

**INVESTIGATING THE EXPERIENCES OF GAY HIGH SCHOOL LEARNERS
AND THE IMPACT THEREOF ON THEIR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE**

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**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education (Educational Psychology), college of Humanities, school of
Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.**

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work on “*Investigating The Experiences Of High School Gay Learners And The Impact Thereof On Their Academic Performance*” is my own work – both in conception and execution – and, it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been adequately indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Student’s signature

Date

Supervisor’s signature

Date

DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to my late parents, Pa. Dn. David Adebayo Dare (Daddy) and Mrs Alice Faramade Dare (Mummy deceased); they are my fountain of power. To the God almighty is the glory for this work.

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ABSTRACT

In the wider awareness of homosexuality across the world, stereotypes and prejudices associated with gay and lesbian learners are visible in most South African high schools. It was deemed important for this research to investigate and understand the experiences of gay learners and the impact it has on their academic performance. This was done through semi-structured interviews i.e., eliciting qualitative data, at one of the schools located in the Durban metropolitan, with five participants whose ages ranged from 16 to 18 years. This study will use interpretive paradigm underscored by the ecosystemic perspective. The findings generated from the data indicated that gay and lesbian learners encountered negative experiences which impact on their academic performance. Gay and Lesbian learners indicated that there must be advocacy campaigns to ensure the inclusivity of all learners irrespective of their sexual orientation and identity at school. The common sentiment expressed was that the acceptance of homosexuality enables the achievement of social justice and the sound academic performance of this group of learners.

Therefore, equity in schools will improve academic performance and social well-being of gay and lesbian learners. Lastly, teaching about homosexuality at school will ensure the improvement of social justice towards achieving the aims of inclusive education. This will promote peer support, and parental intervention to actualise maximum performance on the encountered negative experiences of gay and lesbian learners, and further create a welcoming safe school environment. The slogan of ‘education for all’ stated that all learners have a right to education in all South African schools, irrespective of the religion, culture, race and sexual orientation. Thus, the findings and recommendations of this study are of special relevance to the South African context.

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
DOE	Department of Education
GLSEN	Gay, Lesbian Straight Education Network
GSA	Gay Straight Alliance
LGB	Lesbian Gay Bisexual
LGBT	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender
RSA	Republic of South African
WHO	World Health Organisation

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CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

The focus of this study is to explore the experiences of gay and lesbian learners and their impact on learners' academic performance in high schools in the Durban metropolitan. In high schools, learners have different backgrounds, beliefs, cultures and values. Interestingly enough, school seems to be a place where diversity manifests itself both in primary and high schools. Teaching about homosexuality has occupied a space of debate as a subject at schools (Reiss, 1997; Francis & Msibi 2011; Richardson, 2006). Some researchers have examined problems of coming out as a gay learner in schools (Carter & Goldfried, 2006; Berzonksy & Kuk 2002; 2005), and others looked at the experiences that gay learners have encountered among other learners which impacted on their academic performance (Berzonksy, 1992). It was noted that gay and lesbian minority encounters victimization related to threat of violence, verbal abuse, bullying, physical assaults and sexual assault among their peers at schools (D'Augelli, 2003; D'Augelli, Grossman & Starks, 2006).

However, the information about bullying and victimization experiences of gay/lesbian adolescents emerged from school based studies (Robin, Brener, Emberley, Donahue, Hack & Goodenow, 2002; Russel, Serif & Truong, 2001 & Williams, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2005), hence, learners' experiences need to be properly investigated to improve on their academic performance. Gay and lesbian learners have been silently faced with different

experiences at school. Swearer, Turner, Givens and Pollack (2008) stated that boys who are bullied by being called “gay” have greater psychological distress which can result in low grades, substance use, and depression have also been linked to bullying on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation. There is a need to investigate the experiences of the learners and understand the impact on their academic performance at school. This will improve gay learners’ well-being and facilitate their inclusion in activities at high schools.

1.2 Historical background of homosexuality

Homosexuality has an ancient historical background which can be traced to the scholars in the late and early centuries; among the writers on homosexuality is Richard Kraft- Ebing, his Ulrich theory in nineteenth century described homosexuality as the brain’s degeneration which strongly affected opinion about sexual orientation. However, Richard’s view was supported by medicine doctor and a writer, Magnus Hirschfeld in his book “Sappho and Socrates” (Levay, 1996, p.18-22). On this interest, Magnus Hirschfeld became a renowned activist about sexual life and stood firmly against homosexuality discrimination. Therefore, homosexuality is a sexual behaviour and thinking which are directed towards people of the same sex; (gay and lesbian) therefore, homosexual is being sexually attracted to the people of one’s same sex. The term ‘homosexuality’ was first used in the 19th century, with the term *heterosexuality* used later in the same century to contrast with the earlier term. The term *bisexuality* was invented in the 20th century as sexual identities became defined by the predominant sex to which people are attracted and thus a label was needed for those who are not predominantly attracted to one sex. This demonstrates that the history of sexuality is not solely the history of different-sex sexuality plus the history of same-sex sexuality, but a broader conception that views historical events in light of our modern concept or concepts of sexuality (Murray & Roscoe, 1998).

Historical personalities of being gay and lesbian often described homosexuality by using modern sexual identity terms such as straight, bisexual, gay queer or faggot. This implies that Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay and Transgender can be named without discriminatory offenses by, for example, not putting an attitude which same-sex sexual experiences are excluded from the remarkable noted figures that arise from same-sex identity formation to develop coping strategy (Schoeman, 2006). In today's society, LGBT-supportive researchers like Richard Kraft- Ebing, Magnus Hirschfield, Thabo Mbisi and many others stick to the homosexual theories, excluding other possibilities.

Although it is still true that majority learners find it difficult to maintain an open and unprejudiced attitude toward gay and lesbian learners, there is both increasing tolerance for gays and lesbians and a slow increasing understanding of sexual diversity in our culture. Perhaps in a few short decades, the majority opinion will be in favour of accepting sexual minorities and an understanding that gay, lesbian, transgendered, and transsexual persons are equally capable and equally deserving of societal respect and support (Mbisi, 2012). Until that time it will take many pioneers to pave this road of social tolerance and respect.

However, many, especially in the academic world, regard the use of modern labels as problematic, owing to differences in the ways that different societies constructed sexual orientation identities and to the connotations of modern words like *queer*. For example, in many societies same-sex sex acts were expected, or completely ignored, and no identity was constructed on their basis (Ryan, 2010). Academic works usually specify which words will be

used in the context. Readers are cautioned to avoid making assumptions about the identity of historical figures based on the use of the terms mentioned above.

According to the biblical account of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Holy Bible (Genesis 19:1-11, NKV) two angels came to destroy the city on the account of immorality. Immediately as the angels entered Lot's house, many people of Sodom and Gomorrah surrounded Lot's house demanding for the visitors to appear so that they can have sex with them, because they were in human nature, both young and old because the angels were handsome. Lot refused to release them and later the angels blind-folded those men and then set Lot out of the city before they destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. This implies that homosexuality has a long history, basically related showed intolerance attitudes towards gay and lesbian as desires for same-sex appear unnatural and forbidden in relation to the rules of God by real sexuality, gay and lesbian practice seem abnormal but as a practice of choice (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009). This shows that homosexuality has a long history in the Bible before Christ. Similarly, Quran and Addits recognised homosexuality but with strong contention against the practices, they believed that is an act of immorality to humanity. At such homosexuality is acknowledged perhaps sexuality is encouraged to practice as endowed by human beings.

1.3 Prevalence of gays and lesbians in South Africa

According to Cochran (2001) male clients who are gay or bisexual or with partners of unspecified gender are more likely to be diagnosed with borderline personality disorder. This means that disclosing a gay identity may consequently encourage other learners who are heterosexual to be tolerant of these learners. Problems of disclosure may impede the collections statistics. More so, there is no clear statistic data for gay and lesbian in South Africa, with my little understanding, gay ratio is 10% which represents 1/10 of the male and with lesbians a 20% ratio that represents 2/10 of the female population. While gay and lesbian people are a minority they need to be included; the constitution should preserve the rights of homosexual minority in South Africa and their right to freedom cannot be under-estimated (Massoud, 2003).

In the survey study by LeVay (1996), the prevalence of homosexuals with same-sex attractions (8%), who identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual (2%), those who engaged in same-sex behavior (7%) (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael & Michael, 1994); reveal that fewer than 2% of adolescents identify as gay/bisexual (Garofalo, Wolf, Wissow, Woods & Goodman, 1999). The number of homosexuals who 'come out' with their identity is increasing widely in many countries nowadays (Van Griensven, Kilmarx, Jeeyapant, Manopaiboon, Korattana, Jenkins, Uthaiworavit, Limpakarnjanarat & Mastro, 2004). Survey of adolescents and young adults' document significantly showed higher prevalence rates for same-sex attractions and behaviors. Eleven percent of students at one high school described themselves in terms of one or more attributes of a same-sex sexuality, whereas fewer than 3% identified as gay (Orenstein, 2001). In another high school study, 6% acknowledged that "*I know that I am homosexual*" and an additional 13% "frequently or sometimes wonder" if they are homosexual (Lock & Steiner,

1999). Among college students, 10% of the males and 12% of the females reported “neutral” to “strong” attractions to members of the same sex, two to four times as many as those who identified as gay/bisexual (Lippa, 2000). This means that locally and internationally gays and lesbians are part of the social groups and should be accepted like any ‘normal’ human being.

1.4 Rationale for study

I have chosen this topic because of my personal interest in the experiences of gay and lesbian learners in the public schools. Societal stereotypes towards homosexuality, social justice and identity resulted in me examining gay and lesbian learners’ experiences in high schools. Many people believe that relationships between same sexes are anti-religious while imposing the view that the relationships between opposite genders are the best for all. Meanwhile, discrimination and arguments arise while trying to identify differences such as attraction, identity and feelings of LGBT individuals in communities, homes and schools. Therefore, this study aims at exploring and investigating the experiences of gay and lesbian learners in high schools and the resulting impact on their academic performance.

However, the researcher had an opportunity to interact with two learners in my area who revealed the experiences they were facing at school from heterosexual learners and labelled the treatment as being unfair to their homosexual identity, considering gay and lesbian as outcast’s and as a laughing stock in the classroom. They mentioned that other learners hated them as though they were not created by God. They were harassed, verbally abused, emotionally victimised and stigmatised. These are the many instances where a hostile attitude towards gay and lesbian learners is evident. School educators partially pay less attention to the report of abuse when gay and lesbian learners are abused (Murray, 2002). This created an unbearable atmosphere for these learners and negatively impacted their academic performances.

Considering the experiences of gay and lesbian learners, one ought to be able to reflect on the identity of gay and lesbian learners and how it impacted on their academic performance and to implement support services to assist these learners to freely concentrate on their studies. The literature shows that many African studies have been done on homosexuality within schools. Berzonksy (1992) studied how the identity of a learner can be related to different behaviours towards their academic challenges that sabotage good performance at school. However, this minority of gay and lesbian learners in high school experience many problems that endanger their academic performance. Therefore, this study is aimed at gaining an understanding gay and lesbian of high school learners' experiences and the impact thereof on their academic performance. This study will also focus on the challenges they experience due to their sexual orientation and identity at school especially among other heterosexual learners.

By the provision of education for all monitored by DoE, the introduction of the policy on Inclusive Education, as published in Education White Paper (DoE,2001), the Department of Education has made a commitment to ensure that all children be welcomed at all schools stating that all learners would be supported to develop their full potential irrespective of their background, culture, abilities or disabilities, their gender or their race but the policy is enhanced to cater for LGBT learners though it has not been properly included into mainstream schools.

Francis and Msibi (2011, p. 164) suggests teaching life orientation in ways that challenge attitudes towards the full inclusion of homosexual individuals along with heterosexuals to actualize quality performance in education, and call for tolerance on the part of the South

African teachers who would be teaching this learning area/subject. This would ensure a secure environment for high school gay and lesbian learners, “helping them to improve their studies without fear of discrimination, stigma, victimisation, and the labelling of gender differences and sexual orientation which could cause low self-esteem during learning”.

After this study has explored the issue with the hope of understanding the experiences of gay and lesbian high school gay learners, this in turn could encourage teachers and their fellow learners in schools to embrace tolerance and assist minority gay and lesbian learners to cope academically. According to (DoE, 2001, p. 1&6) stated to respect the justice of all learners irrespective of gender, culture, identity, religion and status without discrimination (DoE, 2001). This ensures equal right to quality education as provided in the policy.

1.5 Aim of the study

The aim of the study is:

- To explore and understand the experiences of gay and lesbian learners.
- To examine the impact of gay and lesbian learners’ experiences on their academic performance, and
- To investigate the provision of school-based psycho-social support to enhance gay and lesbian learners’ well-being.

1.6 Research questions

Any good research comes with one or more questions to answer through the findings generated in the study. Moustakas (1994) asserts that research questions are meant to probe the authenticity of the participant experiences. De Vos (1998) affirms that a good research question is one which answers through the collection of data. Hence, answers cannot be visible before data collection. With respect to the experiences of gay and lesbian high school learners, the following questions will be used as a guide:

- What are the experiences of gay and lesbian learners in high schools?
- How do gay and lesbian learners' experiences impact on their academic performances?
- How can schools provide psycho-social support to enhance gay and lesbian learner's well-being?

1.7 Research design and methodology

This is a qualitative study that falls within the interpretive paradigm because it tries to explore the social context of the study. I have chosen the interpretive framework, as it is grounded in the world of life experiences. Interpretive research sets out to understand human behaviour and empathize with it. It is based on the views, beliefs, and opinions of society and how it should be interpreted and studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). My aim is to explore the experiences of gay and lesbian learners in high schools.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007, p. 274) define qualitative research as “an approach to social science research that emphasizes collecting descriptive data in natural settings, using inductive thinking, and emphasizes understanding the subjects point of view” while Glesne’s (2011, p. 293) definition reads, “a type of research that focuses on qualities such as words or observations

that are difficult to quantify and lend themselves to interpretation or deconstruction”. Schofield (1993) suggests that it is important in qualitative research to provide a clear, detailed and in-depth description so that others can decide the extent to which findings from one piece of research are generalised to another situation that is to address the twin issues of comparability and translatability. I will use qualitative research because it is the approach that seeks to understand people’s way of living and their experience with it.

Research design depends on the nature of the problem to be answered. A qualitative, explorative and contextual research design will be used. Merriam (2009) and Stake (2010) list central characteristics of qualitative research, finding common ground along a number of dimensions which are validity, transferability and acceptability. Researchers with such a humanistic orientation are comfortable with ambiguity, analytical and introspective, are willing to take risks, are ambitious and dedicated to embrace the substantial commitment required to conduct qualitative research. Researcher will explore the experiences of gay and lesbian learners at a Durban school and the impact this has on their academic performance. This study will seek to explore and understand these gay and lesbian learners’ experiences and attach meaning to their experiences (Schofield, 1993 & Glesne, 2011).

1.8 Theoretical frameworks

Researcher has chosen ecosystem theory of Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Bandura's (1997) social learning theory to explain how the identity of learners can impact on their academic performance. Both theories rely on each other to explain in detail the understanding of gay and lesbian learners' experiences and the way it may impact on the academic performance of homosexual learners. This will unfold in chapter two accordingly.

1.9 Sampling procedures

To gain access to the experiences of gay and lesbian learners, interviews will be done with high school gay and lesbian learners who are gay and lesbian encountering problems of stigmatization, abuse, bullying and related forms with their peers due to their sexual orientation and identity which impact negatively on their academic performance. The researcher will use a purposive sampling technique, and participants will be chosen based on their ability to provide relevant information that they could provide. A sample, according to Teddlie (2007), is a representative selection of people, places, or things from which data is gathered. The study will take place at a high school in Durban. Purposive sampling involves selecting learners to answer the research questions, based on purpose (Teddlie, 2007). The participants in this study are gay and lesbian high school who is experiencing problems of stigmatization, abuse and prejudice related to their sexual orientation which impact negatively on their academic performances.

Researcher has chosen purposive sampling to select my participants; this is in line with McMillian and Schumacher (2010) which required the selection of a small group or number of individuals who have an in-depth knowledge and relevant information of the phenomena under study. This was suitable because gay and lesbian learners are in the best position to explain their experiences that they encounter at school, once they have the original incidence; getting information from any other source will not be accurate on the subject matter which in turn negates the qualitative nature of the study.

1.10 Data collection and analysis

Data collection is the act of gathering or producing information that is relevant to the study. Qualitative research often employs interviews and observations to gather information. In this study, interviews will be solely used as the means of gathering data (Cohen, Saito & Entekhabi, 2001). One of the easiest ways to get the learners' experience is through personal conversations and interviews (Creswell, 2002). In this study, face to face interviews will be used as a flexible way of gathering people's experiences (McLeod, 1996). This will allow the participants the freedom to explain their experiences. The researcher will explain to the participants (learners) what we intends to achieve through their participation in the study in order to allay fears they might have. The interviews will be conducted in the English language so that the researcher and participants can get a clear understanding; however, participants are allowed to switch to their home language if they cannot answer the questions very well in English, then it will be translated into English. This will give the participants opportunity to express themselves freely.

According to Kumar (2012) any research which is qualitative should have clearly stated processes of data analysis. Creswell (1998) asserts that the researcher's role is to understand what the interviewee is saying instead of what the participant is likely to say. Braun and Clarke's (2006) summarized patterns of analysis will be used. In this process of data analysis, the researcher will familiarize himself with the data and irrelevant data shall be deleted. The researcher will only consider the answer to relevant data, research and critical questions. Similar responses will be grouped together into categories with similar ideas. Themes shall be generated to form a logical flow of ideas to be maintained. An independent coder will re-code the raw data and a consensus discussion will emerge to reach consensus on the themes.

1.11 Key concepts

Key concepts are the terms that are employed in the literature relating to this study. The following is a brief explanation of the terms:

1.11.1 Homosexuality

Homosexuality is defined as the orientation of sexual need, desire, or responsiveness towards other persons of the same gender, this means male to male, female to female attraction, behaviour and identity (Masango, 2002). Homosexual identities are clearly noticed among peer-groups in societies, homes and schools. Carter and Goldfried (2006) in their study attempt to address the situation of individuals who have difficulty coming out as gay or bisexual who often get diagnosed with borderline personality disorder. Meanwhile, gay and lesbian learners

may tend to be uncertain whether their peers will accept them for whom they are or rather subject them to abuse, stigmatization, bullying and victimisation (Cochran, 2001).

1.11.2 Gay learners

Beyer (2012) advocates tolerance while dealing with homosexual learners, so as to enhance learner's educational performances through accommodation of their sexual and gender orientation. Zembylas (2010) concurs that teachers can equally utilise their dissatisfaction about gay and lesbian complaints to construct new ideas when addressing or counselling difficult issues relating to sexuality in education without undermining the gay, lesbian and bisexual minority.

Francis (2012) states that there is a need to create more intensive awareness and teaching of sexuality catering for the social, emotional, health and educational well-being of all learners and supporting diversity in teaching and learning in South African schools. The aim is to remove homophobia, which commonly causes feelings and emotions militating against good academic performance of homosexual learners in high schools (Boler, 1999). In many of the public high schools, gay and lesbian learners find it very difficult to maintain adequately well in the classroom participation and struggling to gain tolerance of fellow learners which may have implication on their academic performance.

1.11.3 Academic performance

The relationship between identity development and academic achievement is very significant; effective resolution of these factors is argued to be an essential input for academic success in schools (Berger, 1998). However, Berzonksy (1992) proposes that the identity of a learner relates to different behavioural instances around gay and lesbian which are determinants of their academic outcomes. Berzonksy's social theory (1992) explains that the self-identity of the learner is the choice of lifestyle. The learner is affected either positively or negatively based on the social identity he/she chooses, whether homosexual or heterosexual- which choice can impact on academic performance at school (Berzonksy, 1992).

Berzonksy and Kuk (2002; 2005) suggest that it is possible that identity formation style may not only affect the cognitive performance of a learner but also affects the way gay and lesbian adapts to high school, which is a function of the degree of his acceptance by his peers. Such responsive attitude to peers acceptance is likely to encounter difficulties at school (Berzonksy & Kuk 2002; 2005). Was and Isaacson (2008) concur that the identity of gay learners may affect all areas of their lives because social identity has implication for wider society, as there are numerous notions on the issues of disclosure within the community they live in.

Academic performance is often defined as the competence measures of the learners' mental, physical, intellectual, emotional, psychological, psychosocial and spiritual abilities which the learners can be access towards a certification in the structured settings of a school (Singer, 1999). This supported by the teaching and mentoring of qualified educators and teachers at schools.

Generally, performance is defined as the observable or measurable behaviour of a person or an animal in a particular situation, usually an experimental situation (Simpson & Weiner, 1989). This means that performance measures the aspect of behaviour that can be observed at a specific period of time.

Simpson and Weiner (1989) defined academic performance as "the observable or measurable behaviour of the learner towards achieving school desired goals of assessment which are recorded and observed at a specific period basically within the school timing". It shows how badly or well the learner can perform classroom activities. Singer (1999) defines a performance test as the type of test which required doing something or saying. This suggests that learners were motivated through the rigour of certain objectives which are worthy of appraisal in pursuing their academic standards at school. Similarly, academic performance requires testing that throws more light on the learners ability to deal with the tasks (Drever, 1981).

In order to determine performance, a performance test is conducted. Singer (1999) defined performance test as the type of mental test in which the subject is asked to do something rather than to say something. In my view, academic performance of a student can be regarded as the observable and measurable behaviour of a student in a particular examining task. For example, the academic performance of a student in social studies includes observable and measurable behaviour of a student at any point in time during a course. So we can equate academic performance with the observed behaviour or expectation of achieving a specific behaviour. Achievement is defined as a measurable behaviour in a standard series of tests as given by the teachers to measure student's proficiency in school subjects per time (Simpson & Weiner, 1989).

Lawrence (1998) differentiates achievement from performance when he tries to clarify academic long term measures of academic performance as a continual process while achievement is measured as stagnating, falling or improving over a long period of time. Student's academic performance means classified activities set on a performance index which is based on testing learners' abilities on the subject for the grade (Lawrence, 1998).

Student's academic performance can be measured by the capabilities outcomes of the school tasks passed (Wainer, 1994). This connotes the use of academic performance instead of the concept of achievement; they are closely interwoven but academic performance relates to the whole history as shown in school records (Wainer, 1994).

1.11.4 Psycho-social support

Psycho-social support is describes as a continuum of care and support which aims at ensuring the social, emotional and psychological wellbeing of individual learners at school to encourage welfare (Smart, 2003). This support will improve learners' academic performance. Obviously, the provision of psychosocial support services is aimed at enhancing the social, spiritual and emotional wellbeing of gay and lesbian learners who are abused and insecure at schools due to disclosure of their sexuality nature among other learners (Richter, Foster, & Sherr, 2006). The use of the term psychosocial is based on the idea that a combination of factors are responsible for the "*psychosocial wellbeing*" of people, and that these biological, emotional, spiritual, cultural, social, mental and material aspects of experience cannot necessarily be separated from one another (Addison, 1992). The term directs attention towards the totality of people's

experience rather than focusing exclusively on the physical or psychological aspects of health and wellbeing, and emphasises the need to view these issues within the interpersonal contexts of wider family and community networks in which they are located (Henderson, 1995).

These two aspects are closely intertwined in the context of complex emergencies whereby the provision of psychosocial support is part of the humanitarian relief and early recovery efforts. One of the foundations of psychosocial wellbeing is access to basic needs (food, shelter, livelihood, healthcare, education services and counselling) together with a sense of security that comes from living in a safe and supportive environment. The benefits of psychosocial support interventions should result in a positive impact on children's wellbeing, and address the basic psychological needs of competence and relatedness.

Psychosocial support may include a range of actions along the continuum by (Cluver, Gardner & Operario, 2007) can be summarized as follows:

- Love and affirmation. This includes empathy and apathy of learners
- Ensuring that the child's basic rights are realized (for example protection, nutrition, development, health care, and free participation).
- Listening and responding to the child's complaints in order to assist him or her to cope in times of difficulties such as coping with loss or exposure to frightening experiences.
- Ensuring that the learners are well connected socially to others.
- Strengthening the life skills of the child.

Psychosocial support aimed at removing psychological stress, possibly leading to concentration difficulties on academic issues, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress

disorder (Cluver et al., 2007). Emotional difficulties manifested for example in relationship problems and learning difficulties.

However, psychosocial support enhanced psychosocial wellbeing when individuals have the competencies and capacities to deal with life's demands and manage relationships well, enabling them to understand their environment, engage with it, make choices, and have hope for the future (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). This show from learners' psychosocial well-being covers many aspects of the child's life, such as appropriate emotions, relevant thoughts or cognitions, mental health, developmentally appropriate spirituality and morality, positive relationships with family, peers and teachers. Learner's psychosocial wellbeing affects every aspect of their lives, from their ability to learn, to be healthy, to play, to be productive and to relate well to other people as they grow.

1.12. Ethical considerations

Concerning, ethical issues, I was conscious of respecting the concept of human rights, dignity and the privacy of the participants or respondents during and after the course of research so as to protect them. I followed the general recommendation of obtaining permission to conduct the study from the University and the school principal. Only adolescents whose parents' permission was gained were used in the study. Issues such as not causing any harm to clients, informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality were observed.

1.12.1 No harm to participants

Research should cause no harm or threat to participants. In this study, if participants experience stress when being interviewed because of the sensitive nature of the study, the interview will be discontinued. To ensure that stress is minimised, the interview will be controlled by the participants themselves, and they can stop at any time. If the participants need counselling, they will be referred to a psychologist.

1.12.2 Informed and understood consent

Gay and lesbian learners were visited in the safe zone of their school and given information regarding the study and their roles therein. Interview appointments were scheduled with the gay and lesbian high school learners who agreed to participate in the study. Participants were told about the nature of the study to be done (Cohen et al., 2001) and were made aware that they had a right to withdraw from the study at any time if they feel uncomfortable. At the first appointment, the letter of consent was discussed and participants read, queried and then signed the letter of consent.

1.12.3 Confidentiality and anonymity

I explained to the participants that the information they would share would be kept confidential and anonymity would be maintained throughout the study. Pseudonyms were used in the study for the security of their identity.

1.12.4 Access to findings of the study

Participants were informed of the findings of the research study. Participants were free to access that the transcribed data to ensure that I captured their experiences correctly.

1.12.5 Feasibility of the Study

I have identified the factors which contributed to the successful completion of the study:

- I managed to reach the participants at the appointed times.
- Permission was sought from the participants.
- Participants were interviewed after school hours, sometimes on Saturday at their school or homes.
- I bore all expense costs.

1.13 Delimitation of the study

As a student from Educational Psychology, the study looks at the experiences of gay and lesbian learners who are gay. Also, the research will try to gain understanding of how the experiences of high school gay and lesbian learners' are influenced by their heterosexual school. The study will try to show how the gay and lesbian learners are being treated at school without been discriminated against or abused.

1.14 Overview of the study

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the research. This includes the aim of the study, critical research questions, key concepts and research design and methodology. The focus of *Chapter 2* will be based on the literature review and theoretical framework for understanding the experiences of high school gay learners who encounter problems in their learning and possible ways of helping these learners through social learning theory. *Chapter 3* will provide a detailed description of the research design and methodology applied to achieve the aim of the study. Also, it will include how participants will be selected and how the data will be analysed. *Chapter 4* thereafter will present the findings of this study. *Chapter 5* focuses on a discussion of findings and analysis. *Chapter 6* will include conclusions, guidelines based on the research findings, a description of the limitations of the study and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

The research seeks to illuminate on the experiences of gay/lesbian learners and challenges affecting their learning. This chapter provides a theoretical context for the phenomena. The gay and lesbian learners' identity and sexuality can be understood in the context of theories about homosexuality, which are a focus in this section.

This chapter involves a review of literature of gay and lesbian that can be traced to 'homosexuality' by Masango (2002), a concept preferred in this dissertation, and which will be clarified later. An historical overview of homosexuality and of the experiences of gays and lesbians over time shows how school environment and their classmates impact on their academic performance negatively. The researcher will try to explore how being gay and lesbian impact on learners' academic performance. The impact thereof will be explored through social learning theory. Lastly, the researcher will look at the different ways that can be employed to assist these gay and lesbian learners by referring to the policy of Inclusive Education provided for all citizens to enjoy.

Gay and lesbian learners become anxious and depressed at times by the treatment received from their peers at school. Berger (1998) asserts the significant relationship between identity development of a learner and academic achievement is based on the ability to reason on the values attribute to embrace differences that arise from right or wrong choices he/she accepts. The problems experienced by gay and lesbian learners at high school come from the ways in which school age mates, friends and teachers respond to their sexual identity. The experiences

encountered from the family, school, peers and society impact on their academic performance (Bierman, 2004).

The following are key concepts mentioned while engaging in this study for an understanding of the finding as explained with the literature hereunder:

2.2 Homosexuality and academic performance

Homosexuality is defined as the orientation of sexual need, desire, or responsiveness towards other persons of the same gender, this means male to male, female to female attraction, behaviour and identity (Masango, 2002). Homosexuality is commonly noted among the African countries, sub-Sahara and across the modern world today. Their identities are clearly noticed among peer-groups in societies, homes and schools.

Carter and Goldfried (2006)'s study attempted to address the issue regarding individuals who have difficulty coming out as gay or bisexual often get diagnosed with borderline personality disorder. Apparently, gay and lesbian learners' may tend to be uncertain whether their peers will accept them for who they are or rather subject them to abuse, stigmatisation, bullying and victimising on daily basis at school (Cochran, 2001).

Teaching about homosexuality without providing adequate support for gay learners may lead to high levels of school dropouts as they constantly face challenges of abuse uncorrected by teachers and their peers in the classroom; youth without inter-personal relationship skills are at greater risk than their peers who have these skills for a number of reasons, including dropping out of school (Olweus, 1996a) and (Olweus, 1996b). The absence of co-operation and friendly

interaction between gay learners and their peers who are heterosexual can disrupt their confidence; team-work, learning and self-esteem concerning their academic performance in schools (Boyd & Yin, 1996).

Gay learners' self-esteem is influenced by the support received from societies, homes and schools with positive or negative academic outcomes (Robinson, 1995). Writers attach importance to the need for support services to prevent negative outcomes on such minority learners (Svetaz, Ireland & Blum, 2000). The segregation of learners who are gay or lesbian does not promote a safer atmosphere to learning instead; the need is to embrace diversity among all learners.

Similarly, Murray (2002) suggests that teacher–student' relationships can assist gay learners to have free participation in the classrooms among other learners who are heterosexuals and reduce the rate of offenses reported in schools. However, the attitudes of many teachers and educators towards the homosexual minority at high school jeopardises the good interactive tolerance among learners and create relationship difficulties. Warm support from teachers teaching gay and lesbian learners may promote good behaviour among their fellow classmates.

Meyer (2003) asserts that prejudice, stigma and discrimination create a hostile and stressful social environment that causes mental health problems for gay learners and affects their academic performance resulting in mental health problems. However, for LGBT children, schools can become a battlefield, with homophobic bullying as a major contributor to the ostracism, fear, and distress that many students experience (Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz, 2010). Research has shown that LGBT students who are more open about their

sexual orientation are more likely to be bullied by their peers, and victimisation and bullying may lead to severe psychological distress.

Petrovic (1998) argues that using the virtue of recognition and the principle of non-oppression will enhance democracy. This requires a positive portrayal of homosexuality in schools and precludes teachers from expressing their beliefs against it. With the increasingly heard voices of gays, lesbians and bisexuals (GLB) in American society and their demands for recognition have come with negative responses from religious conservatives.

Richardson (2006) confirms that there are no educational policies requiring schools to become safe places for gay, lesbian and bisexual (GLB) learners or where both teachers and the curriculum fully address homosexuality. The invisibility of homosexuality within curriculum policies contradicts the goals of inclusive and equal education for all, notwithstanding, the South African Constitution's commitment to equality regarding sexual orientation. Little has been done to equip teachers to challenge and teach related issues on homosexuality and homophobia in classroom (Francis & Msibi, 2011; Richardson 2006). The majority of teachers and educators unconsciously put gay and lesbian learners at risk and make them liable to internalise emotional trauma to these learners while at school. Therefore, is very important to engage with a supportive network to assist and improve the challenges encountered by gay and lesbian learners in the classrooms.

2.3 Adolescence and identity formation

Adolescence is a time to develop cognitively, physically, socially, and emotionally to prepare to display new behaviour as youngsters transform from childhood to adulthood. This period in turn helps them to reshape their development in other forms. Adolescent risk-taking is an important process that shapes their identities, through decision-making skills they to some develop realistic assessments of themselves, other people, and the world around them (Ponton, 1997). This exploration of behaviour is natural in adolescence (Hamburg, 1997) and teens need room to experiment and to experience the outcomes of their own decision making in many different situations (Dryfoos, 1998).

However, young people sometimes over-estimate their capacity to handle new situations, and this can pose real threats to their health. Jaffe (1998) prefers self-confidence that promotes self-worth without neglecting society's cultures and values. It is a time when young people reflect on and experiment with goals, values, and beliefs in order to develop a sense of self (Waterman, 1993).

School environments should be accommodating with qualified professionals like educators, counsellors, social workers and psychologists who will enhance the service delivery support to any learners who are victims of abuse, gender identity and any form of problems on the basis of constant monitoring to encourage their well-being and academic performance (Horner, 2009). There should be school intervention programmes for tolerance that promote equity and a friendly atmosphere for unity among learners.

Identity formation cannot be overlooked in relation to the adolescent time of “psychological changes which generally include questioning of identity and achievement of an appropriate sex role; movement toward personal independence, and social changes in which, for a time, the most important factor is peer group” (Hine, 1999, p. 36). Grotevant (1997) refers to this developmental process as adoptive identity formation.

Adolescence is a time to develop cognitively, physically, socially, and emotionally to prepare them to display new behaviour as they transform from childhood to adulthood. Adolescence is a gap between teenage and adulthood (Kaplan, 2004). This period in turn helps them to reshape their development in other forms. Adolescent risk-taking is an important process that shapes their identities: through the development of decision-making skills, they develop realistic assessments of themselves, other people, and the world around them (Ponton, 1997). This exploration of behaviour is natural in adolescence (Hamburg, 1997), and teens need room to experiment and to experience the outcomes of their own decision making in many different situations (Dryfoos, 1998).

Parental influence on adolescents is associated with parents' facilitation of children's social interactions outside of the family (Parke, Killian, Dennis, Flyr, McDowell & Simpkins, 2003). Research has established associations between parents' facilitation of social interactions and children's academic, behavioural, and emotional outcomes, particularly in the realm of education, peer relationships, religion, and neighbourhood resources. Parents' involvement in children's social interactions has been associated with children's academic outcomes (Connors & Epstein, 1995), religious and community involvement and academic achievement (Elder & Conger, 2000). There have been few studies, however, that examine associations between

parents' facilitation of children's social interactions and identity formation (Umaña-Taylor, Bhanot, & Shin, 2004; 2006).

Meyer (2003) asserts that prejudice, stigma, and discrimination, creates a hostile and stressful social environment that causes mental health problems for gays learners and affects their academic performance resulting in mental health problems caused by excess stress related to stigma and prejudice regarding sexual orientation. For LGBT children, schools can become a battlefield, with homophobic bullying as a major contributor to the ostracism, fear, and distress that many students experience (Kosciw et al., 2010). Research has shown that LGB students who are more open about their sexual orientation are more likely to be bullied by their peers, and the victimization of bullying may lead to severe psychological distress.

Swearer, Turner, Givens and Pollack (2008) stated that boys who are bullied by being called "gay" have greater psychological distress which can result in low grades, substance use, and depression. These factors have also been linked to bullying on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation. LGBT learners experience bullying, and the hostility of other learners to the positive academic performance of gay learners, and their well-being. I, on this note, it is obvious that gay and lesbian learners suffered depression which cause them to under- perform and may lead to cultivate bad habits.

According to the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa (2013), "corrective rape" is the term given to the erroneous myth that heterosexual rape will have a "healing" effect on a lesbian woman or gay man and will turn him or her "straight" again. Statements like "we will teach

you a lesson”, or “show you how to be a real woman” or “show you to be a real man” accompany the crime indicating the perpetrator(s)’ “belief in the myth that lesbianism and being gay is unnatural and wrong”.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (1997), the perpetrators thus commit the crime with a bias or hatred towards the victim. But, classifying the rape only as a hate crime also ignores that it is particularly women and not men who are most vulnerable to the crime. The fact that it is poor black women and men living in informal settlements who are the most likely victims of this crime is often ignored by prevailing narratives of their experiences on corrective rape. WHO (2002) states that majority of LGBT encountered sexual violence like harassment and rape which lead to major health problems for the victims of rape and related hate crimes (WHO, 2002). These incidents are certainly motivated by hate and or prejudice, but the victims are made more vulnerable by a state that does not adequately provide for their socio-economic needs.

Berzonksy (1992) proposes that the identity of a learner relates to different behavioural instances around him that impact on academic outcomes. Berzonksy (1992) explains that the self-identity of the learner is the choice of lifestyle. Basically, it is stated that the learner is affected positively or negatively based on the social identity he chooses whether gay or straight which can impact on academic performance in school (Berzonksy, 1992).

Berzonksy and Kuk (2005) suggest that it is possible that one’s identity formation not only affects the cognitive performance of the learner but also the way he adapts to the high school in regards to the orientation he has among his peers. Such acceptance is liable to encounter

difficulties at the schools (Berzonksy and Kuk 2002; 2005). Meanwhile, Elliot and Harackiewicz (1996) propose absence of caring responses from teachers, fellow learners, and counsellors in schools will make participation in tasks more difficult for gay learners in high schools. Learners who experience inadequate attention from teachers may develop low self-esteem, laziness, lack of enthusiasm to attend classes. Also, the school academic goals are undermined by these responses resulting in the failure of the learner. Academic performance is also determined by self-perseverance, as portrayed by Was and Isaacson (2008). Berzonksy and Kuk (2005) asserts that informational process; an art of getting first hand experiences of the victim to support current challenges aimed at improving social wellbeing of learners with different identities which is positively correlated with academic performance.

Msibi's (2012) study exposes the dominant attitudes of the heterosexual majority at school as unfair treatment towards homosexuals. At school, teachers and pupils should be made to realise that gay or lesbian identity and sexual differences does not deprive learners of their right to learn in a safer environment. Furthermore, Mbisi (2012) argues that the teacher, being the agent of change, needs to reflect an accommodating mind-set instead of influencing the heterosexual dominance by creating a homophobic environment that endangers gay and lesbian learners at schools. Concerning this fact, Pianata (1999) encourages teachers not to contribute indirectly to creating a hostile environment for students who are gay and lesbian learners, and he argues that oppressive relations among learners in schools intolerance behaviours experiences encountered may impact on their academic performance.

Moreover, Msibi (2012) emphasises how identities are shaped around on exclusion of an 'other', but there is no identity that is inferior to the other; he is interested in making

heterosexual domination known. He equally provides a demonstration of the systematic potential for appropriate transformation and intervention at schools, and for the maintenance of equilibrium between heterosexuals and homosexuals.

Gainor (2000) confirms that the attention of LGBT communities has been focused on the concerns of young people, especially those in school. Gainor (2000) refers to anti-gay and lesbian attitudes as a component of a general climate of violence and hostility and the lack of acceptance of diversity which in turn exposes minority learners to the risk of victimisation. For instance, there has been a heated debate on including gay and lesbian issues in diversity education in elementary and secondary schools, the access to student clubs such as the “gay straight alliance” and the emergence of a national organisation known as Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN, 2012). This argues for the recognition of the learners’ right to be safe at schools with no fear of abuse among their co-learners.

2.4 Homosexuality, peer pressure and choice of friends

Learners were easily influence by the peer pressure both at schools and homes, this affects where they choose to adapt perfectly (James, 1993). According to their free will, it is noted that anyone can determine what to do based on his or her preference within the environment, society, and schools. Hence, learners may choose any lifestyle which can maximise their satisfaction in their daily life and for their social well-being while there are no distractions and labelling among other learners ensuring good academic performance (Hausman, 2000, p.114). Basically, any student can determine how to interact socially with his or her peers within the classroom and school respectively (Satz & Ferejohn, 1994, p. 77). Gay and lesbian learners at

school can cooperate with other learners that are not gay and enjoy teaching and learning together without fear of threat, this in turn improve learners social interaction without undermining academic performance at school (Woodward, 2003).

2.5 Homosexuality and Social justice issues

With the introduction of the policy on Inclusive Education, as published in Education White Paper 6 (2001), the Department of Education has made a commitment to ensure that all children would be welcomed in all schools and that they would be supported to develop their full potential irrespective of their background, culture, abilities or disabilities, their gender or their race. The concept ‘full-service/inclusive’ school was introduced to show how ordinary schools can transform themselves to become fully inclusive centres of care and support. With the fall of the apartheid regime in 1996, for the first time, discrimination based on sexual orientation was prohibited through the adoption of the new South African Constitution that allowed equal right of genders (Cock, 2003). In spite of the liberal constitution, South African gay men and lesbian women are still faced with discrimination and victimisation because of their sexual orientation.

The White Paper 6, DoE (2001, p. 6) states, “equal learning opportunities should be visible without discrimination, irrespective of gender, race, ethnicity, age, status and religion” thus the curriculum document has stated clearly that social justice is for all learners without fear or favour. However, implementation is not fully in place and discrimination against homosexuality in schools is still visible. The commitment of the curriculum policy has been jeopardised by the action and attitudes of religious teachers (in particular) over the rights of

gay, lesbian and bisexual minority students. Thus, there is need for psychological services to support these learners' well-being.

2.6 Homosexuality and bullying

Swearer, Turner, Givens and Pollack (2008) state that boys who are bullied by being called “gay” experience psychological distress which can result in low grades, substance use, and depression. These factors also been linked to bullying on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation. LGBT students experience bullying, abuse, picked on and name-calling which obviously disassociate learners who are gay from those who are not gay at school. Talking about being gay and lesbian nowadays; people around take it wrongly and start endangering these learners and other learners who are heterosexuals were indoctrinated from homes against minority gay and lesbians and showed discriminating attitudes in the classrooms. These attitudes seem to be unfair treatment on the part of other learners. This means that often gay learners are bullied by their peers for being different and lady-like.

GLSEN (2012) reports a research study that established that more research needs to be done to document the school-related experiences of LGBT youth, but also that more work needs to be done in our nation's schools to create safer climates for all students, including LGBT youth. Given the evidence that incidents of harassment and assault are not uncommon to LGBT youth in their schools, local community leaders, GLSEN chapter members, teachers, educators, parents and GSA members need to work within their schools and their school districts to insure that all students are taught with respect and have access to a quality education. Gay and lesbian learners have the right to experiment and be responsible for their choices and be accountable for the consequences.

2.7 Risk factors

Elze (2002) examines the risk factors associated with internalising and externalising problems among gay, lesbian, and bisexual adolescents. It is obvious that lesbian, gay, and bisexual adolescents face unique stressors, as well as shared risk factors with other vulnerable adolescents. This risk factors like; insecurity, fear, anxiety may developed to emotional distress and behaviour problems. Additionally, gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth experienced more internalising and externalising problems than normative adolescents. For instance, one of the participants was physically unstable due to the unwelcome idea of his classmates and it was evident that he is unable to cope very well in the class work.

2.8 Gay versus suicidal thought

Kosciw et al. (2010) concur on the need to implement school-wide anti-bullying policies to reduce or eliminate victimization and for the benefits of LGBT learners in the schools. Actually, gay and lesbian learners in the schools and homes experience social prejudice, harassment and stigmatization leading to rejection by their peers, friends and causing an intensified isolation that make these learners vulnerable to suicidal thought (Ryan & Futterman, 1998; Varney, 2001). It is clear that disassociation and isolation may endanger a victim of abuses in any form and trigger minds to wrong thoughts which can lead to perpetual ideation, at the absence of counselling and supportive measure; such learner is liable to commit suicide.

2.9 Homosexuality and Corrective rape

According to the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa (2013), “corrective rape” is the term given to the erroneous myth that heterosexual rape will have a “healing” effect on a lesbian woman or gay man and will turn him or her “straight” again. Statements like “*we will teach you a lesson*”, or “*show you how to be a real woman*” or “*show you to be a real man*” accompany the crime indicating the perpetrators’ belief in the myth that lesbianism and being gay is unnatural and wrong.

A recent News caption was “Lesbian South Africans are living in fear as rape and murder becomes a daily threat in the townships they call home. On June 30th 2011, Gali, 23 years of age, was the latest victim of a series of violent attacks against lesbians. She was stabbed within a stone's throw of her home in Crossroads Township, Cape Town, as she returned from work one evening with her girlfriend. She reported that two (men) that stays within her community, started yelling insults at her while she was passing along the road and followed her and started swearing at her, screaming: 'Hey you lesbian, you tomboy, we'll show you,' Ms Jeli reported to the BBC. Before she knew it, a sharp knife had entered her back – two fast jabs, and then she was on the ground, half conscious, she felt the knife sink into her skin twice more. She thought that they would kill her.

Another victim was Tuda on April 4, 2014, who was raped by eight men and murdered in KwaThema Township near Johannesburg. Tuda was 24 years-old (BBC News, 2014). Her face and head were disfigured by stoning, and she was stabbed several times with broken glass. The attack on her is thought to have begun as a case of what is known as "corrective rape", in which men rape lesbians in what they see as an attempt to "correct" their sexual orientation with no

good result than being a wicked act towards lesbian and gay people, the practice appears to be on the increase in South Africa as this attitude creates an hostile environment to the LGBT minority.

According to the World Health Organization (1997), the perpetrator thus commits the crime with a bias or hatred towards the victim. But, classifying the rape only as a hate crime also ignores that it is particularly women and not men who are most vulnerable to the crime. The fact that it is black poor women and men living in informal settlements who are the most likely victims of this crime is often ignored by prevailing narratives of their experiences on corrective rape.

Gay learners/teenagers experience a lot of rejection from parents, peers and friends. Research has shown that family rejection is a predictor of negative outcomes (Remafedi, Farrow, & Deisher, 1991; Ryan, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2009; Savin-Williams, 1994; Wilber, Ryan, & Marksamer, 2006) and that parental acceptance and school supports are protective factors for LGBT learners (D'Augelli, 2003; D'Augelli, Hershberger, & Pilkington, 1998; Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006) for sexual minority youth. There is no total acceptance of homosexuals that will improve their academic performance at high school as the finding of this study reveals.

In a situation where a learner is experiencing social exclusion from home, the stress that he/she bears can have a negative impact on their wellbeing. Mostly, gay and lesbian learners easily know when their mates discriminate against them because of their difference in sexual orientation and isolate themselves from other learners within the school environment.

Victimization occurs in schools which are instead meant to enhance students' overall educational experiences; Intellectual growth is indeed important but not at the expense of ignoring the behavioural, emotional, and social development of children (Arum, 2011; Lee, 2012). Lee (2012) emphasizes that teacher's engagement with learners yields positive outcomes. When the focus is ultimately on quantifying student output, perhaps more genuine aspects of holistic values and emotionality that in here inhuman relationships may be neglected (Hoffman, 2009). In the classroom activities should be directed towards the wellness of individual learners and should not focus on sexual differences to avert victimizing one or other group. In the same vein, heterosexual students may lead to high level of school drop out of homosexual minority frequently conflict.

Simultaneously, gay self-esteem is influenced by the support received from broader society, from homes and schools which lead to positive or negative outcomes (Robinson, 1995). Therefore there is a need for support services to prevent negative outcomes for sexual minority learners (Svetaz, Ireland & Blum, 2000). Teacher-students' relationships can assist gay learner's minority to have free participation in the classrooms among other learners who are heterosexuals and reduce the rate of offenses to be reported in schools (Murray, 2002). Gay and lesbian learners may experience depression, anxiety and low self-esteem that can arise as untold hardship experiences at school among the heterosexual students which perhaps lead these learners to perform below average on their academic records. School drop-out is the last resort of many gay and lesbian learners who does not have any or little supportive measures to improve their school experiences that may hinder their academic performance in the classroom among fellow learners.

Sexual minority students report more bullying and sexual harassment than their heterosexual peers (Saewyc, Poon, Homma & Skay, 2007; Williams, Glaser & Williams, 2005). There should be school support services to minimise or eliminate the unsafe school environment for minority learners to ameliorate any form of prejudice based on the sexual identity and orientation of gay and lesbian learners at school. Gay and lesbian learners' experience conscious fear that may distract their attention in classroom quizzes and exercises and cause them to develop low self-esteem ability their abilities to study, perhaps leading them to perform badly academically.

The evidence is that sexual minority learners lack supportive family, school peers and teachers (Warwick, Lambiris, Westwood & Steedman, 2001; Williams et al., 2005) and experience more victimization and isolation within their families and in schools (Garofalo, Wolf, Wssow, Woods Goodman, 1999). Gay and lesbian learners report that educators and teachers often did not intervene, even when they witnessed harassment of learners perceived to be gay or lesbian, making them internalise the experience more strongly (Elze, 2003; Ryan & Rivers, 2003; Warwick et al., 2001). Non-disclosure of peer victimization is likely to be particularly problematic among lesbian and gay learners at school; they are powerless to challenge the situations of their experiences. The above studies shows that many negative experiences encountered by LGBT learners provide evidence of the negligence of some educators to address the situation whenever they are aware of abuse reported by learners of a different sexual identity.

D'Augelli, Hershberger and Pilkington (1998, p. 200) indicates that "up to half of lesbians and gay men have experienced some form of bullying at school and many problems of lesbian, gay,

and bisexual students in high school, such as poor academic performance, truancy, and dropping out of school, are direct or indirect results of verbal and physical abuse perpetrated by peers or others in school” He argues, “That the problems of lesbian and gay youths should not be minimised, and that both systematic victimization and direct attacks must be eliminated” (D’Augelli et.al, 1998 p. 206). Bullying promotes fear and insecurity amongst gay and lesbian learners, leading to high rate of absenteeism at school and later drop out.

In her study, Elze (2002) suggests that there is a high risk of emotional distress such symptoms of depression and anxiety as gay, lesbian and bisexual adolescents become aware of romantic or sexual feelings for individuals of the same sex in family and school environments was marked by stigmatization, victimization and lack of support. Coming out as being gay at the young age makes one more visible and subject to labelling from other learners (Berzonksy, 1992), Stresses are generated from the persistent incidence of such labelling which is beyond the gay learners’ control, leading to depression, anxiety and substance abuse. Emotional stress may possibly develop into low self-esteem and make gay and lesbian learners under-perform at school.

2.10 Theoretical frameworks

I have chosen ecosystem theory of Bronfenbrenner (1979) to explain how the identity of learners can impact on their academic performance. Ecosystem theory and social learning theory; both theories rely on each other to explain in detail understanding of gay learners’ experiences and the way it impact of academic performance. This will be unfolded in chapter two accordingly.

This theory states that the ecological factors of a child are influenced by the way that child is socialised. Bronfenbrenner (1989) defines ecological systems theory as an approach to the study of human development that consists of the ‘scientific’ study of the progressive, mutual accommodation, throughout the life course. However, between the active stages of human growth and the changing around properties of the immediate settings that evolves human lives, as this process is affected by the relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded. This asserts that learner’s development is associated with the rapport he/she have with peers at schools. Bronfenbrenner (1989, p. 227) explains that in order to underline the possible meaning for development by gaining personal qualities, it is significant that cooperate relationships will emerge with people within the immediate environment. This connotes that gay learners’ academic performance depend on the treatment receive by the peers and teachers of the schools which they belong.

2.10.1 Ecosystemic theory

Bronfenbrenner (1979) explains five environmental systems of development functions which are: microsystem, mesosystem, mesosystem, macrosystem and exosystem. These systems are related to the child’s development in his/her environment as seen below:

2.10.1.1 Microsystem

The micro system setting is the direct environment we have in our lives. Our family, friends, classmates, teachers, neighbours and other people who have a direct contact with you are included in your micro system. The micro system is the setting in which we have direct social interactions with these social agents (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The theory states that gay learners are not mere recipients of the experiences they have when socializing with others (classmates/teachers) in the micro system environment, in which we are contributing directly to the construction of such environment. This is the layer closest to the learners and contains the structures with which the learner has direct contact.

The microsystem forms the relationships and interactions a learner has with her immediate surroundings (Berk, 2000). These structures in the microsystem include family, school, neighbourhood, or childcare environments which represent *bi-directional* influences on the learner. Bandura (1997) believes that the world and a person's behaviour influence each other together with the environment. Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory connotes the way of human socialization with the challenges around him in respect to Bandura's social learning theory. This inter-relationship of both theories centred on development of behavioural approach cultivate whilst trying to find coping strategies to the human life experiences.

2.10.1.2 Mesosystem

The mesosystem involves the relationships between the microsystems in one's life. Mesosystem is the layer which provides the connection between the structures of the child's microsystem (Berk, 2000). This means that your family experience may be related to your school experiences among co-learners. For example, if a child is neglected by his parents and peers,

he/she may have a low chance of developing positive attitude towards their teachers. Also, this child may feel awkward in the presence of peers and may resort to withdrawal from a group of classmates. To Bandura (1997) he emphasizes cognitive and information process capabilities that mediate social behaviour and their developmental aspects in different environmental conditions.

2.10.1.3 Exosystem

The exosystem is the setting in which there is a link between the context where in the person does not have any active role, and this implies that there is an active participation of individual within the context (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). For example, a learner may be influenced to actively performing well in the classroom work whereby their classmates are supportive peradventure group- work activities is enhanced to allow all learner to display their abilities to certain before feedback is given. This in turns will help the teacher to identify easily of any learner who is experiencing challenges to participate well in the class exercises. Meanwhile, the teacher will be able to support all learners while providing an adequate and a good classroom environment for learners at school; this determines academic performance of individual learner.

This layer defines the larger social system in which the child does not function directly. The structures in this layer impact the child's development by interacting with some structure in her microsystem (Berk, 2000). Gay and lesbian learners parental work schedules may serve as an input to make the learner inactive to interact with his/her environment and perceive that

there are positive or negative disturbance with his/her own system. Gay learners further experience isolation and disconnection whenever such signal occurs in their environment.

2.10.1.4 Macrosystem

The *macrosystem* – this layer may be considered the outermost layer in the child's environment. While not being a specific framework, this layer is comprised of cultural values, customs, and laws (Berk, 2000). The effects of larger principles defined by the macrosystem have surpassed flowing influence throughout the interactions of all other layers, it comprises of functioning layers to work effectively. For example, if it is the belief of the culture that parents should be solely responsible for raising their children, that culture is less likely to provide resources to help parents. This, in turn, affects the structures in which the parents function. Being gay and lesbian learners may lead series of experiences encountered which is traceable from the child's schools and homes. The parents' ability or inability to carry out that responsibility toward their child within the context of the child's microsystem is likewise affected (Addison, 1992).

2.10.1.5 Chronosystem

The chronosystem includes the transitions and shifts in one's lifespan. This may also involve the socio-historical contexts that may influence a person. One classic example of this is how different in sexual orientation from the parents; child, enjoys genetically, a major life transition which may affect not only the couple's relationship with others but also their children's behaviour (Russell, Serif & Truong, 2001). Gay learners are negatively affected on the early year of their disclosure. The next years after it would reveal that the interaction within the family becomes more stable and agreeable.

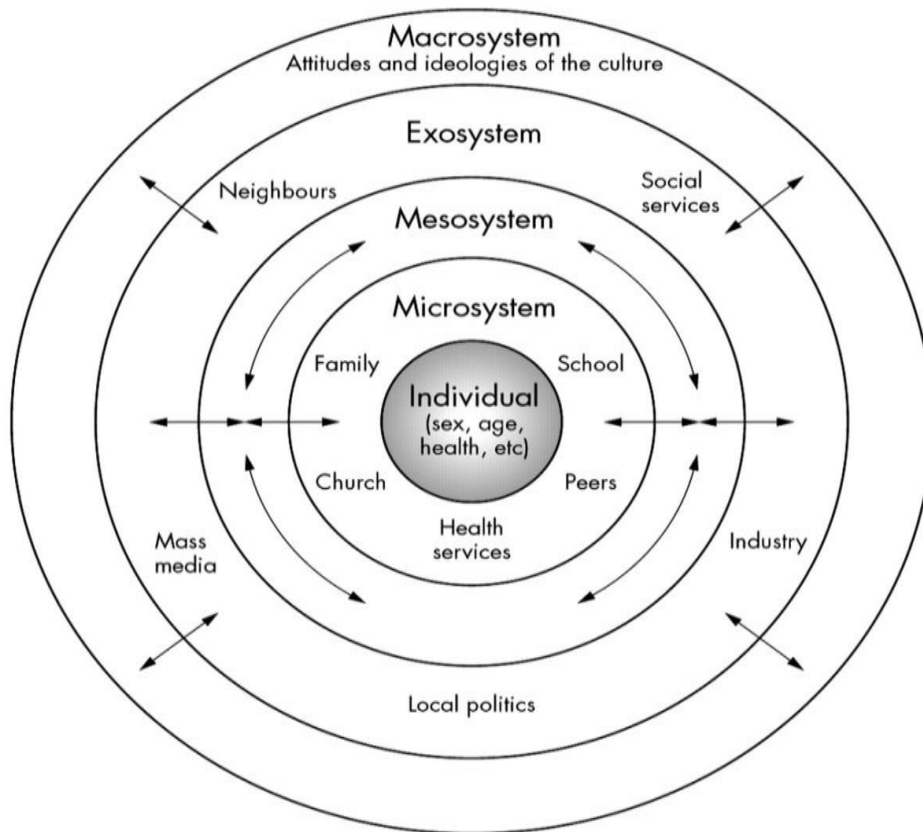


Figure1: Depiction of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological system theory (Swart & Pettipher, 2005:11).

With the diagram, the ecosystem theory is relevant to this study because gay learners experiences is associated with the interaction among their peers at various grades once they cannot only be taught in the classroom and this has an impact on their academic performance experiences. The theory therefore unveils the experiences encountered at school among their peer who are heterosexual and teachers.

2.11 Ecological system theory

I have chosen ecological system theory and illustrate social learning theory to explain how the identity of learners can impact on their academic performance in respect to Bronfenbrenner's ecological system which considered the relationship that a child has with his/her environments and its concerns resulted to the way a child is responding to the challenges around him/her (Henderson, 1995). Gay learners among their peers' experiences assert that environmental conditions are determinant on achieving their school goals which contribute to their academic performance.

This theory states that the personality and behaviours of a child is influenced by the way that child is familiar to the changes around him. An abused gay learner may develop substance abuse problems that heighten suicide risk based on the impact of sexual identification of homosexual which usually apprehend sexual experiences (Remafedi et al., 1991). This fact corresponds with microsystem influence on mesosystem of the child; it suggests the responsiveness of the child to his/her immediate environment.

Bandura (1997) in his social learning theory suggests that the learner's experiences at school or home are likely to influence his or her academic performance. Social learning is conditioned by gradual development of attitudes, belief systems and complex behavioural repertoires necessary for achieving the status, Bandura (1997) emphasizes cognitive and information process capabilities that mediate social behaviour and the developmental aspects of the child. Similarly, Santrock (2008) assumes that learners reasoning are wired by the experience facing on daily basis and this challenge with different environment association.

Bandura (1997) believed that the environment and a person's behaviour influence each other and this corresponds with ecological system of Bronfenbrenner's analysis of microsystem, mesosystem and macrosystem inter-connectivity of a child's reactions. Social learning sometimes has been called a bridge between behaviourist and cognitive learning theories because it encompasses attention, memory, and motivation theory which are suited to predicting behaviour and retrospective analysis of behaviour and has been particularly widely used to address the issue such as depression (Armitage & Conner 2001; Taylor et al., 2007).

2.11.1 Implication of the theories on academic performance

According to Bandura (1997) theory, social learning theory relates the reasoning ability to the choice of sexual identity along with the environmental influence (such as other learners/teachers) at school. Social learning theory addresses with child's behavioural activities in response to the blaming, name-calling, rejection and other such treatment that may create emotional instability and undermine academic performance. Learner's interactive ability rely on their peers at school, otherwise lack of support to perform in school work activities may jeopardize their academic standard. The school activities performance will aimed at improve learner's academic excellence. Therefore, gay and lesbian learners' socialisation can affect their performance at school. Bronfenbrenner's ecological system and social learning theory, tried to relates the behavioural ability in developmental stages of the child towards the challenges around him/her which can impact their academic performance. By the application of these theories; Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory explains about the child's experiences in his environment while Bandura social learning theory viewed the socially constructed aspect of child's life, with way it revolves around his/her life. Therefore, application of these will

enhance the provision of solutions against the negative experiences of gay and lesbian learners to improve on their academic performance at schools.

2.12 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has addressed a sensitive topic, that of gay and lesbian learners who are victimized and called names, leading to depression, low self-esteem, suicidal thoughts, and dropping out of school. The degree of acceptance at school may determine the rate at which a learner can perform given the factors of sexual orientation and identity. Teachers and school pupils should work together to assist sexual minorities to improve performance without fear. The next chapter focuses on research methodology.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In undertaking any research study it is paramount to have a true method of approach required by the research topic as well as the research design that will be the most suitable. The latter includes the methods for collecting and analysing the data and presenting the research findings. The focus of this research is on the experiences of gay learners in high schools and the impact that these experiences have on their academic performance. This chapter will present in detail the design and methodology chosen for this study.

3.2 Research questions

A good research question is expected to flow in line with the study, and be answered by the collected data and which answers cannot be foreseen ahead of data collection (De Vos, 1998). So, based on the experiences of high school gay learners, the following questions will be explored in this study:

- What are the experiences of gay and lesbian learners in high schools?
- How do gay and lesbian learners' experiences impact on their academic performances?
- How can schools provide psycho-social support to enhance gay and lesbian learner's well-being?

3.3 Methodology

The research method is a strategy of enquiry that moves from the underlying assumptions to research design, and data collection (Myers, 2009). It forms a plan towards achieving a rich data and appropriate findings. This research is qualitative and tries to provide an in-depth understanding of gay and lesbian high school learners and the impact on their academic performance. The qualitative research seeks to explore a particular group of learners and not generalize it over the whole population due to different nature of experiences encountered by gay and lesbian learners respectively (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

Similarly, this study is underpinning within the interpretivist paradigm. The interpretivist paradigm provides an understanding of the experiences of gay and lesbian learners and how sexuality is impacting their academic performance. Interpretivism, based its epistemology upon moral and pragmatic concerns which are centered in a particular context and open time to a dialectic and mutualistic conversation (Bryman, 2004). The researcher used purposive sampling method by choosing five participants three gay and two lesbian learners in a high school, Durban. These participants were selected to be interviewed for the purpose of this study. According to Cohen, (2000), state that, in purposive sampling, the researcher makes specific choices about participants and is usually by convenience.

3.3.1 Research design

Research design is defined by Burns and Grove (2003, p. 195) as “a blueprint for conducting a study which falls on the maximum control over factors that may interfere with the validity of the findings”. Also, Parahoo (1997, p.142) describes a research design as “a plan that describes how, when and where data are to be collected and analysed”. Polit, Beck and Hungler (2001, p. 167) define a research design as “the researcher’s overall ways for answering the research question or testing their search hypothesis.” This section will focus on the design chosen and the qualitative approach which Burns and Grove (2003) describe as a systematic subjective approach used to describe life experiences of personality and situations to give them the real meaning.

The researcher has decided to use the phenomenological approach for this study. This aims at understanding the human experiences as it is truly lived (Van Manen, 1990). Moustakas (1994) asserts that individuals have one experience or the other and these can only be explained by them the way they experienced it. The phenomenology has to do with day -to -day living of people and further seeks to understand the phenomena in their true essence prior to any reflective interpretation (Maxwell, 1998). Therefore, this in turn aims to understand and describe the phenomenon from the view of the participants, which are gay and lesbian learners. This approach explores the similarities and differences in gay and lesbian learners’ experience.

The approach to the phenomenon is involved by the attitude of openness to whatever is significant for an adequate understanding of a phenomenon. The researcher’s intention is to explore the experiences of gay and lesbian high school learners and the impact these have on

their academic performance. Phenomenology provides a descriptive analysis of lived experience (Willing, 2001) aiming in this case to understand the experiences of gay and lesbian learners in different grades and to emphasise the description of similarities and differences in experiences. This approach of inquiry has been chosen for the purpose of understanding the experience of gay learners at high school who are encountering discrimination.

3.3.2 Qualitative research

This is a qualitative study that falls within the interpretive paradigm. I have chosen the interpretive framework, as it is grounded in the world of life experiences. Interpretive research sets out to understand human behaviour and empathize with it. It is based on the views, beliefs, and opinions of society and how it should be interpreted and studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). My aim is to explore and make sense of the experiences of gay learners in high schools.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) define qualitative research as “an approach to social science research that emphasizes collecting descriptive data in natural settings, using inductive thinking, and emphasizes understanding the subjects point of view” (p. 274), while Glesne’s (2011) definition reads, “a type of research that focuses on qualities such as words or observations that are difficult to quantify and lend themselves to interpretation or deconstruction” (p. 283). Schofield (1993) suggests that it is important in qualitative research to provide a clear, detailed and in-depth description so that others can decide the extent to which findings from one piece of research are generalizable to another situation, i.e., to address the twin issues of comparability and translatability.

Lincoln (2005), Bogdan and Biklen (2007), Creswell (2009), Richards and Morse (2007), Corbin and Strauss (2008), Merriam (2009), and Stake (2010) all list central characteristics of qualitative research as finding common ground along a number of dimensions which are credibility, transferability, validity, trustworthiness, dependability and conformability. Stake (2010) argues that researchers purportedly benefit from having a humanistic orientation and are comfortable with ambiguity; they are analytical and introspective, they are willing to take risks, are ambitious and dedicated enough to embrace the substantial commitment required to conduct qualitative research. They are flexible, open-minded, and able to see things from multiple perspectives.

3.4 Research site

The participants were from the city of Durban. They were living within the locality not too far away from school. The public school situated in Durban metropolitan, racially mixed with Africans; Coloured, Indians and White. The study location is well structured and secured for the learners' safe learning environment; the school has a long wall built around it and a wide gate therein. It is a mixed school of grade 10-12. It has the staff complement of about 42 teachers.

3.4.1 Sample

A sample, according to Teddlie (2007), is a representative selection of people, places, or things from which data is gathered. The study took place at a high school in Durban. Purposive sampling involves selecting learners to answer the research questions, based on the purpose of

the study (Teddlie, 2007). The participants in this study are gay and lesbian learner's high schools who are experiencing problems related to their sexual orientation which impact negatively on gay and lesbian learner's academic performances. I approached the learners generally class by class and explain the sensitivity and importance of the study which later gave out contact details; cell number and email address. Learners who are gay and lesbian contacted and time was scheduled based on their readiness to take part in the study and voluntarily willing to share their experiences. Therefore, selection was based on willingness, interest, and availability to participate. Participants were interviewed and data collected from five participants.

Three gay and two lesbian learners, to be part of the study (purposive sampling), who are accessible and willing to participate. I have chosen these specific learners in the full assumption that the results of the research cannot be generalised to the wider population due to the small sample of the study. However, transferability of the result is possible to similar groups or contexts.

I explained to the learners the purpose of the research as well as their required participation. The learners read and signed the consent form (see Appendix two) and collected the parents/guardians consent form for signing and were returned at the next appointment date. I ensured that all learners signed the consent form accordingly. Confidentiality was maintained; interviews were done on one-on-one to preserve the identity of the participants. Also, real names were not used; instead, participants were allowed to give their pseudonyms. **Table 3.1** below shows the biographical information of the participants.

Biographical Information of participants

	A	B	C	D	E
Age	17	17	18	17	18
Grade	11	10	11	11	10
Sex	Female	Male	Male	Male	Female
School	Boa	Boa	Boa	Boa	Boa

The ages of the learners used for this study vary between 16-18 years, so they are all in adolescence.

3.4.2. Data collection instrument

In qualitative research, data to be collected should be primarily natural in nature, method can be varied. Here semi-structured interviews were used as systematic way of data collection; an interview schedule was followed for coherence. This study was interested in investigating the experiences of gay and lesbian high school learners (Lupton, 1996) and the impact this has on their academic performance (Rafaeli, Dutton, Harquail, & Mackie-Lewis, 1997). The interview was conducted based on the willingness to participate and availability. Interviews took place at the participants' school staff room on Saturday to avoid distractions and lasted for two hours and thirty minutes in total. Data was collected from participants based on one-on-one interaction using semi-structured interviews. Participants' interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed.

3.4.3 Data analysis

Thematic analysis is a way of seeing, as well as a process for coding qualitative information. I therefore made many decisions about the process of identifying themes and clearly identified why specific categories were chosen. I made decisions by coding the data to enable categorization – by emerging themes (Kumar, 2012).

Another decision made was thorough observation of data when analyzing so as to give credibility to the participants information and not fail the originality of data while transcribing to writing form, this will enhance credibility to the data analysis (Silverman, 2010, p.9).

A qualitative research design was used because it has a holistic focus and allows flexibility and the attainment of understanding of the participant more deeply than could be achieved through a more rigid approach (Merriam, 2002, p.4). This approach was used because it is naturalistic, explanatory and narrative in nature. The study is naturalistic since it attempts to accurately explore gay learners' experiences at the high school in question (Creswell, 1998). Data was collected through individual audio-taped interviews; Participants were asked to share their experiences at school following the interview schedule, and to reflect on the effect these had on their academic performance. Transcripts were read again to provide a simple construction of themes; this was done to find similar themes, categories and subcategories that emerged.

Triangulation of findings involves multiple methods of data collection and exploration of multiple sources of data (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011), classroom observation to help in

justifying the interview collected, this will help to validate the validity content of the study. Triangulation helps to strengthen validity of the study, researcher gave the result finding to the participants to read if all their information were correct and corrections were made to be sure that researcher wrote what they say and not what he thought they were intended to say. This makes the finding reliable and attracts credibility by the participants.

Data analysis is summarized thus by Braun and Clarke (2006) summarized thus:

1. Familiarization; data has to be read many times to get used to the clarity of the data to gain in-in-depth understanding of it.
2. Data re-selection; irrelevant data was completely wiped. The researcher concentrated only on the suitable data that can answer the research critical questions.
3. Generation and clarification of data; researcher continuously read the transcripts, getting ideas from participant's responses and writing these down in sequence trying to form coding, from data collected and gathered similar ideas into the appropriate category.
4. Formulation of themes; the researcher formulated themes from the developed categories, analyzing data of similar ideas and grouped together under the relevant themes.
5. Recording and verification; data was recorded and verified for usage.

Data analysis enabled me to have a clear understanding and map out the findings. Therefore, the researcher broke down the data collected to make sense and ignored the irrelevant data which did not answer critical research questions. Moreover, the researcher went through the data. Relevant ideas which emerged were grouped together to form certain themes or patterns. The data was decontextualized against relevant literature.

3.5 Trustworthiness of the data

In South Africa, Guba and Lincoln (1985) are of the opinion that the words reliability and validity be replaced with the term trustworthiness, when conducting qualitative research. They further claim that the trustworthiness of a research relies on the unquantifiable evidence generated. Interviews were used to gather first-hand information from the participant's experiences that are reliable to enhance credibility to this study.

However, McMillan and Schumacher (2006) state that validity refers to the degree of congruence between the explanations of the phenomena and the realities of the world. Disagreement occurs between the names of specific concepts; reflexivity and extension of findings are the other words that can be used in this regard. To answer the question of enhancing validity McMillan and Schumacher (2006) argue that continuous refinement of the sampling and data collection techniques throughout the data collection process increase validity. Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson and Spiers (2002) are of the opinion that, strategies to ensure rigor in a qualitative study should be carried out during the research process. They outlined the strategies to include; ensuring methodological coherence, researcher responsiveness, ensuring appropriateness of sample and active analytical stance, among others.

Trustworthiness was achieved through an accurate capturing and portrayal of the true experiences of gay learners involved in the study. Triangulation involves multiple methods of data collection. The researcher used classroom observation to be certain that gay and lesbian learner's high school experiences as the study reveals. Validity showed descriptions of findings to ensure transferability of information. Reliability was ensured by the researcher's position

which was detailed in terms of theory and assumptions, triangulation and documented in pursuit of audit trail for data collection and analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

3.5.1 Truth value

Truth value is an extent which the researcher has confidence in the reality truth of the findings based on the research design, the participants and the content. Truth value is made up of the discovery of human experience as it is lived and perceived by the participants (Meyrick, 2006). The truth is subject to investigate the experiences of gay and lesbian high school learners and their academic performance was explored. The researcher made use of face to face interviews and audio-tapes to collect data. These instruments were used to assist the researcher in recording and transcribing exactly what was said by the participants and not what the researcher intended the participants to say. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) describe validity in qualitative research as the extent to which interpretations of data collected have the same meaning to the researcher and participants.

3.5.2 Applicability

Applicability means the extent to which the findings can be applied to other contexts and settings. Applicability is one of the major elements underpinning qualitative research with the interpretive practical relevance of reality application to the same situation (Fade, 2004). The researcher will try to present the sufficient descriptive data of gay learners' experiences as lived by them through the means of audio-tapes and transcriptions. The results therefore, can be

placed in other contexts outside the study and applied to other settings or groups (Creswell, 1998). The findings of this research cannot be generalized.

3.5.3 Consistency

The researcher has aimed to reach the findings that would be consistent with those when the enquiry was to be replicated with the same subject under study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Audio-taping their experiences created friendly relation and trust; this enhanced the free flow of expression for the participants to give detailed account without hiding the true data in attempt to appease the researcher. The researcher purposively used the interviewed data and transcribed notes to ensure the consistency of the study. The research process was described intensively.

3.5.4 Neutrality

Neutrality is the extent to which the outcomes are a function of the participants and the conditions of research, without any biases and without been driven extraneous motivations (Silverman, 2006). The qualitative researcher strives to add value to the worth of the findings by exercising patience to avoid much familiarity contact with the participants. Data, interpretation and outcomes are rooted in the contexts and the experiences of gay learners and not in the imagination of researcher. This logic was used in assembling and interpretation the data throughout the use of themes and sub-categories. There was transparency: participants were seen by the researcher through appointments; information recorded could be verified and re-checked. The researcher personally did not allow my interest to create influence on the participants' ways of responding to the questions presented to them in the schedule. Also, the

researcher respected their anonymity and confidentiality, though in reality they did not wish to withdraw. Participants were allowed to answer the questions as they like, and contact was limited to ensuring that their experiences were clearly heard.

3.6 Ethical considerations

This indicates the procedures required before commencing the study so that the work will ensure the rights of participants.

3.6.1 Informed consent and voluntary participation

In this study gay and lesbian learners were contacted personally by me. The aim of the study and the procedure of the research were explained to them, to show their interest in participation or not. For the learners to participate they were required first to sign of consent letter (see Appendix Two) which included acknowledgement that participation was voluntary. Appointments for individual interview sessions were scheduled with respondents who agreed to participate in the study, at dates chosen date by them. At the first appointment, I explained to the participants about the impending study, followed by giving consent forms for them to read and providing an opportunity to ask questions relating to the study on issues that seems unclear to them, before signing.

Participants were given a copy of the consent letter each, with the contact details of the researcher or supervisor, in case they had any queries.

The consent letter was in English since these learners were able to speak English despite the fact that participants were all African. They were told that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Before interviewing, the researcher explained the questions briefly and the participants were encouraged to speak freely about their experiences regarding being gay among other learners.

Concerning, the ethical issues, the researchers took care to respect the human rights, dignity and the privacy of their participants or respondents during and after the course of research, so as to protect themselves and the respondents. The researcher followed the general recommendation of obtaining permission to conduct the study and approval was obtained from the Provincial District, Department of Education and the principal of the school involved in the research. Only gay learners whose parents granted permission were used in the study. No names were used in any transcriptions, in order to protect privacy and identity, instead pseudonyms were used.

3.6.2 Confidentiality and anonymity

At the initial interview session with the gay learners, participants were assured that their identity would not be disclosed (meaning that their real names will not appear in the study or interview data) and that the information shared would be kept confidential. The interview took place at the school of the learners (participants) on Saturday to avoid distraction and any exposure of these gay and lesbian learners to hostility, ensuring the participants' confidentiality for more cooperation and for honest and open responses.

3.6.3 Small sample versus generalizability

Although, this study was sensitive in nature it did not discourage the participants from partaking in the study because they really want to work with their peers at school and importantly to improve on their academic performance. All the learners who were gay/lesbian were excited maybe because of the significance of the study on their social, physical and emotional well-being. Participants in this study were five (5) gay and lesbian learners in the high school of Durban.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter provided an explanation of how the research was conducted. It also dealt with the nature of the study, research design, sampling techniques, and the data collection method and data analysis. The next chapter will present the findings from the data collected through face to face interviews, recorded on audio-tapes and transcribed.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this study is to explore and investigate the experiences of high school gay learners and the impact these experiences have on their academic performance. In chapter two, the researcher engaged a literature study related to gays' and lesbians' experiences at schools with particular relevance to their academic performance. This contextualises the presentation of findings in chapter four. In this chapter, the researcher provides the results of the data collection, providing supporting evidence from the raw data collected from the participants through semi structured interviews (Appendix One). The data collection will be presented based on the themes generated.

4.2 Research questions

- What are the experiences of gay and lesbian learners in high schools?
- How do gay and lesbian learners' experiences impact on their academic performances?
- How can schools provide psycho-social support to enhance gay and lesbian learner's well-being?

The data generated will be presented in line with the research questions listed above.

4.3 Experiences of Gay Learners in High Schools

Findings from the study revealed that gay learners experienced stigmatization, abuse and bullying, negative imitation and hostility. Each of these experiences is hereunder listed with excerpts from the interviews with the participants:

4.3.1 Stigmatization

Two (2) of the participants reported that they experienced stigmatization from learners and teachers alike. For instance, a participant stated thus:

“They stigmatize me like an outcast...maybe...is because, they don’t know...what is meant to be homosexual...they give me bad treatment....so, painful.” Participant E

In the same vein, another participant responded that he experiences stigmatization from his colleagues and teachers as well, as he stated that *“some of them; they don’t understand the situation...they treat me like..., I am...am...am...just nothing. So...teachers and friends..., some of them, they understand...some of them don’t understand.”* Participant B

4.3.2 Abuse and bullying

Two (2) of the participants allegedly reported abuse related to a rape attempt and sexual harassment as indicated in this statement:

“Yes, yeah!...2013..it was last year actually, yeah...it was my birthday..., we’re celebrating, as a family; but...some of my friends that are boys was three boys...trying to rape me...hmmm....and...yeah!...it my brother that came in...and then.., yeah...it was a stress thing.”(Participant A)

“I have been bullied...I have been abused..., I’m sexually harassed, they have abused me...; the one that I’ve date before...hmm...but some of them...are. Just...I don’t know...mmm.”

(Participant B)

Similarly, one participant expressed verbal abused, fingers pointing and assaults as indicated here:

“Oh! So many times...abused verbally...pointed fingers...treats from boys...that, what is your pleasure in girls to girls, and boys to boys stuffs... to boys some taller learners...tries to bully me, come here...beautiful girl...assaults, victimization when passing the passage...one learner hit my bums one time because, he was calling me and I don’t answer him.”

(Participant E)

4.3.3 Being imitated and picked on

Two (2) of the participants reveals that they are been picked on, laugh at/imitated and called names among others as follows:

“Yes, they walk the way I walk...they talk the way I talk...they repeat what I’m saying? All the time...so...mmm..., yeah...just like okay...- yeah.” (Participant B)

“When you’re speaking something serious...they will say the way you...like ...repeat the way...repeat the way you say a word, most of times, they laugh at you, they imitate you; walk the way you walks, talk the way you talks.” (Participant C)

Participant C in his response confirmed how painful it is for the majority of learners not to make sense out of one’s suggestions in the classroom; instead class mates were copying the way they talked and laughing at them as if they do not exist. This confirmed the response of

(Participant A), *“and our voices are not heard”*, this shows the humiliation experienced in the classrooms by gay/lesbian learners.

“Yes...mm...other learners...picked on me...saying...to each other, she is lesbian...calling me names, and hide among many learners...at times they talk about gays and lesbians when I’m passing...asking me...to tell about lesbian.”(Participant E)

4.3.4 Hostility and name calling

Two (2) participants reported the level of the school hostility and name calling encountered, as expressed in the statements below:

“But, is not that easy...because, you are coming out to your school...in grade 8, you’re like a kid; ...so, they feel like they can say whatever they want to say to you...being gay in grade 8...is not really cool...I mean like you coming into a new world.” (Participant C)

Participant E explains how she felt while finding herself at school considering the recurrent school environmental situation placed around her by peers of different status thus:

“I can’t withstand attending school most of the time, because of the school hostile environment due to my sexuality” (Participant E)

Also, Participant C and Participant E felt embarrassed at the way that other learners and teacher were calling them as clearly stated in the following statements:

“I had a problem with another teacher...she, called me, “moffie” ...just because, I was putting lotion on my hand and actually chased me out of the class.” (Participant C)

“Saying...to each other, she is lesbian...calling me names, and hide among many learners...at times they talks about gays and lesbians.” (Participant E)

It seems so clear that learners who are gay and lesbian are directly open to many such experiences as the responses reflect the encounters at schools among class members and teachers. Name calling leads to emotional stress amongst minority learners.

4.4 How do gay learners’ experiences impact on their academic performance?

It is not inconceivable that the daily experiences of gay learners would impact on their well-being and academic performance, as discussed below:

4.4.1 Inability to concentrate

Two (2) of the participants responded that they cannot concentrate on their studies due to their insecurity in the presence of other learners that are not gay as expressed here under:

“At school, I can’t concentrate, most of my friends are boys, because, if am with boys I’m cool...but with girls...eish! My feelings! Are getting high yeah, is hard for me sometimes...to cope...is not easy; but never feels it, but eish! There’s is nothing I can do about it..., I have to accept it.” (Participant A)

In participant D’s views that she undergone lot of worries about coping at school work as distractions of yelling arose in the classroom in this statement:

“I can’t concentrate on my work....nothing; I have to worry about myself...and because, sometimes.” (Participant D)

One (1) of the participants had response of a rejection, victimization and insecurity among others which left her feeling not well in the classroom as her response indicates:

“It makes me...felt rejected...victimized and not comfortable at school...its worries me a lot and can't focus well, because I'm having emotional stress towards that learner that abused me.” (Participant E)

Gay and lesbian learners' reported experiencing series of problems of victimization that are affecting their academic performance at school as the lack of concentration may hinder good result in the class activities and examinations.

4.4.2 Feeling of rejection among class members

Two (2) of the participants explained that they experienced rejection in the classroom which affected them badly, as seen in these statements:

“Mm...hmm...sometimes in class..; when I tried to say something and I rose up my hand...in class...or... in the class group activities. They will say” no...We don't want me, calling my name, in our group activities, is affecting me because...I felt rejected at times...that is why? I say is affecting me...I can't talk freely without comment...eish! Sad...they don't want my voice to be heard...it's really affecting me to perform well.”(Participant B)

Participant E expressed her response of marginalization, which contributed to her under-performance at both class and group, activities, in this statement:

“mmm...I’m not feeling okay...at all...felt so bad, because...other learners treats me as if, I’m not human being like them...when comes to group activities or class general work...no one likes to associate with me...seriously, I’m marginalize many times...and this put me to be alone most times and affecting my academic records...because I failed and under-performed some of my subjects.” (Participant E)

Expressing no support in the classroom from teachers statement, Participant D reported that there was absolutely no support as claimed some gay/lesbian learners in the school; he expressed the loneliness he feels in these terms:

“In fact been in a class is not a good thing because, we have absolutely...NO...support...you’re like alone in a cold room with nobody to talk to you about anything; it’s very hard.” (Participant D)

Similarly, Participant E emphatically responds that her sexuality is affected her badly which tend to dissociation from her fellow learners and remaining lonely with no one to coming close to her, as her statement indicates:

“My sexuality is affecting me badly, I’m unable to cope very well in the class because...other learners rejected me, and they don’t want to associate with me at all, always lonely.”
(Participant E)

4.4.3 Low self-esteem

On this issue, (Participant C) and (Participant E) faced a challenge of poor self-esteem and self-worth because of the reactions of their fellow classmates at school, which communicated an attitude of no accommodation to gay/lesbian learners based on their sexual orientation and

identity. Low self-esteem is a gradual process that can develop if there is no challenge to it, and can worsen learners' academic performance. Participant C and Participant E's expression of it is represented thus:

"I developed a low self-esteem, I didn't have confidence...it affects my academic performance badly, I wasn't perform well." (Participant C)

Participant C is gay while Participant E is lesbian. Participant C was disturbed by the way other fellow learners were treating him and due to that he lost confidence on himself, which resulted in his not performing well academically. However, PE a lesbian was also surrounded with jests and untold abuse that caused distraction. She is similarly unable to cope very well in the classroom as stated below:

"I'm unable to cope very well in the class because...." (Participant E)

Participant C and Participant E responded differently but their statements mean the same thing. They clearly express some of the experiences gay and lesbian learners are struggling with at school.

4.4.4 Suicidal thoughts

Participant A in her statement related to her experiences at school and home because of her inability to come out clearly with others. This put her in a dilemma at school; however, she was not free at home of issues related to her sexual orientation:

"I guessed they will feel bad, if they get to know...because they taught I am straight girl but at the same time...; I'm a lesbian...mm." (Participant A)

Participant B showed that his dad does not like him been gay but there is no choice as he says:

“Mm mm...my dad...does not like it...but, I know that...somehow...someday...he will realise that; we are the same.” (Participant B).

Participant A’s responses indicate how unwelcome attention from both home and school may trigger suicidal thoughts for gay/lesbian learners whenever they were isolated at school:

“At times thinking of killing myself” (Participant A)

4.5 How can schools provide psycho-social support to enhance their well-being?

This section explained the ways by which school can intervene on the gay learners’ social and academic development through their experiences.

4.5.1 Acceptance of gay and lesbian learners

(Participant A) suggests that other learners and teacher should try to understand to accept gay and lesbian learners the way they are and find a ways to accommodate their participation at school; this is represented in her response:

“I think they should accept us the way we are...we are born like this; they should accommodate us as we are.” (Participant A)

In the same way, Participant B profoundly argued that sexual orientation is created from the same God and further explained that education is for all, irrespective of differences of whatever kind. This statement detailed his response thus:

“Hmmm....I think they have to... make...make children and everyone, to understand that, we have...to...to...be the same...because we come from the same person...that is

GOD...so, we have to understand that; it doesn't matter where you come from? Or who you are? But all that matters; is ...our education...and...Whatsoever."

(Participant B)

In another view, Participant C emphasised the need to be fully accommodated, when he stated that people should "learn to stand us" and he also asserts that school is a public place where everyone is welcome without discrimination or abuse of any kind. Participant C reported as follows:

"but they should learn to stand us, even if they can't...mean like... 'school' is a public place...everybody is welcome...the key to that is, just mind your own business...don't worry about what I'm doing because, I have my values and cultures...and you have your own values and cultures; so try to question my religion or my values...or, what I'm wearing?, or what I'm doing?" (Participant C)

Participant D has his opinions on how other learners and teachers should respect gay and lesbian learners and not resort to any intimidation, as he stated hereunder:

"They don't have to; understand that, we gay...but then, they have to be civil...you know...they have to understand that we 'gays' of course; they have their views and opinions...but what we are asking for? Is for them to stand us, just treat me as anyone." (Participant D)

Participant E confidently suggests the need for a counselling unit at schools where gay and lesbian related issues will be reported. This represents her response as stated thus:

"Maybe...a group to...counselling and grievance section to cater for the needs of minority gay and lesbian to be more tolerated at schools" (Participant E)

4.5.2 Create awareness about gay and lesbian learners

Participant D in his view recommends a campaign that can serve as the way of informing the learners about gay and lesbian people, but that interestingly could be extended to anti-bullying rallies and campaigns for the benefits of learners. Participant D's statement is below:

"I think...mm...there should be campaign, maybe, in schools...you know...informing the learners about gay people." (Participant D)

According to Participant E awareness and orientation for other learners on the better way to embrace sexual differences that will allow equal educational opportunities without bullying. This confirmed her response thus:

"I suggests that, there should me awareness and orientation for...other leaners who don't know that lesbians and gay are also...have right to equal education to know....and to treat us with our differences...without abusing us or bullying."
(Participant E)

4.6 Conclusion

The aim of this study seeks to explore the experiences of gay and lesbian high school learners and the impacts on their academic performance. This chapter presented the findings from data collected through the means of interviews. The themes were generated from their experiences. The academic impacts and the issue of support services were presented in the same vein, through direct quotations from the learners. The next chapter will be based on the discussions of findings with regards to the literature and theoretical frame work of the study.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The objectives of this study is to investigate the experiences of gay and lesbian high school learners and the impacts these have on their academic performance at a school in Durban. In chapter four, I generated findings from data collected. This chapter will seek to answer the research critical questions and thereafter findings will be discussed in line with the literature review, to identify differences and similarities from the findings of studies related to gays and lesbians experiences at schools including how the experiences influence their academic performance. This chapter contextualises the findings in chapter four. I will also attempt to link the findings of the study with the theoretical framework.

5.2 Research questions

- What are the experiences of gay and lesbian learners in high schools?
- How do gay and lesbian learners' experiences impact on their academic performances?
- How can schools provide psycho-social support to enhance gay and lesbian learner's well-being?

5.2.1: What are the experiences of gay and lesbian learners in high schools?

The study revealed numerous experiences of high school gay and lesbian learners relating both to their peers and to related stereotyped ideas held by teachers at schools.

5.2.1.1 Coming out as gay or lesbian

Homosexuality refers to the feeling and attraction to the opposite sex, like male to male, female to female. Berzonksy (1992) studied how the identity of a learner can be related to different behavioural instances around him that have implications for academic outcomes. From the results, it became clear that gay and lesbian learners feel insecure amongst their friends at school and this make them remain hidden and confused which identities need to be tolerated, given commitment to inclusive education. Despite that some gay and lesbian learners doubt that they will be accepted and must remain in the closet as expressed below:

“No! Mm...mm...No! Because...I’m scared...yeah...no, I didn’t tell anyone because I’m scared!”(Participant A)

Participant A, explains, on fear of stigmatization, end up acting ‘straight’ among her classmates at school: *“No,...because I have to act like I’m straight, better than words, at school...and all I do; they believed am straight, all my friend know that I am straight, dating a guy but girls because I date guys...but now I date girls, I am a lesbian now.”*(Participant A). Fear of disclosure as gay/lesbian however contributes to isolation and to forming fewer relationships hence impacting on learners’ wellbeing (Ryan, 2009; Meyer, 2003 & May & Cochran, 2001).

Participant A and Participant B expressed feelings of fear about revealing their sexual identity because of the uncertainty of being accommodated by other learners that are not gay

or lesbian. Participant C, Participant D and Participant E spoke of their sexual disclosure among co-learners that are heterosexual without being troubled by any confrontation at school. Their responses indicated as follows:

“Yes...I have come out and...yeah! I have come out....” (Participant C)

“Yes, I have.”(Participant D)

“Yes, I have...other students knows that...I’m lesbian...even now and bisexual...because, I’m into both girls and boys now...” (Participant E)

Participant A and Participant B are not bold enough to face the reality of the differences in their sexuality without embarrassment. Carter and Goldfried (2006) assert that gay and lesbian learners reported both fear and confidence in disclosing their identity among other learners (Murray, 2002; Lock & Steiner, 1999 & LeVay, 1996). Being afraid to come out prevents them from accepting who they are. Meanwhile, Participant C, Participant D and Participant E were able to stand by their sexual orientation as clearly stated above. Similarly, Participant D explains that other learners know well that she was a lesbian. According to her statement;

“Yes, I have...other students knows that...I’m lesbian...even now and bisexual...because, I’m into both girls and boys now...” (Participant E)

5.2.1.2 Prejudice, stigmatization and victimization

Meyer (2003) asserts that prejudice, stigma, and discrimination create a hostile and stressful social environment that causes mental health problems for gay learners and impacts on their academic performance, resulting in mental health problems that are caused by excess stress related to stigma and prejudice against their sexual orientation as in this quotation:

“It makes me...felt rejected...victimized and not comfortable at school...its worries me a lot and can't focus well, because I'm having emotional stress towards that learner that abused me....” (Participant A)

“Mm...hmm...sometimes in class..; when I tried to say something and I rose up my hand...in class...or...On class group activities. They will say” no...We don't want me, calling my name, in our group activities, is affecting me because...I felt rejected at times...that is why? I say is affecting me...I can't talk freely without comment...eish! Sad...they don't want my voice to be heard...it's really affecting me to perform well.”(Participant B)

Participant A and Participant B experienced stigmatization, rejection and victimization. This created a hostile school environment that threatens their good academic performance.

Nevertheless, gay and lesbian learners need to be heard at school and not to be marginalised at school (Bierman, 2004; Swearer et al., 2008 & Murray, 2002). They need to develop their full potential and social wellbeing.

The statement below shows disconnection between gay and learners and non-gay learners:

“Yes, the walk the way I walk...they talk the way I talk...they repeat what I'm saying? All the time...so...mmm..., yeah...just like okay...yeah.”(Participant B)

According to Ryan (2010) sexual minority learners experience disconnection and isolation from their peers which is associated with internalized problems and this emerged from lack of acceptability among both teachers and learners. This statement indicates: *“I'm having emotional stress towards that learner that abused me”* (Participant E) this confirms the disconnection experience by gay and lesbian learners.

Swearer, et al. (2008) state that boys who are bullied by being called “gay” or “faggots” have greater psychological distress which can result in low grades, substance abuse, and depression. Such distress is also been linked to bullying on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation. Swearer, et al. (2008) suggest that labelling and stigmatizing is applied to learners who are not of the same social personality as others, who are subject to names such as queer, this contributed to depression among gay/lesbian learners. Persistent accusations, stress and constants harassment that may be experienced in school on a daily basis, and repeated assaults add to the fear of bullying; these might lead to psychiatric disorders such as acting strangely in response to invisible attack, as a defensive measure from the victimized gay or lesbian learners (Hershberger, Pilkington & D’Augelli, 1997 & Garofalo, et al., 1999). Here are the participant’s statements:

“Yes...mm...other learners...picked on me...saying...to each other, she is lesbian...calling me names, and hide among many learners...at times they talks about gays and lesbians when I’m passing...asking me...to tell about lesbian.” (Participant E)

Sadly, painful that gay and lesbian high school learners experiencing rejection and stigmatization from their peers at school as it were in the data written thus:

“Mm mm...they stigmatize me like an outcast...maybe...is because, they don’t know...what is meant to be homosexual...they give me bad treatment....so, painful....hey.”(Participant B)

Gay teenage learners experience a lot of rejection from parents, peers and friends. Young people sometimes over-estimate their capacities to handle new situations, and these behaviours

can pose real threats to their health condition. To gain the approval of peers or to avoid peer rejection, adolescents will sometimes take excessive risks as they judge themselves to be “too risky” in contrast to what culture and society believe (Jaffe, 1998 & Kaplan, 2004).

“No, I’m scared; I don’t because they (parent) normally say...ah! That all their children are straight...mmm...they are too strict...I don’t think is a good idea to tell them...yeah! They will kill me! So I can’t tell them, if I do, I will die because they’re so strict.” (Participant A)

Unfortunately, in high schools today, gay and lesbian learners experience being picked on, name calling and labelling and meanwhile their voices are not heard (Berzonksy, 1992). Instead teachers pretend as if nothing wrong has happened whenever the report of abuse is made by the victims (Murray, 2002 & Locket *al.*, 1999). This statement explains:

“Yes...my teachers know...but, they pretend as if, they don’t know...that I’m lesbian...Oh! So many times...abused verbally...pointed fingers...treats from boys...that, what is your pleasure in girls to girls, and boys to boys stuffs... to boys some taller learners...tries to bully me, come here...beautiful girl...assaults, victimization when passing the passage...one learner hit my bums one time because, he was calling me and I don’t answer him...I reported the abuse, but they only warned him not to do that to me again...I felt very sad...but.” (Participant E)

Participant A: *“Yes...mmm...yeah! But...I can’t...use.”* Participant B: *“All the time”*

Participant C: *“Yeah...I mean like...you’re a gay...will get picked on lots of times.”*

Participant D: *“Yes...mm...other learners...picked on me...saying...to each other, she is lesbian...calling me names, and hide among many learners.”*

Gay and lesbian learners often experience pain at times when there is no way to bear the stigma, discrimination, labelling and abuse encountered by their peers at school (Meyer, 2003; May *et al.*, 2001).

“I felt bad...because, yeah! Right... I am a lesbian...but...no, one...has any right to abuse me...at the same time so I don’t have to kill myself...I know that I’m different, ...I just...have to accept it...I think so bad about it a lot; at times thinking of killing myself, and I say no, I don’t have to do that, I have to accept who I am” (Participant A)

Continuous abuse and abuse of gay and lesbian can push these learners towards depression and suicidal thoughts (Ryan & Futterman, 1998 & Goodenow *et al.*, 2006).

5.2.1.3 Gay and lesbian experiences

High school gay and lesbian learners experience very bad treatments from their classmates and teachers sometimes are involved. All the participants have had experiences that shook them and question why they were born the way they are. Statements below are evidence of these:

“Hmmm...some of them bad; some of them boys good...some of them, because some of them do understand, some of them...don’t understand; what lesbian means?, they’re right...yeah...yeah!...”(Participant A)

Experiences of participant A and B showed the type of physical treatment at school among their fellow learners as inhuman attitudes and this support the stigmatization behaviour (Meyer, 2003) as evident in this statement below:

“we have to understand that; every time..., when you are a gay or lesbian....they will treat you like you are doggy...and you are nothing, so...we have to understand that, because they don't understand what you're going through?...so; yeah! They are treating me differently.”(Participant B)

Gay learners encounter teasing and yelling among co-learners which seems difficult for the acceptance of difference related by participant C opens experience when he started school at grade 8 as follow:

“Hmmm...you know...at first; it was not easy about the whole situation, because...I remembered since when I was first came to this school in grade 8, I had some boys...teasing...and...teasing and stuffs and stuff, so, and did, I stood up on the desk and commanded them not to call me gay...and I actually swore with them at that time, so...I think at first, it was not easy...and all teasing and teasing...but as time went by....they started to accept me, the way I am...But, is not that easy...because, you are coming out to your school”
(Participant C)

Gay learners also experience discrimination from educators/teachers, as indicated in the excerpt below:

“As I've said that, it wasn't easy...now...now...they've been okay with the whole situation...but at first it wasn't easy...I had a problem with another teacher...she, called me, moffie” (Participant D)

“mmm...I'm not feeling okay...at all...felt so bad, because...other learners treats me as if, I'm not human being like them...when comes to group activities or class general work...no one likes to associate with me...seriously, I'm marginalize many times...and this put me to be

alone most times and affecting my academic records...because I failed and under-performed in some of my subjects.” (Participant E)

Participant A experienced unfair treatment of being under estimated because she is lesbian; Participant B was referred to as ‘*doggy*’ and treated differently among other learners, while Participant C experienced teasing. Participant D also encountered name-calling from his teacher calling him ‘*moffie*’ and Participant E expressed experiences of disassociation and marginalization in the classroom. The experiences of all participants deepens the stigma of discrimination, prejudice and marginalization (Meyer, 2003), victimization (Arum, 2011), internalized and emotional stress (Elze, 2002) and name calling (Swearer et al., 2008).

5.2.1.4 Bullying

Another experience that is common with gay/lesbian learners is bullying at school by other learners who passed judgement at school on their sexual identity. D’Augelli (1998) indicates that up to half of lesbians and gay men have experienced some form of bullying at school and many problems of “lesbian, gay, and bisexual students in high school, such as poor academic performance, truancy, and dropping out of school, are direct or indirect results of verbal and physical abuse perpetrated by peers or others in school”” (p. 200). One such account is stated as follows:

”I have been bullied...I have been abused..., but not the abused, I’m sexually harassed, they have abused me...; the one that I’ve date before...hmm...but some of them...are. Just...I don’t know....mmm.” (Participant B)

“I’ve never been abused but, I have been bullied” (Participant C)

“Oh! So many times...abused verbally...pointed fingers” (Participant E)

Four of the participants have experienced bullying or abuse from their peers, specifically, Participant B, Participant C, Participant D and Participant E. In contrast, Participant A was subject to attempted rape by her friends at home, *“some of my friends that are boys were three boys...trying to rape me”* (Participant A) while Participant B experienced something similar: *“I’m sexually harassed.”* Participant D state: *“I have...hurts...some cases.”* The above statements represented gay experiences.

5.2.1.5 Sexually harassed of gay and lesbian

WHO (2002) states that average LGBT learners encountered sexual violence like harassment and rape which cause health problems to the victims of rape and related hate crimes. This reveals the prejudice that the heterosexual majority had against the gay/lesbians. Participants this as follows:

“One learner hit my bums one time” (Participant A)

“Some of my friends that are boys were three boys...trying to rape me...hmmm....and...yeah!

It my brother that came in...and then..., yeah...it was a stress thing” (Participant A)

“I have been abused..., but not the abused, I’m sexually harassed, they have abused me...; the one that I’ve date before...hmm...but some of them...are. Just...I don’t know....mmm”

(Participant B)

Participant A and B equally expressed the painful events received from their friends as an injustice acts towards their sexual orientation which are sexual harassment and attempted rape.

5.2.1.6 Bad habits

Repeated exposure to prejudice, stigma and discrimination against gay and lesbian learners can pose greater risks of disconnection from learners in the classroom. This may push gay and lesbian's learners to attempt to respond with resilience towards the challenges around them at school and to achieve the normal interaction needed for free participation in class activities. Signals of this may emerge in gay and lesbian learner's form of depression, isolation, substance abuse and suicide. Having no support to improve the situation may lead student to underperform or fail at school work (Jordan, 2013). This statement show how being gay and lesbian affected the participant: *"Hmmm...my sexuality is affecting me badly, I'm unable to cope very well in the class because...other learners rejected me, they don't want to associate with me at all...always lonely...and I lost concentration and feel like dropout most times...I can't withstand attending school most of the time, because of the school hostile environment due to my sexuality...I'm falling so much...at my studies...feeling of killing myself...I drinks a lot to cool down."*(Participant E)

Participant E was not comfortable with her experiences among other learners in the classroom and this in turn exposed her to suicidal thought.

5.2.1.7 Emotional stress of the victim

There are experiences that can lead to physical stress; this arise from the hatred that other learners may transfer towards gay/lesbian at school which perhaps disturb the well-being of the victim whenever this abuse happen to them. This internalizes the experience and continues to remember that when coming to school.

Seriously, the experiences encountered by gay/lesbian learners different as the participant explain in this statement:

“It makes me...felt rejected...victimized and not comfortable at school...its worries me a lot and can't focus well, because I'm having emotional stress towards that learner that abused me” (Participant A). This maintains victimization act towards gay learners (Arum, 2011).

Gay and lesbian learners often experience such feelings at times when there is no way to bear the stigma, discrimination, labelling and abuse encountered by their peers at school (Meyer, 2003).

“I felt bad...because, yeah! Right... I am a lesbian...but...no, one...has any right to abuse me...at the same time...; so...I don't have to kill myself...I know that I'm different,...I just...have to accept it...I think so bad about it a lot; at times thinking of killing myself, and I say no, I don't have to do that, I have to accept who I am.” (Participant A).

Continuous abuse and abuse of gay/lesbian can push these learners toward suicidal thoughts (Ryan & Futterman, 1998). This means that schools should have programmes in place to address the needs of these learners.

5.3.2: How do gay and lesbian learners' experiences impact on their academic performances?

This study indicates that gay and lesbian learners experience a lot of problems which have a negative impact on their academic performance. Hereunder are some of the issue:

5.3.2.1 Prejudice, stigma and discrimination against gay and lesbian learners

Based on the responses of the participants, gay and lesbian learners are confronted with challenges which impact on their psychological well-being. This emerged from their various responses to the questions. Meyer (2003) asserts that prejudice, stigma, and discrimination, creates a hostile and stressful social environment that causes mental health problems in gay learners and tend to impact on their academic performance. Mental health issues are a common feature in these learners. However, for LGBT children, schools can become a battlefield, with homophobic bullying as a major contributor to the ostracism, fear, and distress that many students experience (Kosciw et al., 2010). Participant B and Participant E expressed their feelings of hostility in these excerpts:

"Mm mm...they stigmatize me like an outcast...maybe...is because, they don't know...what is meant to be homosexual...they give me bad treatment....so, painful....hay" (Participant B)

"I can't withstand attending school most of the time, because of the school hostile environment due to my sexuality" (Participant E)

This gay learner is experiencing a hard time of stigmatization from classmates which prevent him to participate well at school work due to lack of quality interaction with other peers as seen also in this statement:

5.3.2.2 Dropout of school

The attitudes and treatments of heterosexual students may lead to high level of school drop-outs amongst homosexual minority and frequent conflicts. However, one does not have to look to the future for the benefits; youth without relationship skills are at greater risk than their peers who have these skills for a number of problems, including dropping out of school (Olweus, 1996; D'Augelli et al., 1998).

Participant E was not okay with the situation around her, *“mmm...I'm not feeling okay...at all...felt so bad, because...other learners treats me as if, I'm not human being like them...when comes to group activities or class general work...no one likes to associate with me...seriously, I'm marginalize many times...and this put me to be alone most times and affecting my academic records...because I failed and under-performed in some of my subjects”*.

Also, Participant A: *“At school, I can't concentrate”*

“I lost concentration and feel like dropping out most of the times I can't withstand attending school most of the time.”(Participant E).

D'Augelli (2003) stigma and discrimination plays vital roles in development and maintenance of stress that may lead gay learners to a psychiatric disorder emerging from trauma encountered in school based on day to day harassment and assault among gay and lesbian learners.

“Oh! So many times...abused verbally...pointed fingers...treats from boys...that, what is your pleasure in girls to girls, and boys to boys stuffs... to boys some taller learners...tries to bully me, come here...beautiful girl...assaults, victimization when passing the passage...one learner hit my bums one time because, he was calling me and I don't answer him...I reported the abuse, but they only warned him not to do that to me again...I felt very sad...but.”(Participant A).

Participant E expresses *“I’m marginalize many times...and this put me to be alone most times and affecting my academic records”*

Compare experience of Participant B and Participant D responses showed that provision for inclusive education is not properly implemented at school.

“But all that matters; is our education...and...Whatsoever.”(Participant B) *they have to understand that we ‘gays’ of course; they have their views and opinions...but what we are asking for? Is for them ...to stand us...just treat me as anyone”* (Participant D)

5.3.2.3 Failure or under-performance

Gay learners experiencing repeated form prejudice, stigma and discrimination among co-learners and this have a greater risk of disconnection to free participation the in the classroom activities, and perhaps further emotional victimization experienced per time can lead to a low self-esteem to accomplish the normal interactive activities. The signals is obvious inform of depression, isolation, substance abuse and suicide, having no support to improve the situation may lead student to underperform or failing school works (Jordan, 2013 & Goodenow et al., 2006). According to (Participant D) *“mmm...I’m not feeling okay...at all...felt so bad, because...other learners treats me as if, I’m not human being like them...when comes to group activities or class general work...no one likes to associate with me...seriously, I’m marginalize many times...and this put me to be alone most times and affecting my academic records...because I failed and under-performed in some of my subjects”*

Participant D, A, C and E showed that their experiences impact negatively on academic performance as lack of concentration, isolation hindered them to underperform.

Participant A: *“At school, I can’t concentrate...most of my friends are boys, because, if am with boys I’m cool...but with girls...eish”*

Participant A: *“is hard for me sometimes...to cope”* ...Participant B: *“it’s really affecting me to perform well”* Participant C: *“it affects my academic badly, I wasn’t performing well”*

Participant D: *“is very hard...I can’t concentrate on my work”* Participant E: *“I lost concentration and feel like dropout most times...I can’t withstand attending school most of the time”*

The above expressions from participant A, B, C, D and E simultaneously echoed that, they all affected badly academically and need support to improve them.

5.3.2.4 Low self-esteem

In a situation where students cannot have comfort zone at school but fearing of triggers around from other learners or teachers, it will be difficult to actualize good academic performance, understanding interaction accurately in a peaceful and welcoming environment for learning purposes. Dryden (2003) defines low self-esteem is an art of having a generally negative overall opinion of oneself, to the end of his/her ability as a learner or anyone with this expression

Participant C:

“Well, you know...at first, it hard...because, I actually had problems...defining my sexuality...because, I knew I was gay, but...I don’t want to accept myself...I, don’t want to accept that I’m gay, trying to pretend and moving with guys, but my mummy tell me another thing and I developed a low self-esteem, I didn’t have confidence, it affects my academic badly ...I, wasn’t perform well” (Participant C).

The sexual identity and orientation is affecting the participant which disallowed him to perform well due to lack of confidence amounted to low self-esteem which definitely affect his academic performance.

5.3.2.5 Internalizing and externalizing problems

Elze (2002) examines the risk factors associated with internalizing and externalizing problems among gay, lesbian, and bisexual adolescents. The results of this study reveal that lesbian, gay, and bisexual adolescents face unique stressors, as well as shared risk factors with other vulnerable adolescents. Additionally, gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth experienced more internalizing and externalizing problems than a normative adolescent sample. Participant B reveals that:

“Hmmm...we have to understand that; every time..., when you are a gay or lesbian....they will treat you like you are doggy...and ...you are nothing, so, we have to understand that, because they don't understand what you're going through? They are treating me differently”

(Participant B).

Gay learners experience some emotional feelings which are internalized but can only be shared through the assistance of qualified personnel for intervention supports.

5.3.2.6 Lack of support for gay and lesbian learners

Sadly, the occurrence of victimization, bullying, name-calling and verbal assault on the gay and lesbian learners constantly programmed their imagination to recall bad experiences encountered at school or home. Participant B cannot bear the extent of his experiences as stated:

“Mm...hmm...sometimes in class...; when I tried to say something and I rose up my hand...in class...or... on the class group activities. They will say” no...We don't want me, (...) calling

my name, in our group activities, is affecting me because...I felt rejected at times...that is why? I say is affecting me...I can't talk freely without comment...eish! Sad...they don't want my voice to be heard...it's really affecting me to perform well". Participant D states: *"if any incidence happens...our voice is not heard"*.

Participant D sees absolutely no support for gay and lesbian learners at school in his statement; *"NO...support...you're like alone in a cold room nobody...talk to you."*(Participant D). This justifies that lack of support occupied more avenue to disturb the learner in question with Givens and Pollack (2008) state that boys who are bullied by being called "gay" or "faggots" have greater psychological distress which can result in low grades, substance use, and depression have also been linked to bullying on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation. Participant B and Participant D shared the same experiences when it comes to the lack of classroom support for gay and lesbian learners.

5.4.3 How can schools provide psycho-social support to enhance gay and lesbian well-being?

This will be discussions of the school support services to enhance the well-being of gay and lesbian learners.

5.4.3.1 The role of the school as support system

School serves a prominent role in the promotion of learners' wellbeing and mental health irrespective of their age, gender, ethnicity, status, religion and culture. Therefore, there is a need for all schools to ensure that the basic services are provided to improve the performance of all learners. Schools should be spaces conducive to teaching and learning.

5.4.3.2 School support services

Chesir-Teran (2003) concurs that there is a need for interventions or approaches intended to create supportive environments for sexual minority students, and little is known about differences between schools in their influence on these adolescents. Gay learners in high schools suffer victimization and rejection in the schools; they are seldom welcomed and accepted and their presence becomes rather a point of debate. Arum (2011) states that victimization occurs instead of taking the opportunity to enhance students' overall educational experiences; and students achievement is measured solely on standardized test scores. The indirect effect could be to maximize progress towards the academic excellence of gay learners in high schools. Based on this fact; Participant C suggested that: *“there should be awareness and orientation for...other learners who don't know that lesbians and gay are also...have right to equal education to know....and to treat us with our differences...without abusing us or bullying, if possible, at school.”*

Particularly to assist these gay/lesbian learners at school, Koopman and Huebner (2009) suggested that redirecting reform efforts toward non-academic aspects of learning (social and emotional) may have a significant impact on the overall quality of students' school experiences and indirectly improve academic achievement. School support services system may play a significant role in the improvement and development of gay and lesbian learners through counselling, as Participant B and Participant D solicits *“their voices to be heard”*, showing empathy towards these students. It may also involve monitoring of these students' behaviour after meeting on follow up basis to enhance their social wellness and academic performance.

5.4.3.3 Social justice recognition

According to Petrovic (1998) using the virtue of recognition and the principle of non-oppression will enhance democracy. This will require a positive portrayal of homosexuality in schools and precludes teachers from expressing their beliefs against it. All learners should with the increasingly heard voices of gays, lesbians and bisexuals (GLB) in American society, African, Asian and European and respect their demands for recognition. Participant C suggests a copying strategy, *“I tried to bring positivism even when things are bad”* meanwhile Participant A argues for equality in teaching and learning as she tried to say *“they remain silent when they should accommodate us as we are.”*

Basically, high schools learners are often given contradictory messages about inequality and social justice, in which some aspects of diversity or ‘difference’ are considered more worthy of attention and respect than others. The fact that individuals are contradictory and shifting subjects has important implications for policies and practices in early childhood education, as in other contexts of education, which need to be acknowledged and addressed (Robinson, 1995).

5.4.3.4 Conducive school environment

According to the Department of Education policies (2001, p. 6), it’s important for schools to be spaces conducive to teaching and learning. Participant C states: *“but they should learn to stand us, even if they can’t...mean like... ‘school’ is a public place...everybody is welcome...the key to that is, just mind your own business.”*(Participant C). However, Richardson (2006) confirms that there are no educational policies requiring schools to become safe places for

lesbian, gay and bisexual learners or where both teachers and the curriculum fully address homosexuality. The invisibility of homosexuality within curriculum policies contradicts the goals of inclusive and equal education for all. Furthermore, Participant E asserts: *“I can’t withstand attending school most of the time, because of the school hostile environment due to my sexuality.”* (Participant E).

Notwithstanding, the South African Constitution's (RSA, 1996) commitment to equality regarding sexual orientation, the situation in South African schools is handled inconsistently. Little has been done to equip teachers to challenge and teach related issues on homosexuality and homophobia in classroom (Francis & Msibi 2011; Richardson 2006). Teachers who have little or no idea of sexuality education actively ignore or mishandle the issues pertaining to homosexuality. Participant A states: *“they should accommodate us as we are”*.

Participant C: *“but they should learn to stand us”*

Participant D: *“Is for them ...to stand us...just treat me as anyone”...*

Participant E: *“minority gay and lesbian to be more tolerated at schools”*. According to Participant A, Participant C, Participant D and Participant E School pays less concern to accommodate gay and lesbian learners’ experiences in what is a hostile environment in the school.

The school environment should be accommodating with qualified professionals like educators, counsellors, social workers and psychologists who will enhance support to any learner that is a victim of abuse related to gender identity and will address any problems through constant monitoring to encourage their well-being and academic performances (Horner, 2009 &

Goodenow et al., 2006). School intervention programmes are needed that promote equity and a friendly atmosphere for unity among learners. This is supported by this comment: *“maybe...a group to...counselling and grievance section to cater for the needs of minority gay and lesbian to be more tolerated at schools”* (Participant E).

Hooks (1994) argues for an interactive relationship between teacher and learners to be aware of individual differences. This required first talking about themselves and revealing their true personalities without hiding their identity. For instance: *“I started to go to the grade coordinator at that time, so he took the matter up to the office...and the teacher didn’t want to hear anything and the management called her to discussed the incidence, she didn’t want to hear anything...she didn’t want to hear anything about the situation, but then...I forgave her,...en...then she said, ‘sorry’ and her behaviour was not acceptable...but those are other things, some teachers are expecting, some are not.”*(Participant C)

There is no good relationship between learner and teacher in that situation, imagine what that lack of understanding can mean for the learner.

Fox, Dunlap, Hemmeter, Joseph, and Strain (2003) advocate developing a school-wide approach to developing social and emotional competence at every range to enhance the free flow of inclusivity at school for all learners, regardless of sexual orientation, to achieve good academic outcomes for all learners. This requires improving support services to achieve relationships amongst learners that will change the prevailing classroom behaviours. Participant D argues as follows: *“Awareness, I think there should be campaign, maybe in schools, you know...informing the learners about gay people.”* (Participant D).

In conclusion, in alignment with the above literature, gay and lesbian learners can improve their performance academically with their peers who are heterosexual, and such good performance will enhance the social well-being at school.

5.5 Theoretical analysis of findings

For clarity and simplicity, the ecosystem theory and social learning theory that was used as the theoretical frameworks, will try to explain in relation to this study. Bandura's social learning theory recognises the socialization of learners in respect to the experiences encountered as one of the major determining factor for academic performance while Bronfenbrenner's ecology theory relate the happening of the child ecosystem as determinant factors responsible for performance with microsystem, these are the experiences that are indirectly affect the child reactions within the macrosystem as it depict social values and choice of future. The illustration maintains that experiences encountered by gay learners have influences on their academic performance because environmental conditions maintains the emotional domain that drives the psycho-motor of the learners' interest to learning and challenges around them per time; both theories will serve as a mechanism to provide solution to improve gay and lesbian learners in high schools.

Firstly as mentioned in chapter two, the identity of learner has both positive and negative influences on the academic performance because it deals with how learners are socialised. Berzonksy and Kuk (2002) suggest that learners are challenged indirectly and directly during the identity formation time which normally coincides the ages of schooling. This is not only affects the cognitive performance of the learner but also tends to influence how he/she adapts

to socialises among his/her peer when trying to define where to belong during identity formation and culture at school in regards of the orientation his/her socialization have among their peers.

Bronfenbrenner (1989) maintains that connectivity flow in the child's immediate environment which influences his way of responding to situation in any relationship he find himself. Was and Isaacson (2008) concur that once the identity of learner shows in all areas of life since social identity includes relationships a wider society which has numerous notions on the issues of disclosure. Ideally, identity formation is important because it evolves in the environment with which he or she interacts. Participants explained their various experiences and the impact of these on their academic performance with the suggestions of supportive measures for their improvements. The findings of this study were guided by the way in which learners can outgrow the experiences and to have ability to cope with these issues that affecting their academic performance. Experiences shared indicate that being gay and lesbian learner makes the participants to have different challenges in real world at school.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter dealt with the results and the discussion of the findings which represents the participant's responses and literature and the theoretical frameworks relevant to this study. The study revealed that participant's experiences were closely similar to the literature in relation to gay and lesbian learners, while there are limitations to the study on exploring gay and lesbian

high school learners specifically. The findings of this study are that participants do not have the support by the pressure placed on them in response to their sexual orientation.

The next chapter will present the conclusions, recommendations and some guidelines, limitations and suggestion for future research.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

The study used a qualitative approach to gain an understanding of the experiences which gay/lesbian learners encounter in high school. This chapter presents a summary of the research, conclusion and recommendations on how to provide support services to improve and to set a proposal for further research. The research questions of this study are:

- What are the experiences of gay and lesbian learners in high schools?
- How do gay and lesbian learners' experiences impact on their academic performances?
- How can schools provide psycho-social support to enhance gay and lesbian learner's well-being?

6.2 Summary of findings

This research was conducted with the aim of investigating the experiences of gay learners in high schools and how being gay affects their academic performance. Three core objectives were set: to explore and understand the experiences of gay learners, to examine the experiences of gay learners and the impact thereof on their academic performances and to investigate school support systems for gay learners. To ensure these objectives, the study engaged a qualitative method by the use of semi-structured interviews in one school with five (5) gay and lesbian learners, to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences and their world.

This study began with a review of literature to explore on the previous work on the subject and with an account of social learning theory and ecological theory which provided the theoretical insight to the study. Data were collected through open-ended, semi-structured interviews with five gay and lesbian learners in a school in Durban Central. From using analysis of the data, it was found that the most frequent experiences are those of abuse, bullying, stigmatization, victimization, rejection and attitudes of intolerance; these were accompanied by lack of service support system at school to address these issues and thus improve their academic performance.

The study reveals that gay learners were unable to expose some of the experiences that are too traumatic for them to deal with simply because of the intolerance of their peers and the fear of teachers who do not know their sexual identity. As participant A and B remain silent to such questions by responded “*mmm*” and “*at times thinking of killing myself*” (Participant A and B) respectively. These gay/lesbian learners showed their fear of what might come to them from their peers; this makes attending school at times an experience of fear, leads to problems of inferiority coping with both the social life and academic aspect of school work.

Regarding these experiences, there is a need to find alternatives that would enable gay/lesbian learners to achieve maximum performances at school. Amazingly, despite the negative experiences faced by these learners, participants intended to improve on their academics results good learners with good grades. (Participant C)’s statement “*I developed I don’t care attitude and then I tried to score A’s thereafter*” This in turns, suggests that there are ways in which the learners can be supported towards the improvement of their performance, irrespective of present experiences. So, this study reveals that gay/lesbian respondents advocate that they can be accommodated without abuse, without bullying or being-picked on and stigmatized because

school is meant for diversity and tolerance. This is voiced by Participant A: (*I think they should accept us the way we are, born like this; they should accommodate us as we are.*) and Participant B and C: (*they should learn to stand us.*) Nearly all participants expressed the fear of abuse; only one did not identify any abuse. Participant D only was not practically abused. This situation required inclusivity so that learners can enjoy full acceptance at school without any difficulties. To this end, school support services are enjoined to provide an equitable psychological and counseling supports to improve the conditions experienced by gay learners.

In this study only Participant C is able to cope on his academic performance challenge due to his positivist approach he said that was applied; I don't care attitude while the remaining Participant A, B, D and E were still battling for school psycho-social supports to help them improve on their academic performance.

Therefore, to achieve the goals of this study by supportive measures; Participant D and E suggests, (*Awareness...I think...mm...there should be campaign.*) while Participant A, B and C requested "*total accommodation of gay and lesbian learners at school to have equal opportunities*" as included in DOE policies. At this point, school support services are required to assist gay learners to improve academically irrespective of their sexual orientation.

Lastly, the study found that gay/lesbian learners have been trying to cope with their daily experiences, adjusting responses where necessary to concentrate on their studies, attempting to avoid distractions and embracing what limited supports is available from the school support through cooperation with teachers who understand the importance of their wellbeing.

6.3 Significance of the study

The study has revealed that the participants' experiences were closely similar to the literature in relation to gay and lesbian learners, while it must be noted that the study was exploring high school gay and lesbian learners specifically. The findings of this study are that participants do not have the support needed to deal with the demands placed on them by the prejudice and stigma related to their sexual orientation. In the context of inclusive education, any discrimination of learners due to their sexual orientation should be condemned, and educators have to actively demonstrate that they are conversant with national education policies before ensuring their implementation.

6.4 Recommendations

The following can be generated as recommendations from the study findings which have implications for parents/guardians, learners and schools. These are addressed in the form of guidelines and principles for the improvement of experiences encountered by gay and lesbian learners at high schools.

Based on these research findings of the study, it is evident that gay and lesbian learners can identify stigmatization and the like related to their sexual orientation and the impact thereof on their academic performance. This might be the reason for the under-performance of these learners at school; the failure to accommodate all learners in public school which is meant to be an inclusive educational system. This implies that there is a need for orientation programmes and wider awareness to assist gay/lesbian learners who are challenged in their academic performance. Possible suggestions include:

6.4.1 What guideline and strategies can be generated to assist gay and lesbian learners to improve on their academic performance?

6.4.1.1 Information sharing and conscientization

At schools debates, campaigns and open talk should be introduced regularly so that all learners can be familiar with diversity issues and what practices to promote tolerance, support and equity among all students. This form of programmes will strengthen group participation in the classroom, regardless of differences in sexual orientation, and further enhance learners' enthusiasm in all activities at school, instead of isolating the gay and lesbian learners. As Participant D and Participant E suggest: *“Awareness...I think...mm...there should be campaign, maybe..., in schools...you know...informing the learners about gay people.”* (Participant D), also supported by: *“I suggests that, there should me awareness and orientation for...other learners who don't know that lesbians and gay are also...have right to equal education to know....and to treat us with our differences...without abusing us or bullying...if possible, at school.”* (Participant E).

6.4.1.2 Life orientation re-packaging

Teachers training programmes should focus on homosexuality, gender education, life orientation, and counselling based on enabling the teachers and educators to have a basic knowledge of these issues and to prepare them for the experiences of learners, so that they can find appropriate problem solving strategies that lead to improvement in learner's academic performance. More so, teachers needed to be open minded to complaints of these learners whenever they are faced with challenges. As they pass through adolescence and towards adulthood, positive attention from teachers will ensure their academic and social well-being at school.

6.4.1.3 Parent-teacher collaboration

Parents/guardians need to be lenient with their children at home, so that they can be helpful and recommend some solutions because the learners' stress may be related to issues related to sexuality, including teenage pregnancy, career choices, HIV and disruptive behaviours. Parents/guardians are encouraged to work hand in glove with teachers. For instance, a lesbian in the study could not reveal her sexual identity to her parents because they are so strict, she remains silent in fear, hence her social well-being is affecting her performance at school. Parental acceptance is very important in assisting these learners. To address the Participant A on her parents: *“No, I’m scared; I don’t because they (parent) normally say...ah! That all their children are straight...mmm...they are too strict...I don’t think is a good idea to tell them...yeah! They will kill me! So I can’t tell them, if I do, I will die because they’re so strict.”* (Participant A)

6.4.1.4 Psychological/psycho-social support services

Psychological services to support homosexual learners by counselling them is needed to help them gain confidence and self-esteem and to strive harder towards achieving a rewarding academic performance. The needs of learners vary, for example, emotional, sexual, psychological, psychosocial, academic, spiritual and physical needs which must be addressed to enable them to develop their full potential at schools, homes and society.

There is need to organise campaigns and rallies to accommodate homosexuality in schools and to work against bullying by challenging abuse, labelling, stigmatization, victimization and

rejection of gay learners in schools. This will create an atmosphere where they can learn effectively without pressure from other learners and teachers.

Empowerment programmes can equally be launched at schools to encourage gay and lesbian learners to develop self-confidence with their sexual orientation and believe in themselves so that they feel that being gay/lesbian does not deny them the right of responsibility towards their future excellence.

Support is a critical element. A peer-support group will strengthen the situation of the gay and lesbian learners and enable them to perform effectively at school.

Some of the experiences can be traumatic in nature, such as gay and lesbian learners' experiences of rape attempts, bullying and abuse. Teachers' assistance is necessary in such cases and they should create a good rapport (i.e., a relationship based on trust) with the learners.

6.4.1.5 The role of the school as a support system

Gay and lesbian learners are human beings like every other learner; therefore support for them is important to take note at schools. The followings suggest how the school can render intervention to assist these learners.

This can be done by launching of awareness campaigns against discrimination on any learners, but to encourage them with love. Learners may be subject to the nature maybe due to hereditary, choice, peer pressure and rejection. School should operate in an atmosphere that is open to

confidentiality to enable learners to confide in the teachers for life related experiences not fearing abuse at school.

Teamwork between the teachers-parents and learners is another strategy to help in discovering the impacts that gay and lesbian learners experiences have which affect their academic performance. Monitoring learners' performance on a daily basis, and getting teachers-parents/guardians feedback will encourage progression towards good performance.

The above guidelines are aimed at improving those experiences of gay and lesbian learners that have impacted on their academic performance at school. Other learners who have contributed to the negative performance and the hostile school environment should desist from doing so and should embrace total acceptance of their fellow learners regardless of their sexual orientation. Furthermore, programmes to address these issues will harmonise teachers, other learners and gay and lesbian learners in creating an environment that is conducive to effective learning for every learner.

6.5 Limitations to the study

The major limitation in the study was the language barrier. The learners who were interviewed were mainly Zulus, only one of them was Coloured; the researcher was also a non- Zulu speaker, therefore the interview schedule was designed in English. The transcribing was done after the researcher had listened to the audio-taped data. Scarcity of literature on the subject of gay learners and their experiences posed a challenge. There is not much written on the subject locally.

Some gay and lesbians learners declined to participate due to the sensitive nature of the study, while others were too shy to be audio-taped though they initially had agreed to participate.

The participants were high school learners, all but one of them Zulu, and in different grades.

Thus, the findings are not generalizable to other contexts.

6.6 Recommendation for Further Research

The following can be considered as avenues for future research:

- To explore teacher's attitudes towards gay and lesbian learners at high school: teacher's perspective to ensure their academic performance.
- To design parent/teacher interventions to assist gay and lesbian learners at high school in achieving good academic performance.
- Experiences of high school principals in improving gay and lesbian learners' academic performance and making schools safe for all.
- The participants in the study were gay high school learners in KwaZulu-Natal; the results in this study cannot be generalised to all high school learners. It is recommended that future studies should also look at the experiences of gay and lesbian learners across the provinces in South Africa.
- Since there is a problem with the environment which these learners was socialized, further studies is encourage to consider this for the welfare of gay and lesbian learners at schools.

6.7 Conclusion

This study found that there is no comprehensive support service to accommodate LGBT learners, even though the published policy (in White paper 6) promotes inclusion irrespective of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, etc. The specific school operates with only one counselor who has not been provided with guidelines to support gay and lesbian learners in a context of abuse based on their sexual orientation. The schools remain silent to the complaints of sexual minority learners about the discrimination centered on their sexual identity. The Department of Education is expected to address demanding experiences of LGBT learners through providing support with trained personnel for this task, including psychological services and counseling that could enable these learners' social and academic development.

The study focused on investigating the treatment which gay and lesbian learners encounter from peers and teachers concerning their identity and sexual orientation. The school seems unaware of their existence, making it impossible to identify their needs and render support properly. Additionally, it was accepted that learners were falling back on their own resources in attempts to deal with the situation which may consequently lead to dropout of gay and lesbian learners once the situation feels unbearable.

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APPENDIX ONE

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Please note that this is only a guide to ease the interview process and enable me stay within the focus of my study, other questions could arise from the responses to these. English language will be used in this interview.

A: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

	A	B	C	D	E
Age					
Grade					
Sex					
School					

B: PART PROPOSED SEMI-STRUCTURED QUESTIONS

1. When did you first realise that you are different?
2. Can you remember what happened?
3. Have you “come out” yet (declared your sexual orientation)?
4. Are your parents aware that you are gay or lesbian?
5. How do they feel about your sexuality?
6. At school, are other learners aware that you are gay or lesbian?
7. How do they treat you being gay or lesbian?
8. Are teachers aware that you are gay or lesbian?
9. How do you feel about the way people (teachers & other learners) treat you?
10. Are you ever ‘picked on’ because you are gay?
11. Are you ever abused or bullied for being gay or lesbian?
12. How do you feel about that? How does that make you feel?
13. Did your school environment accept you for being gay?
14. How do you think schools can accommodate gays and lesbians?
15. Do you think being gay/lesbian affect your academic performance? Give a reason for your answers
16. What challenges do you experience about being gay?

APPENDIX TWO

School of Education,
College of Humanities,
University of KwaZulu-Natal,
Edgewood Campus,
22nd May, 2014

Dear Participant,

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

My name is Sunday Adesoji Dare, department of Educational Psychology, (Masters) studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood Campus. I am interested to investigating the experiences of gay learners in high schools of Durban and how the school can fully support them with their sexual difference among other learners to aid their academic performances. I aimed to explore gay learner's experiences in your school. Note that interview will be audio recorded with your permission, transcribe for analysis by expert and your names will not be used but pseudonyms.

Please note that:

- Your confidentiality is guaranteed as your inputs will not be attributed to you in person, but reported only as a population member opinion.
- The interview may last for about 1 hour and may be split depending on your preference.
- Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research only.
- Data will be stored in secure storage and destroyed after 5 years.
- You have a choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalized for taking such an action.
- Your involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved.
- If you are willing to be interviewed, please indicate (by ticking as applicable) whether or not you are willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

	Willing	Not willing
Audio equipment		

Researcher contacts are:

Email: sdare14@yahoo.com

Cell: 0735598921

My supervisor is Mr. Henry Muribwathoho, Educational Psychology, School of Education, Edgewood Campus, University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Contact details:

Tel: +27 (0) 31 260 7011

Fax: +27 (0)

Email: muribwathohoh@ukzn.ac.za

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

Should you have any questions about this study or its procedures, now or in the future, please contact me or my supervisor at the following contact details:

RESEARCHER	SUPERVISOR
Sunday Adesoji Dare	Mr. H. Muribwathoho
Tel: 0735598921	Tel: 0826712126
Email: sdare14@yahoo.com	Email: muribwathohoh@ukzn.ac.za

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 Fax: +27312603093
 Email: snyman@ukzn.ac.za

DECLARATION

I..... (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from or continue the project at any time, as I am pleased to the best of my experience to participate.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

.....

.....

Regards,

S.A. Dare

APPENDIX THREE

School of Education,
College of Humanities,
University of KwaZulu-Natal,
Edgewood Campus.
22nd May, 2014.

The Principal,

Dear Sir,

RE: APPLICATION FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT AN INTERVIEW

My name is Sunday Adesoji Dare; I am an M.Ed (Educational psychology) student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood campus. I am conducting a research aimed at investigating the “experiences of high school learners and thereof impact on their academic performance”. I need to interview gay and lesbian learners in your school. My plan is to interview a minimum of 5 learners, whose ages range from 16-18 years and the interview will begin after the school hour in a prepared office not to disrupt the teaching and learning activities of the fellow learners during the school hours. Researcher and supervisor will be allowed during the interviewing session for the confidentiality purposes. The interview would last for approximately 30 minutes per participants.

I have already applied for permission from the provincial Department of Education to access schools for the research and will make a copy available to you upon request. Each participant for this study does so voluntarily and letters affirming confidentiality and anonymity will be issued.

Looking forward to your cooperate reply.

Kind regards,

S.A. Dare

APPENDIX FOUR

School of Education,
College of Humanities,
University of KwaZulu-Natal,
Edgewood Campus.
30th July, 2014.

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: CONSENT FOR LEARNERS TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

My name is Sunday Adesoji Dare; I am an M.Ed (Educational psychology) student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood campus. I am conducting a research aimed at investigating the “Experiences of high school gay learners and thereof impact on their academic performance”. I wish to seek for permission to undertake research. I need to interview gay and lesbian learners in your school. My plan is to interview a minimum of 5 learners, whose ages range from 16-18 years. The interview would last for approximately 30 minutes. In this study I will seek to explore gay learner’s experiences at school impact thereof on their academic performance.

Universal principles such as honesty, justice and respect will be my research guide. I hope that this research will make a positive contribution to our gay learner’s experiences at high school. Participants will be treated with respect and fairness and I will ensure compliance regards to confidentiality and anonymity. Participants are free to withdraw from the research at any stage without negative or consequences.

Thanks for your cooperation.

Yours faithfully,

.....
Student

DECLARATION

I..... (full names of parent/guardian) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from or continue the project at any time, as I am pleased to the best of my experience to participate.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

.....

.....

APPENDIX FIVE



21 October 2014

Mr Sunday Adesoji Dare (212558320)
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Protocol reference number: HSS/0568/014M

Project title: To investigate the experiences of high school gay learners and the impact thereof on their academic performance

Dear Mr Dare,

Full Approval Notification – Committee Reviewed Protocol

This letter serves to notify you that your application in connection with the above was reviewed by the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, has now been granted **Full Approval**.

Any alterations to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach/Methods must be reviewed and approved through an amendment/modification prior to its implementation. Please quote the above reference number for all queries relating to this study.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research protocol

Yours faithfully

Dr Shenika Singh (Chair)
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

cc Supervisor: Mr Henry Murbwathoho
cc Academic Leader Research: Professor P Morojele
cc School Administrator: Mr Thoba Mthembu

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Dr Shenika Singh (Chair)

Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

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Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3567/6350/4567 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 4809 Email: vinbas@ukzn.ac.za / svrmanom@ukzn.ac.za / mohund@ukzn.ac.za

Website: www.ukzn.ac.za



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APPENDIX SIX



education

Department:
Education
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Nomangisi Ngubane

Tel: 033 392 1004

Ref.:24/8/223

Mr SA Dare
477 City Life U-2265
Smith Street
Durban
4001

Dear Mr Dare

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"To investigate the experiences of high school gay learners and the impact thereof on their academic performance"**, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 01 August 2014 to 30 June 2015.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Connie Kehologile at the contact numbers below.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report / dissertation / thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Director-Resources Planning, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education, (Umlazi district)

Nkosisathi S.P. Sishi, PhD
Head of Department: Education
Date: 15 August 2014

KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

POSTAL: Private Bag X 9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200, KwaZulu-Natal, Republic of South Africa
PHYSICAL: 247 Burger Street, Anton Lembede House, Pietermaritzburg, 3201. Tel: 033 392 1004
EMAIL ADDRESS: kehologile.connie@kzndoe.gov.za; CALL CENTRE: 0860 596 363
WEBSITE: www.kzndoe.gov.za

APPENDIX SEVEN

Crispin Hemson
15 Morris Place
Glenwood
Durban
South Africa 4001

hemson@ukzn.ac.za

C: 082 926 5333

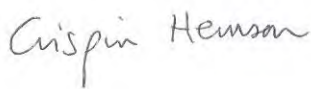
H: 031 206 1738

10th January 2015

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to record that I have carried out a language editing on the dissertation by Sunday Adesoji Dare, entitled 'Investigating the experiences of high school gay learners and the impact thereof on their performance.'

The editing has been limited to language issues within paragraphs and referencing, and has not addressed structure. Subsequent work still has to be undertaken by the student to address required changes.



Crispin Hemson

APPENDIX EIGHT

TURNITIN REPORT

Investifgating the experiences of gay learners in high school

ORIGINALITY REPORT



PRIMARY SOURCES

1	www.dsd.gov.za Internet Source	1%
2	www.apa.org Internet Source	1%
3	Jace Pillay. "The educational challenges facing early adolescents who head families in rural Limpopo Province", Education as Change, 12/2006 Publication	1%
4	www.unhcr.org Internet Source	1%
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