2008). This further illustrates the complexity of the situation. Although tolerance seems to have increased in the USA, especially with increased visibility and advocacy, Van Wormer (2016) argues that even with the remarkable advances in recent years, there is still much discrimination directed towards non-normative sexualities.

2.3 Sexual Identities and Performances of Black Lesbian Women in South Africa

Black sexualities historically have been silenced and same-sex sexualities have a history of being criminalized in South Africa, especially under apartheid (Christiansen, 2000; Padake, 2013). Many African cultures do not allow for discussions around sex and sexuality as it is seen as something that should be kept private. This means that culturally and socially, black lesbian women are not given much of a platform to express their sexualities and, when it is done, it is regarded as going against group norms around what is acceptable as a person in the world, again causing people to firmly adhere to a heteronormative system.

Nel and Judge (2008) offer an explanation for homophobic victimisation They state that by coming out as gay and people accepting same-sex sexualities, patriarchal gender roles are being challenged, this in turn leads to homophobic victimisation. Walker (2005) adds to this arguing that 'Liberal' sexualities have contradictory consequences with regards to sex, sexuality, masculinity and femininity in an otherwise orthodox patriarchal South Africa (Walker, 2005). This is allowing for new forms of- and a redefining of the concept of masculinity. He proposes that this is threatening to the male counterpart role and position of women, especially lesbian women. There are then misguided efforts in trying to control this change, at times perhaps through violence.

'Corrective rape' is an increasingly problematic issue in South Africa, and the term refers to a specific kind of hate crime where men rape women who are presumed to be lesbian due to their gender non-conforming behaviour, in an attempt to convert them to heterosexuality (Martin, Kelly, Turquet, & Ross, 2009). Padake (2013) reacts to this phenomenon stating that 'corrective rape' is not and should not be seen as different from rape perpetuated against heterosexual women, as all rape in a sense is 'corrective'. Having said that, incidents of 'corrective rape' seem to be on the increase and research has shown that 'corrective rape' and violence in general is largely perpetrated against black lesbian women. Having said that, being victims or potential victims of violence is not the sole experience of being a black lesbian woman in South Africa. Literature and studies however seem to focus on black same-sex identities as being the primary victims of violence.

An example of such a study is that of Graziano (2004). The findings of the research conducted in Johannesburg showed that black gay men and lesbian women feel they have to "surrender their black identity" in order to fit into the 'mainstream' (predominantly white) LGBTIAQ+ community (Graziano, 2004, p. 308). This is partly does to the fact that violent acts are reported predominantly in township areas. The suggestion is not that this is because of race, but partly because of the lack of resources, meaning a lack of transport, and lack of street lights, which would make a person more vulnerable to acts of violence. This is not to say that the presence of resources makes violence non-existent, this is merely to show that the lack of resources may increase the likelihood of attacks. It can be suggested, to some extent, that because of research and the amount of research shedding light on white lesbian relationships, there seems to be a better understanding and wider acceptance of white lesbian

women as opposed to their black counterpart. As such, interracial relationships in the same-sex context could be a way of finding inclusion. Participants in Graziano's (2004) study stated that interracial dating was very common, because black gay men and lesbian women turned to their white counterparts for, amongst other needs, financial security and the white counterpart to them for sex.

Findings of Graziano's (2004) also showed that family support was reported to be problematic, with most participants stating that they were encouraged by their families to see a Sangoma, to heal them of their sexual orientation. The reactions of families seem to reiterate wider societal rejection of same-sex identities. While families and communities were reported as being discriminatory, the study also found that there are churches in participants' communities which are non-discriminatory towards same-sex sexualities. This shows that there is increasingly more inclusion and acceptance and tolerance of same-sex sexualities in communities however small it may appear. It seems then, that the lives of black lesbian women in South Africa are a lot more complex than just being focused or concerned with violence and being ignored (Reid, 2003).

In addition to the various issues faced by black LGBTIAQ+ people mentioned above, some research has also been conducted on the gender performativity of black lesbian women in particular. Before presenting some of these studies, it is important to understand that as part of the Queer Theory framework, Judith Butler (1993) expresses that femininity does not mean woman. She describes that social constructions of gender are not an explanation of biological sex. Rather than this, it is expressed that there are multiple expressions of gender, which are performances rather than a biological attribute. An example of this is said to be the 'problematic' lesbian 'butch' performance, where women take on what is thought to be a traditionally male role and way of dressing. This is said to be problematic for traditional and conservative ideas of gender identities, because it especially challenges hegemonic male performances. The 'butch' performance is then also seen as proof that gender roles are performed (Butler, 1993, Bell et. al., 1994; Moore, 2006).

Examples of studies that talk about how gender non-conforming individuals are particularly vulnerable to violence are Graziano (2004) and Nel and Judge (2008) to name a few. Zethu

Matebeni (2011) however argues that the choices to perform specific gender expressions is an intentional one and that this non-conformity acts to help prevent violent acts. An example of this is that, practically, 'masculine' clothing (pants with sneakers) makes it easier to fight and/or run than a dress with high heel shoes. Matebeni (2011) goes on to argue that identities can be blurred by style and meanings accompanying stylistic expression and therefore bring about different meanings to outward reality. This stylistic expression (i.e. the choice of clothing) are one of many ways that gender is performed. Nonetheless, performances including outward/style expressions of these performances are a vital part in identities. Moore (2006) argues that performances are a serious process in renegotiating gender and acceptance of gender roles. In addition, as Munoz (1999) argues, performativity is a vital survival strategy that can be used by minorities. Performances can be used to demonstrate conformity or non-conformity for various reasons including shielding oneself from societal scrutiny and attack or to better allow for inclusion.

This research hopes to begin exploring the lives of black lesbian women in a small town in South Africa where the focus is not just on the violence they may face. Furthermore, since research focuses predominantly on black lesbian women in township settings, this research hopes to explore the experiences of black lesbian women studying at Rhodes University, a largely middle-to-upper class social setting which is still largely heteronormative and historically white.

2.4 Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter, the motivation behind conducting this study and choosing this subject matter was discussed. This chapter explored various theories surrounding same-sex sexualities, race and gender expressions, with a focus on queer theory, heteronormativity and intersectionality. Additionally, previous studies were explored. The limited exploration of black female same-sex sexualities was explored, criticising that often times when they were reported on, black female same-sex sexualities have been positioned as victims of violent behaviour, with sexual violence being on the increase. This chapter also acknowledges that the context in which previous research as well as that of this current study are ever changing. The next chapter will look at the methodology that will be used to make this study a reality.

Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

"Every discourse, even a poetic or oracular sentence, carries with it a system of rules for producing analogous things and thus an outline of methodology". - Jacques Derrida

3.1 Aims of this Research

This research was a qualitative study within a social constructionist paradigm, using Queer Theory, heteronormativity, and intersectionality as a theoretical framework, and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the method of analysis. The combination of Queer Theory and intersectionality with IPA was useful for this research as it provided an in-depth understanding around the experiences of black lesbian women, which took into account the differences within this group.

The objective of this research was to investigate the lived experience of black lesbian women studying within a historically white university in a small town in the Eastern Cape, while understanding how this identity influenced the everyday lived experiences of the participants. Additionally, this research aimed to build on existing literature and research focusing on black lesbian sexualities without setting out to prove or disprove a hypothesis. This research in many ways answered the call for continued exploration of black lesbian lives in literature and in Zethu Matebeni's 2011 study exploring the experiences of black lesbian sexualities in Johannesburg, which was presented in the first chapter. This call to a large extent also influenced the research questions discussed in the next chapter.

3.2 Research Questions

In trying to find out what aspects of black female same-sex sexualities to explore, the following questions are set out to be answered in this interpretive phenomenological exploration:

How do participants describe themselves in terms of race, gender and sexuality?

What is life like as a black lesbian woman living in Grahamstown as a student?

In what ways (if any) do the identities of 'black', 'women' and 'lesbian' intersect in the everyday lives of black lesbian women?

3.3 Using Interpretive Phenomenological Analytic Methods

This qualitative study used IPA methodology with the theoretical framing of Queer Theory, heteronormativity, and intersectionality, as discussed in Chapter 1. This section of the methodology chapter discusses IPA as a suitable methodology for this research.

IPA recognises the sensitive nature of conversations around non normative populations, and allows for an understanding of this while challenging the understandings based on othering of people and the medicalising and/or pathologising of behaviours. For this reason, after careful consideration and supervision, IPA was used in this research as a better suited methodology.

IPA as an analytic method arose after Johnathan Smith saw a need for a methodological approach that is both experimental and experiential within the field of Psychology. In fathering this methodology, Smith was influenced by many other theories and used these in a way to operationalise IPA. Among these theories was phenomenology (experience) and hermeneutics (interpretations). Along with ideographic (a focus on individual), phenomenology and hermeneutics are the three key areas of focus of IPA.

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) describe IPA as an approach is devoted to examining how people make sense of relevant life experiences. During this process smaller, everyday experiences are not overlooked and past events are taken note of as they influence current experiences. Additionally, IPA allows for both researcher and participant to engage with experiences in a way that reflects on the experience. In simplified terms, IPA focuses on experiences, past and present and allows for these to be shared and received in a reflective process. Criticism has been directed towards IPA for not providing explanations of any particular phenomenon (Willig, 2008). This point is valid, however, the lack of specific proposed theory, allows studies, such as this one with Queer Theory, to incorporate better

suited theory. In so doing, researchers are better able to evaluate IPA as a methodology, which is theoretically flexible.

3.3.1 IPA as a Method

This section gives a general overview of the methodological process of IPA, with details of how this was implemented in this study explained in other sections of this chapter. As mentioned before, IPA is idiographic, for this reason, it is proposed that results be based on individual interviews which were semi structured, so as to ensure that participants had a say in what they are disclosing (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009). Typically a homogeneous, purposefully selected group is selected, so as to not only pay attention to each individual encounter, but also allows for similarities and differences between each individual encounter to be explored. Homogenous groups also allow for the same phenomena to be investigated. Because of the small group selected, using IPA did not allow for generalisation for the larger population to be made based on findings. The aim of using IPA was to show that individuals that belong to a larger population have certain experiences, which may or may not have been similar to others. In line with this, hypotheses were not made. It is important to understand that experiences are situated in context, which means they are unique to the individual. This also meant that it was impossible for unique individual perspectives to be shared.

In my experience this was methodological challenge, because the perspective of the participant was and remains unique and the researcher has to play a double role of understanding what is being described while also trying to make sense of the participant's experience (Reid et al., 2005). It was however not possible to insert oneself into another person's "life world" (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 53), as the way we experience another person's experience is based on our own experiences, understandings, pre-existing knowledge and values, which were important in the analysis stage (Shaw, 2004). Simply put "the participants are trying to make sense of their world, the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world" (Smith and Osborn, 2008, p. 53).

In adopting this duel position, the researcher tried to make sense of the information given by participants by drawing on their own interpretations and theoretical understanding and used verbatim interview quotes to illustrate a participant's real life experience. For this reason, a continuous reflective process should be engaged in to allow for fair results where the researcher is aware of their own biases and limitations (Finlay, 2008). In this reflective process, supervision also becomes an important process.

3.4 Participants

Firstly, it was important to explain that because of convenience due to difficulties with mobilisation, familiarity (although limited) and what I believed was better accessibility to participants, Rhodes University students were selected as a general population for this research. Keeping in mind that IPA calls for a specific, purposeful participant selection.

IPA proposes that preferably 3-6 participants be used as the participation size for a study using IPA (Smith et al, 2009). Initially this study set out to use five undergraduate students as participants, however three participants volunteered, of which 2 were included in this study, which still provided useful and quality information. Because this was a 'mini-thesis', having three participants and not more did not significantly impact on the quality of the study. It proved continuously difficult to recruit participants for this study. In hindsight, this could, to some extent be attributed to the language used in the title and invitation to participants (Appendix 1). Many that commented on, but did not opt to participate, pointed out the problematic language of using lesbian, as they did not identity as lesbian for cultural and political reasons. In the end, 'lesbian' was used loosely to describe female same-sex sexualities. Due to challenges encountered in finding participants, the sampling criteria was changed to include any level of study and participants of female same-sex sexualities.

The initial plan was to recruit participants from the OutRhodes society, which is a student society at Rhodes University that advocates for LGBTIAQ+ rights at the university and uses a Facebook group to relay information to past and current members. However, only one participant was recruited through this process, even after repeated posts on the group page. After this no other participants volunteered for the study. This meant that alternative means

of recruiting participants had to be considered. The solution to this was spreading information about the research through word of mouth, which yielded two more participants after lengthy efforts.

It remained intriguing to use university students, partly because of accessibility, but also because of the interesting notion that people started exploring sexualities and sexual orientations during university years (Arndt & Bruin, 2006). This knowledge suggested that, during this time, students are possibly more reflective and actively aware of their identities. When students are more reflective about their own identities and how this places them in a larger context, it is possible that they engage with their own personal experiences more readily. This helped this research move away from a focus on black lesbian women being portrayed as victims of violence (Gontek, 2009). That being said, all participants were of and/or above the legal age of consent, they were given information on the purpose of this study after which they gave written consent (Appendix 2), and signed a permission to record the interview form (Appendix 3). They were also given the option of withdrawing their participation at any time.

Demographically, the three participants were between the ages of 25 and 27. As mentioned, the two participants included in this study were students at Rhodes University with Martha, being an honours student and Monika an undergraduate student. Only two participants were included in this study, after the audio recording of the third participant was electronically corrupted and could not be recovered. They both identified themselves as black female South African nationals. In terms of sexual identity, they both identified having same-sex sexualities, describing that they did not want to be called 'lesbian' rather preferring to identify as 'fluid' or not wanting to be "boxed' into any sexual identity category.

The identities of the three women that took apart in this study will remain protected. Briefly reflecting on working with them, however, they had three distinct ways of engaging. The participants who will hence forth be referred to as Margret (participant 0), Martha (participant 1) and Monika (participant 2), when referring to them as individuals, all seemed interested in the study once it was explained to them. Margret came across as timid and shy and was at the

time of interviewing an undergraduate student. Martha was more confident and well-read in issues regarding same-sex sexualities and was very self-aware and reflective. Monika, took a little longer than the other two participants to become comfortable in the interview space and, while she was insightful, she remained somewhat guarded.

3.5 Data Collection

As explained above, the data collection process was challenging, because it was difficult to find participants. Using IPA methods, participants engaged in a semi-structured interviews which were between 30 minutes and 1 hour depending on how engaging the participants were in the process. These interviews were conducted in English. This is appropriate being that the language of instruction at Rhodes University is English. Semi structured interviews are described as a beneficial data collection technique when trying to capture experiences, concerns, perceptions and opinions of participants (Barriball & While, 1994; Guest, Brunce &Johnson, 2006; Laforest, 2009). This has the advantage of allowing thoughts and feelings to be conveyed while maintaining a structure that is true to the needs of this research. I found the flexible structure to be helpful as it provided enough structure that I could guide conversations in the general direction of my research topic, and enough flexibility for participants to have a stake in what was said during the interview. In addition to this, participants were given choice regarding where they would feel more comfortable conducting interviews. To this end interviews were conducted in participant's homes and the Rhodes University Psychology Clinic.

This process also had some disadvantages. Some disadvantages include that with an interview schedule, the conversation was somewhat unnatural as it was partly directed by the interviewer, which influenced the information shared. The interview schedule that guided the interviewing process is attached in Appendix 4.

All interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the participants and they were informed that these recordings would be deleted once transcribed verbatim. This along with any identifying information was erased from documents and transcriptions. Recordings were transcribed verbatim soon after the interviews, which was helpful as I was still able to reflect

upon the interview process with a fresh memory. This was also helpful in making out some of the inaudible words on the audio recording.

As a basic reflection on the data collection process, training for the coursework part the M.A (clinical psychology) component had been helpful, as that knowledge could be harvested in being able to formulate new questions as new information was received. In addition to this, the previous training allowed for me to be both present and reflective in the moment so as to be cognisant of my own misguided or pre-informed knowledge. It is my opinion that this had helped increase the quality of my interactions and allowed me to be actively present, which I believe would have been limited without this training. This was a point of concern for me because of the sensitive nature of sex and sexualities.

In addition to this, I had limited exposure to black female same-sex sexualities, let alone having purposeful conversations. This became a concern that could only be addressed by explaining this to participants and allowing them to interject when they felt necessary. This allowed me to be comfortable in allowing participants to relay their experiences without being overly reliant on theory because of my own anxieties (see Storey, 2007). This allowed for a comfortable, engaging, reflective, critical engagement. The experience of this process made the analysis stage of this research exciting and intriguing. This analysis process is discussed in the following chapter. The ethical considerations impacting this study will be discussed in the next section.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

In considering the ethics related to this study and research in general Willig's (2008) guidelines to ethically sound research were considered. The issues of informed consent and voluntary participation were considered. As mentioned above, all participants were voluntary and were given information on the study and the purpose thereof, and asked to sign informed consent forms (Appendix 2& 3), which required them to be above the age of 18. Participants were also given the opportunity to ask any questions regarding the research, and the process remained as transparent as possible, especially because no deception was required as part of this research. Participants were also informed that they could opt out of the study when and if they wanted to.

Wassenaar (2006) complimented the above by adding that it is important to gain individual and institutional consent (where possible) in order to prevent misuse of power of researchers. Therefore, consent was also sought from the corresponding university (Rhodes University) and organisations (OutRhodes) as well as ethical approval from the ethics committee of the psychology department. Interviews were audio tape recorded, which participants had to consent to in writing (Appendix 2& 3). This information was transcribed and audiotapes deleted.

Ethically, it was essential to be aware of potential benefits and costs that could result from this research (Leary, 1991). The potential benefits include contributions to literature and a better understanding of same-sex sexualities, especially black female sexualities; this in a broader sense was beneficial for both participants and researcher. The obligation to protect participants' identities was respected through the use of pseudonyms and redacting any identifying information (Ryen, 2011). Potential costs or harm was limited to discomfort due to the sensitive nature of the research. Because discourse around sexuality is a sensitive one, participants might be uncomfortable sharing their experience. For this reason, my supervisor and I carefully considered how to approach interviews in a way that would cause as little harm as possible. Ryen (2004) also suggests that it is in the best interest of ethics, that a good relationship of trust between researcher and participant be maintained in order to minimize harm. As a clinical psychology student, I have exposure to similar settings, where I have to deal with sensitive topics, I was able to pick up on discomfort and tried to minimise this as much as possible by allowing participants to be more comfortable with me without feeling obliged to continue if they felt that would be best for them.

In the initial stages, it was carefully considered whether or not there were other ways to retrieve information, which would cause less harm to participants. It was decided early on, however that other means such as questionnaires or surveys would not provide the rich detail that semi-structured interviews did. These alternatives would also not have been suited for the topic or purpose of this research topic. Additionally, for ethical reasons, participants were not asked for or given any rewards for their participation. Cold-drinks and snacks, however, were provided during the interview process.

3.7 Trustworthiness and Credibility

In qualitative research, unlike quantitative research, validity and reliability is measured as "trustworthiness, rigor and quality" (Golafshani, 2003, p. 604). The key word is rigor, which can be described as a quality that is thorough and careful. The most commonly used explanation are the four proposed criteria to ensure rigor in qualitative research by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose that these four criterion are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

The criteria for credibility, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985) involves establishing that the results of qualitative research are credible or believable from the perspective of the research participants. Since it is their narratives that are being conveyed, they are the only ones that can truly confirm how credibly the story is. Since, however, participants in this study remain anonymous and contact has not been, this is a difficult criteria to follow up on. However, all analyses and conclusions from the analysis have been grounded in the extracts from the participants' interviews and the hope is that participants are able to access this study once published and are able to critically evaluate what has been described in this study and an interactive feedback can transpire.

Transferability describes the degree to which findings of the study can be generalised or transferred to other contexts or settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability is said to be amplified when the research context and methodology is thorough and described in full, making it possible for others to use this information in different contexts. It then becomes the responsibility of the person using that information to judge the sensibility of that transfer of information. This means that the responsibility of generalisability of information is a shared venture between multiple researchers. This research assumes to be thorough enough for this process to take place. This aspect would comparatively be the reliability criteria in traditional quantitative studies. Concerning itself with the ability to get the same result multiple times. The probability of this happening however, are slim given the ever changing aspect of

knowledge and societies in general. The current study acknowledges that contexts are ever changing.

The concept of dependability highlights a need for researcher to account for continuous changes in the context in which the research has taken place (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which this study does by describing and acknowledging these changes. It is an assumption of qualitative research that every study allows for unique perspectives regarding a number of topics. This is where confirmability is involved. Confirmability highlights the degree to which research findings can be confirmed by other sources. This criteria was reflected upon during multiple stages of this research. This is aspect was integrated by engaging in relevant supervision including peer supervision as well as continuously checking the data in this study. This also involved keeping a reflexive journal to continue being cognisant of biases or distortions.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter looked at the methodology used in this study and engaged with some of the problems associated with using IPA as a methodology. This chapter also introduced the reader to the participants in this study while acknowledging ethical and rigor related considerations. Participants shared their own experiences with little participation from the researcher. Additionally, this research has been supervised, meaning that not only has the entire research process been overseen by a second, and more experienced researcher, but the content and themes picked up have been evaluated by this second party. Additionally, research bias has been minimized through supervision but also by grounding the analyses of themes in the participants' own words. These themes will be selected based on topics that came up in both interviews. The next chapter looks at the process of analysis of this research with a strong reflective component.

Chapter 4: DATA ANALYSIS

"Without reflection, we go blindly on our way, creating more unintended consequences, and failing to achieve anything useful". – Margaret J. Wheatley

4.1 Introduction

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) allows the researcher flexibility and creativity, making unique results. As a novice researcher, however, in terms of research, literature and context, I adopted IPA outlines proposed by Smith et al. (2009) to get me better acquainted with the process. This made the process seem less intimidating, which it can sometimes become. This chapter discusses the process of analysing the data with some descriptive and reflective processes. It describes the process engaged in after data was collected to elicit the findings presented in the next chapter. In reading other research papers of the same length and purpose, note has been taken that some have integrated the data analysis and findings chapters into one chapter and have to some extend neglected to give the reader insight into their reflections of the data analysis process. Because of the importance of process and reflection when using IPA, describing how the data was analysed becomes an important aspect of the research. Another reason for having a separate data analysis chapter is to give

the reader a better understanding of my interpretations, which are largely subjective (keeping in mind criteria of IPA) by making the analytic process more transparent. This subjectivity assumes that traditional criteria for evaluating research qualitatively, largely based on the notion that the researcher remains objective and distanced, is unrealistic (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992).

4.2 Analysing participants' interviews

As discussed in the previous chapter, the process of analysis was a lengthy one that required not only new knowledge, but also confidence in sometimes unfamiliar aspects. This section describes the process of analysing the interviews of participants.

1. Initial encounter with participants (observations)

This stage of analysis requires the researcher to build a relationship with participants and be observant of the surroundings. This stage also denotes the process of collecting data, which includes the interview and audio recordings of said interviews. Part of this stage is also being aware of any possible mechanical problems such as having the appropriate documents and materials and being able to use the recording equipment adequately. These aspects were discussed in the methodology chapter. This section will focus more on researcher observations during the interview.

Participant 1 (pseudonym: Martha) was initially apprehensive about participating and initially only wanted to speak to the researcher to gain information about the topic being researched. After a short discussion, she agreed to participate voluntarily. Martha found out about the research by word of mouth. Martha is a young female currently studying at Rhodes university. She was friendly and cooperative. She was open and building a relationship with her was relatively quick. Martha came across as distant initially, but became less guarded fairly quickly. Martha seemed well read in matters concerning same-sex sexualities which is evident in her use of language and is quite confident in her understanding of self. Martha wore her hair short (about 1cm of hair), she had no make-up on and was well groomed (I took particular notice of her well-groomed eye brows). She is slender in build. Martha wore comfortable clothing which I can only describe as androgynous.

Participant 2 (pseudonym: Monika) is in the same age range as Monika, she found out about the research through a social media platform and reached out to the researcher. Monika is currently a student at Rhodes University. Monika took a little longer become less guarded and open up to the researcher. This could however be as a result of being less confident in her use of the English language. Monika seemed reserved, but not shy. She did however come across as being self-conscious. This could, however, be a result of the mechanical nature of a research relationship. Monika seemed somewhat guarded as she often had her arms crossed against her chest. Monika seemed to have a good social awareness of herself in terms of sexuality. Monika wore her hair in shoulder length dreadlocks. Her attire can be described as athletic, and her build is also noted to be athletic with broader shoulders.

Participant 3 (pseudonym: Margret) - A third participant was interviewed for this study, however there were technical difficulties as the file containing her interview was corrupted. This remained the case even after a computer specialist was consulted- nothing could be done. As a result the audio recording could not be opened and was therefore not transcribed. My observations during the interview were however documented in the reflective journal and are as follows:

Margret participated after replying to a post on a social media platform. Margret engaged well, although she came across as shy and reserved. Margret came across as being less self-aware during the interview process. Unlike the other two participants who opted to describe their sexualities as 'fluid' or not liking to 'categorise' themselves in terms of sexuality, Margret identified as 'lesbian'. Interviewing Margret involved much encouragement and participation of the researcher. Margret also seemed self-conscious. Margret seemed to seek acknowledgement from the researcher as she often looked uncertain when the researcher did not encourage her to continue speaking. Margret wore her hair tied back in a ponytail. She wore denim jeans and a simple causal t-shirt which was layered with a pink cardigan. Her style can be described as casual.

Because her recording was lost, however, Margret's interview was not analysed. As a result of this only two interviews went thought the analytic process. Having said that, the following three stages will be described together (stages 2, 3 and 4).

2. Identifying themes
3. Clustering themes
4. Comparing and contrasting themes

After interviews were conducted, they were transcribed. The first round of transcribing included all audible information including laughter, pauses, sighing, repeated or incomplete words and sentences etc. When I looked at this information I realised how different spoken and written language are. Our brains seem to make sense of errors made in speaking such as incomplete sentences, which does not translate when the words are put on paper. With this in mind, I set out to 'clean up' the transcripts by taking out repeated words and completing sentences by adding brackets. This involved going back to audio recordings and making sure that what was being communicated was translated onto paper.

Once this was done, I set out to omit any identifying data to make sure the document remained true to the promise of confidentiality and anonymity. Although omitting was not a lengthy process, it took more concentration than I would have expected. This was then followed by reading and re-reading the transcripts to identify and code themes within each document and later among them. This process was time consuming and took a lot of concentration. It also required re-evaluation at times. During this process links were also made to existing theory and compared to findings of other studies. Once this process was repeated and completed satisfactorily, information was integrated and master themes identified.

5. Integration and master themes found

Several themes were identified and once integrated, four master themes were identified. These master themes are as follows:

- "I am a human being" Self Identity vs. Perceived Identity
- Factors influencing identity

    - "You are trying to be like everybody else": Upbringing and schooling
    - "I never declared": Experiences of coming out
    - "They refuse to accept that I'm like them": Racial identity
- Social and Cultural Influences
    - "I'm not obviously lesbian looking": Social (media) representation
    - "How do we marry you now?": Cultural practices
- "We've had no problems": Feelings of acceptance and safety
- Moving forward
    - "A society that box[es] certain people": University LGBT societies
    - "Thinking in everyday language": Accessibility of information
    - "Eish this country is going to the dogs": The constitution vs. reality

These themes will be discussed in great depth in the following chapter. Before concluding and moving on to that chapter, the interpretive and reflective processes will be discussed briefly.

4.3 Theoretical understanding of interpretations

Smith (1996) describes that a good qualitative research should be transparent about its process of analysis. This study used guidelines as proposed by Smith et al (2009) on preferred ways to conduct studies using IPA methods. The aim of IPA is to give a systematic and thorough analysis of participant's accounts allowing for rich details of complex phenomena to be explored (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999).

Once interviews were transcribed verbatim, which in itself is already a lengthy process, general/ broader themes were coded. This was followed by more detailed explorations of these themes, which progressed into smaller more detailed themes. These were then compared to themes of other interviews. Coding of these themes was done by analysing texts and highlighting phrases that stood out. This stage already calls for interpretation, as it required me to group what was said under thematic headings. Once this stage was done,

themes were revisited to make sure that these themes were a true representation of participant' accounts of their experiences. In hindsight, being that there were so few participants, follow up interviews should have been done to clarify information and to gather more information.

For as much as training and personal experience prepared me for the data collection stage, nothing could have prepared me for the time consuming process of data analysis using IPA. This is a critique that has long been associated to using IPA methodology. Another lesson learnt, which is both a critique and complement to IPA methodology, is that because the interaction between participant, researcher and data is so unique, no study (including this one) can truly be identically replicated.

4.4 Reflecting throughout the process

The importance of reflection during research is encouraged by Finlay (2008) and Smith et al. (2009), which brought about the idea to keep a reflection journal. A process which was accompanied by supervision, especially peer supervision, because of availability. This journal documented insecurities, possible biases, motivations for doing this study and other personal difficulties which could have impacted the process of engagement with participants and later how data was understood and interpreted. These reflections were often shared with peers and my supervisor in a contained space to identify strengths and shortcomings in judgement. During these discussions participants remain anonymous and once the research was completed, the document was destroyed to maintain participants' anonymity and confidentiality.

There was initial hesitation and uncertainty about writing about the themes of these reflections, as it seemed to put too much emphasis on the researcher rather than on the participants. It should, however, be kept in mind that participants' experiences and words used to express and describe these events are interpreted using the researcher's knowledge and to some extent worldview (Reid, et.al. 2005). This puts the researcher in a position of power, making reflections and supervision including peer supervision essential. Two aspects of these reflections are illustrated and briefly discussed in the following section.

4.4.1 Struggling with theory, literature and context

Being new to the practice of research, especially when taking on a topic (for academic purposes), which one is not academically familiar with makes trying to grapple with literature even more complicated. This is because one needs to become comfortable with the idea of conducting research in a methodologically sound manner, while still being true to the theoretical and literal aspect of the subject matter. Living in a largely heteronormative society, means to a large extent, the information readily available is presented in a way that maintains that heteronormative stance.

In my case this context is Namibia, where same-sex sexualities remain constitutionally unsupported and socially seen, but not spoken about. To some extent, this also influences the way in which information is interpreted and in so doing also has an impact on decisions made. In the case of this research, this meant that initially, the interpretation and understanding of this information was informed by those perspectives. It was after continuous exposure to the information and context along with supervision (and an already liberal stance) that information started and continues making sense, increasingly. This exposure is still, however relatively limited, meaning that new, sometimes contradictory information still takes time to process. At times this reality has caused bias in judgements, which was addressed in supervision.

In addition to this, being unfamiliar with the context has had an impact in how and where participants were recruited, which has allowed lessons to be learnt in practice. It is the belief that this inexperience and time constrains have impacted on number of participants and quality of the information gathered.

4.4.2 Personal reflections

Being a black female, made me aware of societal struggles, engaging with my personal feelings about these experiences and being fortunate enough to have had training in working with people was a positive reflection that became a motivating factor when analysis became

overwhelming and challenging. Realising that subjectivity (a quality which is at times questioned, because it is not in line with traditional understandings of empirical research) can be a helpful tool, allowed for creativity and flexibility to be a less threatening call. Having said this, my awareness of lived experiences of black lesbian women was influenced by readings of the works explained in the following section.

4.4.3 Reflecting on the journey to understanding

In experiencing ambivalence regarding whether or not this is to be the topic of my thesis, I spent some time doing recommended readings on same-sex sexualities in South Africa. For the benefit of the reader, these are some of the readings and my reflections. To begin with, this study was initially inspired by Zethu Matebeni's 2011 dissertation exploring black lesbian sexualities and identities in Johannesburg. This research was written in such a way that the complex reality was well conveyed. This complexity however made it difficult to navigate and as a result fully appreciate the topics discussed, especially for a novice both in terms of research and theory. This had the benefit of understanding just how complex, both socially and individually, black female same-sex sexualities are and to point out how vastly unexplored this area is.

I have to admit that, as intriguing and insightful as the section on intimacy and sexuality in Matebeni's (2011) work is, explicitly inviting participants to venture into their intimate and sexual relationships in the present study seemed intrusive and unnaturally voyeuristic, leaving this area largely excluded in this study. Where I rather took a perhaps safer social perspective of black female same-sex sexualities. That being said, I often reflected on and questioned my uncomfortable feelings and unwillingness to explicitly steer conversations into the direction of same-sex intimacy. Was it my own socialisation bias and general fear of intruding into spaces where I was unwelcome? A lack of exposure to information? Perhaps neither. This search lead me to Zanele Muholi.

A name that I was pointed to that seems to have a brave presence in South African discourse surrounding black female bodies and sexuality, particularly black female same-sex sexuality is Zanele Muholi. I have not been afforded the opportunity to personally experience her photographic works, however I have met their presence through search engines (e.g. Caitlin

and I, 2009), which were emotional experiences for me. Muholi, through her images, forces the viewer to be confronted with the material reality of black female bodies, she also forced us to be confronted with our own misconceptions and prejudices about an intersect of our reality by using real and sometimes intimate images of what Gqola (2006, p.83) describes as "highly visible manifestations of the undesirable". Her medium on communication makes her works accessible to the larger society.

I started to realise that the answer to why there is still so much oppression and disapproval of same-sex sexualities, even with so much information regarding same-sex sexualities, especially from cultural perspectives is that, a) there really is not that much accessible information and b) same-sex sexualities have been so deeply entrenched in the political reality, especially as a tool to oppose colonial influence that it might take more than a constitutional change to change the minds and hearts of the average South African. A small example of political opposition is what president Jacob Zuma is reported to have said in 2006. He is reported to have described same-sex marriages 'a disgrace to the nation' (Croucher 2011, p. 163). Even with these sentiments, however, it should be recognised that although not the majority (according to results of studies presented in chapter 1), that there are millions of South Africans supporting the societal implementation of equality within the realms of sexual orientations (and beyond).

Continuing with works that are related to and have influenced my process of understanding of black female same-sex sexualities, Nkunzi Nkabinde's (2008) personal narrative of her experiences of being a lesbian Sangoma has been insightful. She bravely explores the dynamics and her experiences of claiming her lesbian sexuality in a space that condemns non-normative expressions, particularly of sexuality. She challenges societal and cultural exclusions of same-sex sexualities which is explored in a 2011 study that exposes the presence of female same-sex sexualities among Sangomas (since ancient times). This is just to show how same-sex sexualities are experienced in different cultural spaces, which is helpful.

Natalie Donaldson's influence came through her supervision. Her (2011) thesis that explored the subject positioning of lesbian presentations in two television programs through group discussions. Her research revealed that these positions are different depending on the race of the person being represented (black and white), revealing interpretations of othering and

otherness. Findings of Donaldson's (2011) study highlighted the similarity of media representations and social expectations of black female same-sex sexualities. The social and interpretive binaries also became apparent. In my search for literature (and understanding), I also came across some less dominant (and perhaps less influential) studies.

Such an example is the unpublished independent study of Grant (2013) that explored, and to some extent compared the experiences of a black and a white lesbian woman living in South Africa. Her study revealed similar themes as the current one. The point that I am trying to argue is that, experiences of black lesbian women are vast and complex and people, to multiple extents, should and do use different platforms to convey this message and bring about understanding among a variety of target groups.

4.5 Conclusion

The process of analysis is a lengthy and at times intimidating one, however, keeping in mind the shared responsibility of both researcher and participant, continuous reflection becomes an important aspect of data analysis. Within this process it is also important to get a sense of the participants, which will be helpful throughout the process. Smith et al (2009) and Willig (2008) give a brief description of data analysis in IPA, which is described in 5 stages leading up to identifying themes and discussing them. The themes identified in this study are described and illustrated in the following chapter.

Chapter 5: FINDINGS

"Life is a series of events and sensations. Everything else is interpretation. Much is lost in transition - and added in assumption / projection". - Rasheed Ogunlaru

5.1 Introduction

Having a predominantly psychology educational background has set an intimidating platform for this chapter, as I have to constantly remind myself that this is not a therapeutic

formulation. Until now, previous chapters were heavily influenced by pre-existing theory and information, this chapter will look at new and unique information about the experiences of two black 'lesbian' women. The term 'lesbian' in this regard is used cautiously as these women did not describe themselves as lesbian; they prefer not to "attach a label" to their sexualities. They do however explain that 'lesbian' or 'same-sex' are the terms used to describe their sexualities. That being said, this chapter, as discussed in previous chapters, uses interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), which is proposed to be suitable for health and well-being related topics (Holmes, Coyle, & Thomson, 1997; Jarman, Smith, & Walsh, 1997; Smith, Flowers, Sheeran, & Beail, 1997; Golsworthy & Coyle, 1999; Smith & Osborn, 1998). IPA is used as a methodology with queer theory as a theoretical anchor and lens through which the interpretations are explored. In this chapter, the findings of this study are presented. Once the data, in the form of verbatim transcribed interviews, had been analysed, the following master themes emerged and will be discussed along with subthemes in further detail in this chapter. It should be kept in mind that the findings presented in this chapter are a result of interviews from two participants. Although their experiences might be shared with others, in no way does this research assume that the findings are generalizable. With that in mind, the following themes emerged after data analysis:

- "I'm a human being" vs "Oh, you have a she?": Self Identity vs. Perceived Identity
- Factors influencing identity
    - "You are trying to be like everybody else": Upbringing and schooling
    - "I never declared": Experiences of coming out
    - "They refuse to accept that I'm like them": Racial identity
- Social and Cultural Influences
    - "I'm not obviously lesbian looking": Social (media) representation
    - "How do we marry you now?": Cultural practices
- "We've had no problems": Feelings of acceptance and safety
- Moving forward
    - "A society that box[es] certain people": University LGBT societies
    - "Thinking in everyday language": Accessibility of information
    - "Eish this country is going to the dogs": The constitution vs. reality

5.2 "I'm a human being" vs "Oh, you have a she?": Self Identity vs. Perceived Identity

Identities in and of themselves are an interesting human experience, where individuals feel a sense of belonging or community when in the presence (either direct or indirect) of other person that are perceived to identify similarly. This in turn has an impact on everyday experiences. Theories on identity propose that there are a number of factors that influence how we experience ourselves. These factors include a variety of lifelong exposure to certain external stimuli, which formed part of the interviews. This section discusses Martha and Monika's experiences of their own identity and the perception and influence of their internal and external environments.

The dominant theme brought forward during interviews revolved around sexual identity. Both participants seemed to explain their experiences from the perspective of sexuality. This could be, firstly, due to the fact that this research had an unavoidable focus on sexuality. Secondly, being that same-sex sexualities have been politicised and sensationalised, sexual identity might become a somewhat sensitive identity, which provides a perspective that is different to the norm. That being said, both participants preferred not to refer to themselves as 'lesbian' or to "label" or "box" themselves in terms of sexuality. Martha had the following to say:

> Martha: "Gosh, I don't attach a label to it. I'd like to think of myself as just a sexual person, fluid".

She goes on to say:

> Martha: "So if somebody says to me, "Oh, but you're lesbian", but I don't identify as such. At that point in time, it would be important for me to say, "No, I'm not lesbian, I'm a human being. I'm a woman who happens to be with another woman."

Martha's experience of her sexuality seems to challenge everyday expectations and language used to describe same-sex sexualities. Martha describes being uncomfortable with the label, unfortunately however, Martha's reason was not explored. With this in mind, there seems to be somewhat of a contradiction in terms of labelling sexuality. Martha rather refers to her sexuality as "fluid", which in itself is also a label, but a less defined use of language that is fairly new, and has fewer connotations attached to this label. The term fluid also seems to distance from continued discourse about different sexualities and helps maintain Martha's preferred sexual identity of being "just a sexual person". In her description of everyday

events she also seems be very careful of the terminology she used to describe her experiences. This could point to an increased sensitivity towards the subject matter.

In addition, Martha seems somewhat frustrated by the fact that she has to "declare" her sexual orientation, where heterosexuality is assumed. As a way to not be presumptuous, like what her experience of others has been, Martha describes that she makes it a point to not "assume" someone else's sexuality and asks. This is also in an attempt to make others aware that there is "not an alternative, I hate that word, it's simply another way of being… there is also another way that people feel comfortable living". Her experience of feeling "othered" is evident in the way that she describes her sexual identity.

Similarly, Monika states

> Monika: "I don't like putting myself into a box and say "Ok I am lesbian", I just have my sexual orientation. I am more attracted to woman."

Monika also prefers not to be "boxed" in such a way that she feels "othered" from the heteronormative expectation, although her sexual orientation is not heteronormative. Monika explains that although she does not want to label her sexuality, her sexual identity is one that is important to her. Monika's opposition to being "boxed" or using "labels" to explain sexuality seems to fluctuate however, as she sometimes used the term 'lesbian' to describe the sexuality of her friends. This could be for a number of reasons. The most plausible would be that her grappling with social issues externally could be a new occurrence. This could be explained by the way she is uncomfortable and guarded when talking about sexuality in general. She also often seemed to have the need to explain herself in the interview process. This could point to the fact that she might have felt judged from previous experiences. It was also noticed that Monika used societal as opposed to personal examples to explain her thinking. This is perhaps related to her being uncomfortable with the attention same-sex relationships have received. Monika seemed annoyed with the attention same sex relationships receive as she remarked same-sex sexualities "mustn't be publicised in a way that it is special. It mustn't be top story". It seems that although Monika finds that although her sexual identity is an important part of who she is, she also seems to convey that her sexuality it is something that should be kept private.

5.3 Factors influencing identity

Both participants describe that their sexual identities are an integral part of who they are. During their interviews it became evident that there are factors that have influenced the way they portray their sexualities. The most obvious ones discovered during the interview process are their upbringing and schooling, and their experiences of 'coming-out' which to a large extent seem similar.

5.3.1 "You are trying to be like everybody else": Upbringing and schooling

Both participants expressed that they grew up being allowed certain privileges of expression which are not perceived to be the norm for children in their demographic. This could have had an impact on their confidence in expressing themselves both at home and at school regarding their identities.

> Martha: "Growing up black African in the township, children are meant to be heard and not seen. Or seen and not heard. And there was a bit of that in my home but also at the same time we were allowed a certain level of expression. You know, if you didn't want, you didn't like something, you could say it. And so I haven't quit learned to be quiet. And I would say it's just socialization at home."

Martha discusses how she was allowed to express approval and disapproval in the household, which meant that she could openly express herself and perhaps some parts of her identity and personality at home. Although this level of expression seems to fluctuate with regards to expression of her sexual identity, especially at home. This also seems to be influenced by the kind of relationships Martha was exposed to.

Both participants also describe growing up in a heteronormative society where intimate relationships were portrayed to be between a male and a female.

> Monika: "I didn't know if it was right or wrong to like be in a relationship with a woman. Because since I have been brought up in a society where usually, when I was younger, it was normally a boy and girl kind of thing"

Monika describes being in a relationship with a woman as if it was a moral dilemma; right vs wrong. This made me curious about the how not only sexual relationships are made taboo subjects, but also how non-normative sexual identities are posed as a

matter of morality rather than identity. This could make discussing sexualities difficult to talk about because of the taboo status, and continuing of misconceptions around same-sex sexualities to continue. Monika spoke about this subject in a mater-of-fact manner, which made this way of thinking seem normal for her (and perhaps her context?).

> Martha: "We were young and we were girls and I thought all my friends were judge-y and we were all discovering sexuality and everybody was straight. So I was thinking "I think I'm straight, but actually something happens to me when I'm in the changing rooms. What's happening?" But you don't really pay heath to it because I had family members who are not quite accepting. So you sort of suppress it and you are trying to be like everybody else."

In terms of exposure to sexualities, Martha seems to echo Monika's experience. Martha seems to have initially experienced her own sexuality as confusing, being that heterosexuality was the norm, and any other sexual identities were not readily available. What seems to have made matters worse is that her "friends were judge-y" and some of her family members were not accepting of sexual identities that deviate from the norm. This experience seems to have made it difficult for Martha to not only acknowledge "what's happening" to her in terms of sexual identity, it also seems to have limited her ability to explore let alone express her sexual identity at the time.

While both participants were not readily exposed to same- sex sexualities in the home environment, their experiences at school seem to have been different. While Martha thought her friends were "judge-y" and the norm was to be "straight", Monika's experience that at school same-sex sexualities were more accepted and displayed. Monika adds that she was also in a relationship while at school.

> Monika: "It's a girl's school so it was just normal to me to have a girl being with a girl. So most of my friends were from my school back then when I came out. When I starting to realise that "Oh this is who I am" and this is the kind of people I am attracted to. You see, so it wasn't really a big deal because it was the culture. Like not really a culture, but it was something that everyone was used to at school. And most of my friends were lesbian."

Monika's experience seems to have been less confusing. This was to a large extent because she was exposed to same-sex and heterosexual relationships. She describes that many of her female friends were also in same-sex relationships, which could

have made it safer for her to express and explore her sexual identity, making it possible for her to be in a same-sex relationship during her school years.

This different representation of relationships then impacted on how participants grappled with their self-image. This grappling seemed most visible when participants spoke about their experiences of coming out.

5.3.2. "I never declared": Experiences of coming out

Before delving into participants' experiences of coming out, it was a point of interest that Martha expressed frustration about the concept of coming out as someone in a same-sex relationship.

> Martha: "And so you do have to kind of declare, as it would, to people: "actually I'm not like you, I'm like this." But for me, it's weird and it's frustrating because for heterosexuals nobody comes out, they don't come out. Everybody accepts that. You say, "Hey I found somebody" everybody just assumes and it's ok. Hey, It's a guy, but if you say "Oh, I found somebody" and eventually down the line they find out it's a woman it's like," why didn't you say?" "Well why?" you didn't have to tell me that it's a boy"

Nonetheless, both participants remarked that they had experiences of "coming out", although Martha seemed uncomfortable with the concept. Both participants went on to describe how they passively came out to their families. Martha explained how she brought her girlfriends home and acted with them in the same way she would if she were dating a male. Her mother then put everything together though observation. Monika also brought her girlfriend home, which her cousin observed, she ten told Monika's parents who initiated a conversation about her sexual orientation. This is what they both had to say about their experiences of coming out:

> Martha: "I suppose I did do a kind of coming out, I always use to joke about how I would bring "Umakoti" home. That they shouldn't expect me to bring a man. I would bring Umakoti, Umakoti… is a term for a new wife. It's the Xhosa term for a new wife. And also, when I met A* [name has been omitted], when I was going out with A*, I didn't say to my mom," I'm going out with a woman" but what I did is, I introduced her as A*. And she kind of figured out that there was more here. I acted

> with her in the same… I did same patterns of engagement that I would if I was with a new person. You know. And I didn't declare it's a woman or anything like that, you know, because even before, I never declared, so I just…. You know, she will figure it out. Like she has before with the other people."

Martha describes that she would "joke" or not overtly state her sexual identity to her family, this largely because Martha did not see a need to have to come-out. Taking into consideration her experience with regard to same-sex sexualities in her family environment, her use of humour to indirectly express her sexual identity to her family could also mean that the topic could still be taboo and not accepted at home. Martha is however openly in a same-sex relationship around her mother, she does however leave her mother to "figure it out" on her own with regards to Martha's sexual identity.

> Monika: "I didn't have to just come out, "ok I'm lesbian", everyone. At home I remember when I came out I was in Grade 10 or Grade 9 I used to come with my girlfriend, not at home but at my cousin sister's house and then, I think she kind of told my mum about it."

Monika's describes that she did not openly tell her mother regarding her sexual identity initially. She was however, openly in a same-sex relationship which was displayed around her cousin, who later told her mother. Monika's reluctance to tell her parent could have come from the fact that she was not sure if they though her sexual identity to be "right or wrong", and could point to some level of initially not being comfortable with expressing and exploring her sexual identity around her parents.

Both participants also described their parents' reactions of support from their immediate families.

> Martha: "Well, she has never been comfortable with it, but surprisingly, she was quite understanding. She hasn't really asked me anything but when I do talk about it and the challenges I have, if we do have a conversation about challenges, then she is quite supportive. She engages in conversation with me, but she never really comes out and says, "So what's really happening here? Are you really lesbian?"

Martha describes that she was surprised by her mother's understanding and support with regard to her sexual identity. She also describes how she didn't overtly tell her mother about her sexual identity and her mother did not overtly ask about her sexual identity. This experience seems to allow both Martha and her mother to engage in

conversations about their everyday lives, which includes relationships, while still seeming to keep some distance with regard to Monika's sexual identity for both of them.

> Monika: "My mum asked me, "is what your cousin tells me, is it true?" {That she has a girlfriend}. And then I was like "Ja, its true" and then she, I thought she was going to react like… (iffy signal hand gesture) , but she was like "Ok cool" and then she went behind my back and told my dad and then my dad was like, "no, If it makes her happy then we can't be all judgemental, the more we don't appreciate it, the more we might lose her". They were quite appreciating and accepting."

Monika, on the other hand describes an open conversation about her sexuality, which involved her cousin 'outing' her. Monika continues to describe that her family is accepting, and not wanting to push her away because of her sexuality. She seems to have expected a negative reaction towards her admitting to her non- normative sexuality, but seems to have been surprised by the support she received instead.

Both participants also describe how extended family members, in particular aunts, are not as supportive of their sexual orientations as their parents were.

> Martha: "I said I had family members who are not quite accepting…I mean people on the streets say things about… my own family, this December I said to them 'well don't count on me bringing a husband, I'm bringing Umakoti'…my aunts looked at me and said 'no, we're not going to that wedding.'"

Martha describes that the process of covertly coming out to her family was met with little support and acceptance by her family. Although they did not blatantly oppose to her sexuality, they seemed to not be willing to participate in any expression of her sexual identity such as a wedding. Her aunts seem to prefer to keep a distance from her sexuality, where they do not seem to open avenues for conversations where they might gain better understanding into Martha's sexuality.

> Monika: "My aunts and the elders, were like "that's kind of bizarre because we have never had such thing in our family even in the past because we have never had someone who is dating a woman. It's kind of taboo"

Monika describes that her "aunts and elders" seem to approach the subject of same-sex sexualities as "bizarre" and "taboo". Similar to Martha's experience, her extended family also seems to keep a distance from the topic, and in so doing, they might continue perpetuating misunderstood information regarding same-sex sexualities.

Monika goes on to explain that she is the first person in her family that she knows to be in a same-sex relationship, and her extended family might be grappling to understand that same-sex relationship are "a real thing". Separately, participants also gave accounts of coming out to friends.

> Martha: "I suppose with friends, I might have casually come out… Guy friends wouldn't believe me when I said I was attracted to women. It was always, they always thought, "hmmmm (with curious expression)… Then we would go out, then they would catch me staring, without me even realizing that I was staring at somebody and they would go, "Hey wena" you know and it's things like that."

Martha seemed to have a hard time coming out to her friends, with initial hesitation about the backlash of coming out and wondering if that is something she could handle. She describes, however that after she was in a same-sex relationship, she acknowledged that "I like this much better. It feels more natural", which might have encouraged her to come out to her friends. She describes that her male friends in particular seem somewhat reluctant to believe her sexuality.

She goes on to describe the varying reactions of her friends.

> Martha: "Well some were just cool about it and some were like 'nah, that's not you, it's a phase'…Cause you know how it is. I mean, I suppose, I don't know, people always feel like you go to varsity and you're all experimental all of a sudden."

Martha explains that the reason coming out could be important (even though it frustrates her), instead of hiding it, could be to normalise same-sex sexualities as a reality rather than it being regarded as an experiment or phase.

Monika on the other hand explains that she went to school with most of her friends, who to a large extent are also same-sex orientated. She explained that because of social stigma, she thought about the "pros and cons and how people would treat me". Monika does not go on to explain what these pros and cons are, only going on to say that she has not "came to experience where I am treated differently because of my sexuality". Martha on the other hand has experienced being treated differently because of her sexual orientation. She gives an example of recent to relay her experiences of coming out to new friends.

> Martha: "I've had friends say 'Well it's because of all these liberal ideas you have, you know, so now you are going all crazy and you have an identity crisis'"

It could be that some of Martha's friends try to rationalise her being different in terms of sexual orientation by marking it as a phase or as a temporary identity crisis. Others, such as the example illustrated below, try to convey understanding of LGBTQAI+ communities in attempts to relate, and to show that they are not judging the other person. This was however not the case as Martha still felt judged.

> Martha: "I was talking about my partner to a colleague and when I mentioned "she", she said "She?" and I said "Yes she" and she said "Oh, I thought you had a boyfriend." And I said "No I didn't. Well I never said, actually, you assumed I had a boyfriend. Uhm… and at that moment I feel like her perception of me changed. So in some way, that impacted on my everyday life. Cause how she looks at me, and she mentioned that she use to work for a LGBTI something-something. And so now I'm starting to feel like J* is looking at me differently now. Because before I was the same as her, the heterosexual who's going out but because I slipped off the radar, she didn't figure me out to be somebody who might be into women. Now all of a sudden she looks at me and she goes, " Oh, you have a she?" so in those ways, it impacts just how people might react to you or relate to you, if they don't otherwise know who you are or what your sexual orientation might be. So when they do find out, it's a different way of relating."

It is noted that while language such as using "you" to describe one's own experience with some emotional distance, using terms such as "they" also serves to distinguish self from other. The next section describes how participants explain their racial identity and one participant explains that not only does she feel othered by her sexual orientation, but also regarding race.

5.3.3 "They refuse to accept that I'm like them": Racial identity

Interestingly, although both participants are black (Nguni) women, none of the participants explained their racial identity by referring to the colour of their skin. Monika expressed that she is black because of the "culture" and "family" in which she was raised. Martha describes herself as "black African", but did not go into detail about why she identifies as such. Martha later explains that although she identifies as black, her 'performance' of black does not fit the norm and as such she is not seen as black.

> Martha: "I also feel othered by being a black same sex person because, there is this whole thing; it's 'unAfrican' to be gay or lesbian or whatever, so some people might other me [...] I do feel that even though I might be black like them, they refuse to accept that I'm like them only because I behave in particular ways and hold different views about being that are different to what is supposedly black. So therefore I don't fit the category of black, nor do I quite fit the category of woman because actually I'm not. I'm deviating from what a woman should be dating. So yeah, I think there is quite a bit of othering. I mean especially if you're black and same sexed you have not only culture which says you can't be who you are, you have culture which tells you as a woman you should be acting a particular way."

Martha seems to describe identity categories of black, female, lesbian as being challenged by what is socially accepted. She describes that she seems to deviate from these categories because she does not perform I accordance to what is expected of these categories. This seems to pose a challenge between who she experienced herself to be and what language she uses to do so, and what it means to be black, lesbian or female in a societal context.

5.4 Social and Cultural Influences

As explained in the previous sections, both sexual and racial identity have strong links to societal and cultural norms. From a social constructionist perspective, these factors are created socially as norms without one person creating or policing these. In communities these norms are often enforced, reinforced and policed by various members. In turn this seems to have an impact on how certain identities are formed, expressed and supported. This section describes the cultural and social issues articulated in the interviews.

5.4.1 "I'm not obviously lesbian looking": Social (media) representation

Martha and Monika describe that in everyday experiences there is a social expectation of what male and female should act like and in extension certain performances are also expected of same-sex sexualities to make same-sex relationships more heteronormative. Both that dressing and acting a certain way earns one a label of "butch or femme". These expectations seem to be similar to the ways in which the media portrays same-sex relationships. These representations, which are at times the primary source of information regarding a variety of subjects for people, can impact on how same-sex sexualities are perceived and expressed. Both participants described being displeased with the portrayal of same-sex relationships in the media. Their reasons were both experienced as intriguing. Martha points out that there is

a need for "real" and "normal" same sex relationships to be portrayed, where social misconceptions of same-sex relationships can be challenged and people stop looking for "who is who in the relationship {male vs female}" or "who's the top and who's the bottom. This frustration could also be linked to the fact that participants have difficulties accessing information to not only educate themselves around same-sex sexualities, but also directing others towards helpful and appropriate information. This process seems to be frustrating for participants.

> Martha: "But there are people like Somizi [Somizi Mhlongo, actor, choreographer and Idols SA judge] for instance. I don't know if you know this guy. He was very out there and very flamboyant and that's great but for me sometimes the thing about this whole gay and lesbian thing and it's also why I'm not keen for labels is because there is a particular kind of way that people start viewing you or there is a particular kind of performance that you are supposed to be if you are gay or lesbian. So if I'm lesbian I'm either supposed to conform to Butch or Femme. You know, so it's either because I'm not obviously lesbian looking then maybe I must be Fem, because if I were Butch then it would be obvious. I would be like wearing tekkies, you know and no nail colours or no nail polish and pants and all those things. And if you gay you have to be flamboyant, you have to be obviously Fem, but actually they are normal people. Two women who look exactly the same, but actually prefer to be with each other. Not because either one is fitting into a particular role"

Monika's experience is similar, describing the portrayal of same-sex relationships, especially in mainstream media, as problematic, because it draws too much attention to a relationship and continues to 'other' same-sex relationships and sexualities. She goes on to explain that

> Monika: "Especially if it's a celebrity or someone who is well known. And then that person happens to be in a relationship with, like let's say a man with a man. That shouldn't be a big deal. No. It should be treated normal because if it was like for instance a male and a female, it wouldn't be publicized like "oh, wow", this makes like a hard news. It shouldn't be something which is like "wow". It mustn't be something that is treated differently".

Both Martha and Monika then go on to describe the cultural struggles of marriage in same-sex relationships. *Lobola* is an increasingly controversial practice where a male partner pays money to the family, usually an uncle or father figure before getting married to their female partner. The reasons for this payment vary.

5.4.2 "How do we marry you now?": Cultural practices

The main cultural issues that was brought up by both participants was the subject of *ilobola*. Same-sex unions are constitutional right, however, participants describe not only unsupportive extended family members, but also unchanged cultural practices, which also do

not accommodate constitutional rights. This then seems to complicate same-sex sexualitites in social and cultural contexts, making traditional or cultural unions difficult and sometimes unaccommodated. Caster Semenya and another unnamed social media same-sex couple's situations were described by participants, where they started to talk about cultural practices that might further hinder social and cultural acceptance of same-sex sexualities.

> Martha: "And then you have culture telling you again that 'well if you're going to be how you are then all your life falls outside the parameters of what we can deal with 'cause how do we marry you now? We used to a man and a woman 'cause who's going to pay for lobola between the two of you? How do we…' It's all those kinds of things which are actually quite a real practical issue to deal with a different kind of being. You know, because lobola comes out of the whole man/woman thing so how do you actually do it with same sex? But then actually it raises other questions; do same sex couples want to be lobola-ed? Do they want that kind of custom? And if they are African, how do they negotiate that? Do they create new customs? Because these things change, these things develop over time although we want to believe that they have been there since antiquity. Do they want to engage with how they might create these shifts? Or do they want to somehow conform with 'I'm Butch, I'm Femme' or maybe I should pay lobola for you. Well I mean I don't know with Caster, I don't know if you know Caster Semenya, the athlete. She's now married and apparently there's a rumour that she paid lobola. I became to understand who paid for whom and why."

> Monika: "It's a matter of those cultural aspects being in conflict with sexuality. Like who's, so, who's the man, now who's going to pay lobola? And then, I feel like as soon as this transformation thing extends, then people will come to recognise that it's not only is about lobola paying, people are in love. I have these two other couples I follow on Instagram. They just got married in December. And their family had the same problem. This other girl who, whose regarded a stud lesbian, her family regards her as a man, so I don't know in what basis today to put that in. So, they regard her as a man, so they wanted her to pay the lobola."

Both participants expressed that "compromise" needs to happen with regards to culture and integrating same-sex sexualities. Martha goes on to explain that the relevance of some cultural practices need to be evaluated instead of regarding same-sex as a "stranger" that needs to be done away with in order to maintain known culture and its practices.

During interviews participants indicated that even with a liberal constitution allowing for expression of sexual orientation, safety is still a concern. This aspect is illustrated in the next section.

5.5 "We've had no problems": Feelings of acceptance and safety

Martha and Monika both expressed that although they have not had personal experiences of violence, because of the presence of concerns surrounding safety regarding same-sex sexualities, especially female same-sex sexualities, they have had concerns about their personal safely. In these conversations, comparisons were drawn between larger cities and smaller cities. Larger cities which have larger populations and at the same time might allow for a larger variety of expressions and opinions (which influence each other) are thought to harbour more retaliation and discrimination. At the same time, however, larger towns, with more physical space for diversity could also allow for increased visibility and expression. This in turn could lead to increased violence, but also increased tolerance and acceptance. Responses regarding this problem seems largely identical in terms of expressed fears and experiences of both participants. In this conversation, participants explained that they felt safer in Grahamstown as opposed to larger cities, where they are from.

> Martha: "I have heard this said before by people in my department that Rhodes is more, not Rhodes, Grahamstown is more accepting of oddities in people. So I'm thinking well then maybe it might be an interesting town, we'll see how things progress. And I have been to Joza a couple of times with my partner and we've had no problems. There have been no restrictions on how we behave or anything and we've had no trouble"

She goes on to add

> Martha: "For instance in Gugulethu or Khayekitsha these two big townships {in Cape Town}. I don't think... I might be as open, yes, but also there might be a lot more cautiousness, a lot more hyperawareness that if I act in a certain way, let me ready myself for whatever might come. Whereas I haven't picked it up here in Joza [Grahamstown township]."

Monika's expressed concerns for safety are similar. She explains that she also experiences Grahamstown as a non-threatening environment.

> Monika: "I feel like it's an environment where, its accepting environment where diversity and different gender and sexual preferences is allowed kind of thing. Not allowed, but accepted and it's kind of celebrated...Grahamstown is really kind of different from PE {Port Elizabeth}in those kind of cases, because you hardly hear that there was maybe a lesbian who was killed or maybe was raped by her guy friends"

She adds that although she has not had encounters of violence, she does remember instances of people mocking same-sex relationships.

> Monika: "Taxi drivers will be mocking woman because especially if you happen to be with a girlfriend and then you walking people are just making fun of your relationship kind of thing and then they'll be like asking maybe questions like, "where have you seen two woman being in a relationship? Grahamstown and PE are different in that way. In PE its mostly, there are maybe lesbians brutality like maybe people being killed, maybe because of their sexuality and people being sexually assaulted or raped because of their sexuality"

Martha also adds that it seems like in some areas of the country, violence against same-sex relationships seem to be on the increase.

> Monika: "I know there is an organization in Gugs {Gugulethia}, because gays and lesbians are harassed. A lot of the time people see it and people are more open these days and it seems tolerated because more and more people are coming out and I don't think it's really more people are coming out more than, because of the sense that is affected, people are being free to be themselves."

Participants experienced showed that Grahamstown, a small town, was experienced as safer, and allowed for more visible expression on identities. This has multiple influences. Some of which include, increased confidence for participants and increased exposure to the community. The consequences of this are also multi-faceted and multi-dimensional (and directional). The final theme that was picked up was the reality of the constitution and how much freedom it allowed for in reality and suggestions about what needs to happen to help implement constitutional rights into everyday realities.

5.6 Moving forward

Other than the subject of the constitution and their experiences of what the reality of being able to express same-sex sexualities, Martha and Monika brought up interesting and intriguing ideas around LGBT societies and accessibility of information for the everyday person to help them understand same-sex sexualities and relationships.

5.6.1 "A society that box[es] certain people": University LGBT societies

The subject of campus societies such as OutRhodes was not explored with Martha. It was however one of Monika's biggest concerns. She explains that she agrees with the advocatory presence of societies and that people can become activists against violence and discrimination directed at same-sex sexualities. She however went on to describe that she does not agree with a society that is "just for homosexuality" a society that box certain people… LGBT people". She describes that at times such societies can further increase "stigma" against the people it is trying to protect, because it might cause "self-pity, like "I'm gay and this is how society treat us". She advises that people first practice "self-love" "before I can go out there and ask people to come and campaign with me and accept me".

5.6.2 "Thinking in everyday language": Accessibility of information

Martha on the other hand focused on the use of academic language that is not easily accessible to the everyday person. She criticises that the use of words such as "continuum" and theories do not make same-sex sexualities accessible to people. She adds that we need to "start thinking in everyday language". She admits that she also uses terminology that is "too academic" "too philosophical" and "rationalize too much". She adds that in reality "in everyday life there is only man/ woman". Language is a complex phenomenon, which is also used as a means to transfer and absorb knowledge. If the everyday person is not able to access this information, intercepting misinformation could difficult to do.

> Martha: "So I think if there is gonna be any change it's about thinking about it and thinking through that change in ways that the everyday normal person thinks about it…being a human, being a man, being a woman. Once we're still writing books and this big queer theory stuff, that's the things we write academic journals about… I don't really think we quite get to changing the normal average man's thinking around what it might possibly mean to be a sexual human being."

This leaves the important question: If the people that we are trying to reach do not receive the information, how are changes in attitudes going to be challenged, potential knowledge received and feedback given? Martha and Monika then explain the role and reality of the constitution.

5.6.3 "Eish this country is going to the dogs": The constitution vs. reality

The constitution has long been observed to be different from public opinion. Martha explains that she thinks the constitution is "Most times I think constitutions are kind of these lovely aspirational documents that countries dream up", because the reality is that there are encounters of same-sex sexualities being met with violence as described in the previous section. She adds that the constitution makes it easier in court, but not in homes. She goes on to give examples of everyday opposition to same-sex sexualities.

> Martha: "There was a gay marriage being covered and all the elder people in my family were going 'what is this? No man'. And I made the argument precisely of the constitution in this country allows for this marriage/this union to take place because actually we are one of the few countries on the continent that... who protect constitutionally the rights of same sex people to be married or in a relationship or whatever. And they looked at me and they go 'Eish this country is going to the dogs'. So right there is an example of the constitution and what it stands for and what it says is not really filtering down into people's minds".

She adds that socially

> Martha: "you only have to be a spectator in a taxi for instance, get in a taxi and somebody is reading a piece of news about a march, an LGBTI march and then you just hear the comments people have say, which tells you a lot about what's happening on the ground what people feel about these so-called deviants, you know people who aren't heterosexual".

Monika shares a similar sentiment, describing that the constitution "is something that theoretically people are not really practicing it". Both participants also add that cultural practices need to be evaluated or compromised so that people can stop using them as an excuse to exclude same-sex sexualities.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter described various themes that emerged through the analyses of verbatim transcribed interviews with two participants. The focus of this chapter was the internal and external processes and experiences of participants. The master themes that emerged and were described in this chapter were experiences of grappling with identities, the social and cultural presence of same-sex sexualities, concerns of safety and some suggestions of how to move forward from the current positioning of same-sex sexualities and relationships. This chapter also engaged with the descriptive level of analysis as described by Smith et al. (2009). The

following chapter will further discuss these themes and engage with the interpretive level of analysis.

Chapter 6: DISCUSSION

"The aim of argument or of discussion, should not be victory, but progress"- Joseph Joubert

6.1 Introduction

Findings of this study show a broad spectrum on experiences of multifaceted black female same-sex sexualities negating socially imposed, sensationalised and politicised labels and ideas of what is to be a black, 'lesbian' female. Furthermore, these findings put less emphasis on violence and victimisation, although not totally ignoring the present fears of those violent acts directed towards same-sex sexualities. The narratives of the two black female participants told of lives lived. The question should be less of whether these narratives are an accurate depiction of black female same-sex sexualities, because they are not. These are the lived experiences of two women. This chapter looks at the meaning of the findings, and why they are important, what studies that have preceded this present study have found, limitations of this study and suggestions for future research. This will begin with a brief overview of findings of this study.

6.2 Review of findings

The structure of a research study at times makes themes seem unnaturally separate, whereas in reality these themes are interrelated in a complex arrangement of web, in a way that surpasses my ability to convey these accurately. This interplay of themes is explained in chapter 2 under intersectionality. In an attempt to merge reality and research, five (5) master themes were identified, analysed and interpreted. The themes of this study revolved mainly around individual identities and how these interact with external realities, the social and

cultural presence of black female same-sex sexualities, concerns of safety, which is expected especially with local and international media coverage on violence directed towards same-sex sexualities. Finally, both participants found themselves discussing their opinions about constitutional protection and suggestions regarding helpful ways forward.

6.2.1 "I'm a human being" vs "Oh, you have a she?": Self Identity vs. Perceived Identity

As discussed in the first chapter, there have been numerous theories regarding identity formation. The details about whether identity is a process or a concept, born of nature or nurture is not what this research sets out to prove or disprove. In reality, how we experience ourselves and how this allows us to live our lives is part of our reality regardless of how 'identity' is explained. Queer theory, which forms the framework and as a result the theoretical lenses in which this research is viewed, conceptualises identity as a fluctuating, unstable social construction (Marcus, 2005). This can for example be seen in the comparison participants make between how they behaved before and after 'coming-out' and in different spaces. These are just some examples of how identities are expressed across and within different spaces and time, demonstrating and confirming just how unstable identities really are; also as proposed by queer theory. Having said this, both participants have narrated that they do not like to attach a label to their sexual identity. This is in line with queer theory that states where queerness and fluidity are used as terms to describe sexualities that transcend traditional heteronormative views of sexuality (Giffney, 2009; Savin-Williams, 2005).

There seems, however to be a conflict between how participants would like to identify themselves, social perceptions of what same-sex sexualities should be expressed and how they are presented in social discourse. McLean (2008) discusses how lesbian identities (and I extend this to sexualities in general, especially same sex sexualities) are socially expected to be performed in certain ways. These performances of roles and sexuality are what Judith Butler refers to as performativity. This is to some extend due to media representations of same-sex sexualities. Participants describe that these are often stereotypical and misleading, which in the larger context is unhelpful as this serves to further misrepresent same-sex sexualities to viewers and thus continuing to perpetuate binary representations of feminine gay men and masculine lesbian women. This experience of binaries in sexuality are also

represented in Queer theory as simplifying experiences of sexuality among others. This in part is also due to the fact that this binary does not take into consideration intersectionality, such as gender, race, class etc. In reality this binary isolates sexuality as an identity category. I argue that as long as same-sex sexualities are misrepresented, open and helpful platforms for social, cultural and political discourses will remain closed.

This then brings about the question of appropriateness of terms such as 'lesbian' and the dated-'ness' of such terminology. Queer theory, similarly to the participants in this study suggests labelling sexuality and using such terms as 'lesbian' or 'gay' continues to segregate sexuality, which is seen as more complex and fluid. It is respectfully acknowledgde that there are people that do refer to themselves as 'lesbian' for the exact reasons that some prefer to not 'label' themselves (e.g. fighting the social and political connotations). The choice not label sexual orientation or to use a label that negates normed societal labels. This could lead to experiences of agency and moving away from an otherwise stigmatised group, allowing participants to live with these identities in a somewhat safe manner. LaSala (2010) argues, however, that regardless of whether someone uses the label 'fluid' or prefers not to label their sexual identity at all, this does not take away from the fact that people that are not exclusively heterosexual represent a marginalised and stigmatised minority. If Huxley, Clarke and Halliwell's (2013) argument that adhering to norms (such as labels) indicates a lack of individuality, then moving away from them should imply grappling with individuality. This could mean that moving away from the 'lesbian' label is transformative, however, the reality is that this does not protect same-sex individuals. It should however also be explored that using the term 'fluid' or no labels represents a recognition of individuality as it shows that the individual has grappled with who and how they want to be in the world. Representing an active experience of identities. Factors influencing these identities are discussed in the next section.

6.2.2 Factors influencing identity

"You are trying to be like everybody else": Upbringing and schooling

"I never declared": Experiences of coming out

"They refuse to accept that I'm like them": Racial identity

Participant narratives relayed how support and exposure influences expressions of these identities. An example of this is how comfortable and confident participants felt in spaces where their identities were replicated. More specifically, this is demonstrated in the fact that even though both participants went to all-girl schools in large towns, one participant (Monika) felt confident in her expressing her sexuality early on, as opposed to the other participant (Martha) who was not exposed to openly expressed female same-sex sexualities. In saying this, I am aware that there are other factors influencing these experiences and that this is a simplified version of reality.

Matthews and Salazar (2012) explain that the context in which people grow up can be dominant influence on how people express their identities. They continue to describe that growing up in largely heteronormative contexts often translates to being witness to heterosexual expression and homophobic manifestations both direct and indirect (Matthews & Salazar, 2012). This has a direct impact on later expressions of self-identity as these experiences can increase the likelihood of internalised homophobia, which is described as "taking outward messages and turning them inward onto themselves (Matthews & Salazar, 2012). With participants growing up in a conservative and largely heteronormative context, internalised judgement could be an inevitable reality as seen in how they describe same-sex identities as "deviants" and the conflict sometimes experienced when negotiating how much of their sexualities they express in their everyday lives. This could also further be influenced by the continued retaliation against same-sex sexualities.

Other factors that were narrated to have influenced expression of sexualities were experiences of support from friends and family, especially during the time of coming out. Participants relayed that they have not always been met with support from friends and family, as they describe that some extended family has not been understanding and some wider social contexts.

Grierson and Smith (2005) assert that the process of coming out is both personal and political. This is largely due to the fact that these two dimensions influence on another in social contexts. Both participants reported that they did not 'declare' their sexual orientation. This could be due to the perceived social non-acceptance of same sex sexualities. Participants' experiences of coming out could have been a defensive factor to keep a low

profile, to protect self-identity from treat (e.g. retaliation and non-support) (Breakwell, 1986). Participants were however met with support from close family and friends (for the most part). This support seems to have translated to increased self-esteem and confidence in identity expression, although there is still caution due to ongoing violent retaliation against same-sex sexualities. Continued narratives of support from friends and families could serve as encouragement for other LGBTQIA+ youth in similar contexts. Continued family support could also contribute to families being privy to discourses about the realities of same-sex identities, opening up further social platforms for same-sex identities to be expressed more freely.

Staying with the theme of identity. Participants did not describe their racial identity in terms of skin colour, but rather as a performance. This is in support of the continued assertion that there is no biological basis for racial classification, although race is a lived reality (Lefko-Everett, 2012). Describing that because of their sexual identity, and I extend to that and add that also because of the 'unAfrican' debate, black people that identify as same-sex are stripped of their blackness. One participant readily narrates that she is othered in terms of gender and race because of their sexuality. This is an example of how same-sex sexualities continue to be excluded from the broader social climate, reinforcing a stance that same-sex identities do not belong. This also illustrates the conflict between familial support and social acceptance, creating conflict and a complex experience of the self. Along with the master theme of identity, social and cultural representations of female same-sex sexualities came up.

6.2.3 Social and Cultural Influences

"I'm not obviously lesbian looking": Social (media) representation

"How do we marry you now?": Cultural practices

Participants relay that social representations of 'flamboyant' male same-sex sexualities and 'femme' or 'butch' female same-sex sexualities misrepresent same-sex sexualities. They continue to narrate that the lack of "real" representations of same-sex sexualities does not open-up platforms for discussions and ensuring understanding of same-sex sexualities to the average person. Similarly, Fassinger and Arsineau (2007) argue that the depiction of same-

sex sexualities as wanting to live as the opposite sex, by performing, in terms of sexuality, the role of a man is misleading and leads to misunderstandings in the thinking of the average person who does not have access to information about sexualities for example. There are some same-sex persons who prefer to go against gender norms, however media tends to spread the misconception that this is an accurate stereotype and that sexualities should be performed I certain ways (see Judith Butler on performativity in chapter 2).

Findings of Matebeni''s (2011) study, for example, shows that there are a number of ways in which black lesbian women express and position themselves. For example, participants in her study expressed different styles, with some participants preferring to dress in ways that are thought to be traditionally masculine or preferring to vacillate between masculine and feminine, others preferred to be self- expressive in their styles. Although Matebeni's study was conducted in a geographically larger space, those findings were not vastly different from this study as participants in this study also expressed a variety of expressive preference. These results are however not reflected in the media, which has the impact of continuing to mislead and misrepresent same-sex sexualities, again blocking meaningful changes in the thinking of the average person with regards to same-sex sexualities. As a result, labelling same-sex sexualities as "unAfricanness" and "deviance" will continue their presence in opposition to same-sex sexualities.

Looking at the bigger picture, the continued presence of such discussions leaves doors to discussions about (what participates narrate as) the datedness of cultural practices such as *lobola* to remain unassessed. Often times, cultural practices are accompanied by a culture of silence especially with regards to non-normative phenomena; don't ask, don't tell (Epprecht, 2008). Similarly to Valocchi (2005), I argue that this silence allows for heterosexual norms to continue being dominant, as long as these norms are not questioned within the cultural context. This silence continues to enforce binary models of gender and sexuality. It is however also worth noting that when talking about the practice of lobola participants did not directly oppose the custom as a heteronormative practice in itself, only arguing that it needs to be adapted to include same-sex marriage.

Within the theme of the representations of same-sex sexualities, both participants narrated assumptions of heterosexuality in heteronormative spaces. This started with their experiences of seeing and believing that relationships are between a man and a woman (heterosexual)

especially as children. Monika in particular also spend a lot of time talking about how her friends/ colleagues treat her differently after finding out she "have a she" and being asked why she didn't in a way declare her sexual orientation. As a result she took to doing the opposite and not assuming that people identify with any particular sexual orientation.

Monika and Martha described how socially people expect certain behaviours of same-sex sexualities, perhaps in attempts to manage information that is not understood. Examples of these are looking at clothing and social behaviour such as aggression to describe whether or not someone is 'butch', and the opposite being called 'femme'. Both participants asserted that they have been associated with both, but do not describe themselves as either. This is an example of how binaries in terms of gender or sexuality are rejected and reconstructed. This can be linked to the social expectation of lesbians to look a certain way, a notion that is at times perpetuated by representations of 'butch' and 'femme'. Huxley, Clarke and Halliwell (2013) argue that assuming these lesbian identities is at times experienced as judgement and discriminating. This could be because it assumes that same-sex identities are predictable, which leaves little room for further questioning of this assumption. I agree, that the lived experiences of same-sex identities are not as limited as some assumptions of binaries (masculine/feminine, femme/butch) might suggest, and that there are a number of ways same-sex identities are expressed (Mcdowell, Emrick & Garcia, 2014).

This conflict continues with the how participants describe themselves and socially normed ways that same-sex sexualities were presented as both would at times describe themselves as "lesbian" when talking about how people think of them, which in essence seem to have been internalised, causing further internal conflict as they seem to expect and assume to be described in these ways and as a result think these are thoughts of people.

6.2.4 "We've had no problems": Feelings of acceptance and safety

This research would not be complete without addressing the concerns of safety regarding same-sex sexualities in the South African context, which is at times how same-sex sexualities are framed in "identity politics" (see Heyes, 2009). As a result of not being sure of what others think and how they might react to same-sex sexualities, along with continued local and international coverage of violence towards same-sex sexualities, participants describe feeling safe and/or unsafe in certain spaces. There was a difference in experiences between larger

and smaller spaces. Little research has been done comparing these two contexts. While the topic of a previously white context was not directly addressed in the conversations with participants, the context can address areas such as safety. This is in terms of availability of infrastructure that came with the financial privileges of being white in the historical context of South Africa, this is however an assumption. The true influence of context on lived experiences should have been better addressed.

Having said that, often times, literature has positioned same-sex sexualities as vulnerable and subject to violence, victimisation and resilience (Graham & Kiguwa, 2004; Graziano, 2004). Participants in this study shared largely about feelings of acceptance and safety. It can be assumed that these results mean that these experiences increase confidence and expression in these spaces, allowing for visibility of non-heteronormative expressions in heteronormative spaces, which can help transform these spaces to be increasingly exposed. Morrow (2004) writes that asserting sexual identities and how much of this identity is expressed is a daily decision. In simple terms, feeling safe in spaces makes this decision more plausible. Feeling unsafe in spaces would then cause more caution and less expression. In Matebeni's (2011) study, participants expressed contradictions of living in a large space and negotiating their expression and safety. Her study unpacked the difficulty of black lesbian women wanting to express their own identities and assert themselves in their space (a space in which they belong and want to feel included) while still being aware of discrimination and reality of same-sex identities as being vulnerable and needing to keep safe in that same space. Participants in this study expressed an innate fear, which is not reported to be directly linked to violence in this smaller space (Grahamstown). It is difficult, however to generalise these findings and assume that larger spaces are less safe than smaller spaces. It is however helpful to explore the impact of violence and the positioning of black lesbian identities as vulnerable, on the visibility of black lesbian identities in everyday social settings. This is because the continuous results of the lack of exposure of non-normative identities in otherwise heteronormative societies, leaves them invisible and unexplored.

6.2.5 Moving forward

"A society that box[es] certain people": University LGBT societies

"Thinking in everyday language": Accessibility of information

"Eish this country is going to the dogs": The constitution vs. reality

Initially, I had reservations about this theme, as it seemed to encompass miscellaneous topics, however, as I continued to read, reread and grapple with the topics discussed, this master theme continued to merge the subthemes of this section.

Participants unanimously agreed that the constitutional right to protection and equality for same-sex sexualities is not echoed in social and culture practices, beliefs, and behaviours. This is further supported by pre-existing research as discussed in the first chapter. Participants aggress however, that there is progress, and that there seems to be increasing support, leading to increased visibility of same-sex sexualities, which is also accompanied by increased retaliation and violence towards same-sex sexualities; a vicious cycle. Participants gave suggestions about how this cycle could be broken. These suggestions were sometimes given hesitantly because they struggle to bring about change in attitudes and understanding in some of their most intimate relationships. This hesitation should however not be cause for discarding of what they had to say.

Martha suggested that literature published does not cater to increasing understanding of the average person, leaving information only accessible to those privileged to understanding the language that describe those experiences. Which I admit this research is also guilty of. The language used in academic institution and writings is often understood by those that are exposed to it. However, this use of language excludes sometimes even the participant as they at times do not have access to this information and are unfamiliar with the theories presented. As helpful as this understanding is for those that understand it, it makes little difference in reality, because that knowledge cannot help in their own lived lives.

Martha on the other hand describes how at times societies which have the aim of spreading awareness and understanding at times tends to isolate and box in the very people it is to be protecting. This, she describes, is further exaggerated by people who join societies without engaging in "self-love" and understanding. I argue that if Heyes (2009) is correct in claiming that same-sex identities are at times politicised to present same-sex sexualities as vulnerable to violence and marginalisation connect the fight against discrimination to broader human rights struggles, at times this struggle could neglect to present same-sex sexualities as an identity that brings about positive and sometimes banal experiences.

6.3 Conclusion

This chapter explored the findings of this study, while discussing related research. These related research studies were discussed in the context of being comparative to the findings of this current study. I have criticised that although there are a number of well researched studies that have been published, they are at times difficult to navigate for a novice and for the everyday person, making that knowledge sometimes inaccessible. There are however other portrayals of information that involve the community and can evoke the kind of thinking that can transform individual thinking. To a large extent, the finding of this study reassert the notions of queer theory. This is especially with regards of fluid identities, the ways in which sexuality is expresses in different spaces and how people are expected to perform their sexual identities. This then also ties in heteronormativity, seeing that the context in which participants live is largely heterosexual and there is an assumption of heterosexuality. These concepts are not, however experienced in isolation, which them brings about the importance of understanding intersectionality. The next (and final) chapter concludes and summarised this study.

Chapter 7: CONCLUDING SUMMARY

"Mischief managed"- (Marauder's Map) Harry Potter

This concluding chapter will give a brief summary of the findings of this study. It will also address the importance of this study along with the limitations of this study and suggestions for further research.

7.1 Brief concluding summary

This study had the aim of exploring the lived experiences of black at Rhodes University and their larger context, while understanding how their multiple identities influenced the everyday lived experiences of the participants. The results conveyed experiences of two female women who identify as fluid as not to put themselves in rigid boxes of sexuality and their experiences. Participants of this study not only positioned black lesbian identities as a lived reality, but also as one that constantly negotiated and expressed. It comes with experiences of learning, frustration and fear, but also with joy, inclusion and exploration. Similarly to Zethu Matebeni's (2011) conclusions, participants in this study also showed that the experiences and expressions black lesbian women have and will continue to have political impact as they continue to assert themselves in their own spaces. A presence that should continue to open discussion about the inclusion of same-sex identities in everyday contexts. This study tries to document this presence in an attempt to amplify these experiences to reach beyond the context in which Martha and Monika live, in an attempt to share and make visible these experiences.

7.2 Importance of findings

Yes, the sample size of this research is small, and there are other limitations that will be discussed in an upcoming section. Limitation should however not serve as an excuse to disregard the findings of the present study. Using Queer Theory as a theoretical framework also aids in positioning the understanding of this theory in everyday contexts, which becomes helpful in understanding the sometimes complicated knowledge contained in the theory. The findings of this study are important as they demonstrate that same-sex sexualities allow for diverse interactions with internal (such as an intersect of other identities) and external (such as family and wider society) factors, providing a view into lives lived with experiences not limited to harassment, rape and murder. An uncomfortable majority of information regarding same-sex sexualities have focused on violence and brutality. If nothing, these findings contribute to a limited archive exploring what it is like to be a black same-sex sexual female, and necessarily so. In stating this, I am not assuming that the experiences of violence are inaccurate or unimportant, because they are and they probably expose a very real threat to people's lives. I am merely asserting that the aspect of violence is only part of the experience. In addition, I do not position this study as the first of its kind. Although limited, others have explored and investigated the lived experiences of black female same-sex sexualities before me.

7.3 Limitation of this study

Although not a limitation in terms of a qualitative study, the small number of participants pose limitations to this study. This is both a strength and a limitation, however. This could have had an impact on the number of themes that could have been discussed. The small number limited the variety in terms of narratives to be relayed and explored, however, because the assumption of generalisation is not one that this study tried to take on, this does not have a direct impact on the aim of this research paper. In hindsight, it would have been beneficial for this research if follow up interviews were conducted, in order to clarify and broaden the scope of conversation to include more detail. IPA is an appropriate methodology for this research because of the creativity and flexibility it allowed for, these in the hands of a novice researcher is however a daunting task, which leads to a somewhat simplified version of narratives. Keeping with the idea of novice- ness, being unfamiliar with the context, and also because participants have not been in Grahamstown for a long time, made it difficult to

comment on the influence of this context. This unfamiliarity also means that some experiences, such as intimacy and sexual expression were not explicitly addressed. Additionally, the nature of this study and the nature of narratives means the full understanding of these narratives cannot be truly expressed or interpreted. It is my hope, however, that even with these limitations, the essence of Martha and Monika's has been conveyed. Hopefully these limitations can also be addressed in future research studies.

7.4 Suggestions for Future Research

Few studies relating to same-sex sexualities general, were encountered in the process of conducting and writing this research have focused on the context of smaller towns to show the dynamics and experiences in such settings, this is a gap that needs to be filled. Additionally, there continues to be a need for research to be conducted and knowledge to be made available engaging with true experiences if black female same-sex sexualities in multiple contexts that move away from positioning black 'lesbian' as victims. Lastly, because of social opposition and the assumption of negative judgement (at times from same-sex persons towards heterosexual perceptions), one-on-one interviews can at times be met with guarded-ness, for this reason, perhaps to get a more active participation and more energy, reflection and exploration on the part of participants, group settings could be helpful in engaging with black same-sex sexualities.

Engaging with participants about their experiences, while reflecting on my own has been an enriching and growing experience. Being curious about the world we live in provides for explorations that enrich our experiences through knowledge. Further research and exploration should be done to build on existing research and this current study to further supplements our knowledge and help us engage with our surroundings in an ever changing world.

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Appendix 1: Invitation to participants

RE: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Are you female?

Are you black?

Are you lesbian?

If your answer is yes to all the above, I am looking for you. I need your help...

My name is Naem. I am a Masters of Arts student in Clinical Psychology. Part of the course requires that we do a research proposal. I am interested in investigating and understanding the lives experiences of black lesbian women in Grahamstown.

If you are interested, it will only take one hour of your time, and if halfway through you are no longer interested, you can walk out. Any identifying information about you will be kept confidential. What do you have to lose?

To make this deal even better, I will provide cold-drinks and snacks.

Still interested? For more information, please do not hesitate to contact me by email: n.haihambo@ru.ac.za or naem.h@hotmail.com.

I hope to hear from you soon and see you later.

Thank you!

Naem

Appendix 2: Informed consent form

RHODES UNIVERSITY - DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY
AGREEMENT BETWEEN STUDENT RESEARCHER AND RESEARCH PARTICIPANT
I _____ (participant's name) agree to participate in the research project of Naem Haihambo on Experiences of black lesbian women in South Africa and at Rhodes University.

I understand that:
1. The researcher is a student conducting the research as part of the requirements for a/an Master's degree at Rhodes University. The researcher may be contacted on +27767702502 or n.haihambo@ru.ac.za. The research project has been approved by the relevant ethics committee(s), and is under the supervision of Ms Natalie Donaldson in the Psychology Department at Rhodes University, who may be contacted on +27(0)46 603 7383 (office) or n.donaldson@ru.ac.za

3. My participation will involve a 60 minute long semi- structured interview, to give insight into experiences and perceptions of being a black lesbian woman.

4. I may be asked to answer questions of a personal nature, but I can choose not to answer any questions about aspects of my life which I am not willing to disclose.

5. I am invited to voice to the researcher any concerns I have about my participation in the study, or consequences I may experience as a result of my participation, and to have these addressed to my satisfaction. A counselling centre may be contacted for further support on +27466037070 or counsellingcentre@ru.ac.za

6. I am free to withdraw from the study at any time – however I commit myself to full participation unless some unusual circumstances occur, or I have concerns about my participation which I did not originally anticipate.

7. The report on the project may contain information about my personal experiences, attitudes and behaviours, but that the report will be designed in such a way that it will not be possible to be identified by the general reader.

Signed on (Date):
Participant:_____ Researcher: _____

Appendix 3: Consent to record interview

Rhodes University — Department of Psychology

USE OF TAPE RECORDINGS FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES PERMISSION AND RELEASE FORM

Name of participant			
Participant's contacts details	Email address: Phone number:		
Name of researcher			
Level of research	Honours	Masters	PhD
Brief title of project			
Name of supervisor			

DECLARATION

(Please initial/tick blocks next to the relevant statements)

1.	The nature of the research and the nature of my participation have been explained to me.	verbally	
		in writing	
2.	I agree to be interviewed and to allow recordings to be made of the interview.	audiotape	
		videotape	
3.	I agree to _____ and to allow recordings to be made.	audiotape	
		videotape	
4.	The tape recordings may be transcribed	without conditions	
		only by the researcher	
		by one or more nominated third parties	
5.	I have been informed by the researcher that the tape recordings will be erased once the study is complete and the report has been written.		
	OR I give permission for the tape recordings to be retained after the study and for them to utilised for the following purposes and under the following conditions		

Signature of participant: _____ Date: _____

Witnessed by researcher: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 4: Interview schedule

Introduction of interviewer

My name is Naem, today we are just going to talk a little about you. During this interview, I would like us to discuss your identity as a black lesbian woman. First, I will ask you about your background information and then we will start the discussion about your identity and experiences. I would like to remind you that all information that you give me today will remain confidential and you can opt out at any time.

Semi- Structured Questions (1 hour):

How do you identify yourself in terms of race and sexuality?

(Clarifying question: Can you tell me a little more/ can you elaborate?)

Are these identities important to you?

Is one identity more relevant to you than another? If yes, how? If not, why not?

Can you tell me about your experience of being a black lesbian woman?

(Clarifying question: Can you elaborate? What do you mean by that?)

Can you tell me a little about your family? Are you 'out' to your family? (if not why, if yes, how did family respond)?

What has Rhodes University been like for you?

Are you 'out' at Rhodes and in your res or digs?

What has Rhodes been like for you as a black lesbian woman?

Are there any differences between being at Rhodes and being at home in terms of your race and sexuality?

Are you part of OutRhodes? If yes, is it a safe space for you? If not, why not?

Ending

Thank you so much for your time and energy that you have dedicated to talking to me. It is highly appreciated.