Teachers' perceptions of sex, gender and sexuality diversities: evidence from a Durban primary school

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I am grateful for the support and encouragement of my husband

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Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to the memory of my late grandfather.

Declaration

I, Navisha Sewnath, declare that:

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Name: Prof Shakila Singh

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Abstract

Issues of gender and sexuality permeate the entire schooling experience and impact the daily activities of learners. As such, it is critical that educators have a grounded understanding of these topics to ensure that all learners feel included and can obtain the requisite information on gender and sexuality. International studies have concluded that educators have a wholesale deficit of knowledge on sexuality and gender, while prior research from South Africa has mostly focused on the understanding that Life Orientation educators have of sexuality and gender. Thus, this study attempts to contribute to the literature on sex, gender and sexual diversities and schooling by investigating the perceptions that a selected group of intermediate phase teachers in a primary school have of sex, gender and diverse sexualities. This qualitative study aims to investigate teachers' understanding of, and engagements with, sex, gender and diverse sexualities in the primary school. The sample comprised 12 purposefully selected intermediate phase educators at a selected primary school in Durban. This included teachers who specialised in Life Orientation and teachers who did not. The study was conducted within the interpretivist paradigm and individual semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from the educators. The data was analysed using thematic analysis. The social construction of gender, gender-relations theory and queer theory were utilised to understand the data. The key findings from the study revealed that such educators have varying understandings of sex, gender and sexuality diversity, with the majority having a limited understanding of these concepts and a culture of heteronormativity prevailing in the school at large. Furthermore, the educators did not regularly engage with sex, gender or sexuality diversity in their classrooms and many understood it as being the domain of the Life Orientation specialists. They cited lack of preparation and general discomfort with the topics of sex, gender or sexuality diversity as the main reasons. This study argues that all educators, regardless of the subjects that they teach, should have the requisite knowledge of gender and sexuality.

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Chapter One

Introduction to the study

1.1 Introduction

South Africa is a deeply patriarchal country that is still inherently conservative (Morrell, Jewkes & Lindegger, 2012; Msibi, 2011; Singh, Mudaly & Singh-Pillay, 2015). Any individual citizen's gender and sexuality identities are inevitably constructed in this social context (Morrell et al., 2012; Singh et al., 2015). These social conditions facilitate the creation of gender stereotypes, gender inequalities and gender hierarchies (Francis, 2017; Morrell et al., 2012; Singh et al., 2015). The prevailing gender norms in South Africa espouse male dominance and female subordination (Bhana & Anderson, 2013; Morrell et al., 2012). Additionally, the social conditions in South Africa ensure that a culture of heteronormativity is predominant (Bhana & Anderson, 2013; Morrell et al., 2012; Msibi, 2019). Consequently, both females and non-normative individuals are often harassed and bullied for their identities (Morrell et al., 2012). Researchers have concluded that schools too are not immune to these occurrences (Bhana & Anderson, 2013; Wilmot & Naidoo, 2014). Scholars of gender have also touched on the fact that teachers have directly contributed to creating a culture of heteronormativity within South African primary schools by further reproducing or reinforcing gender inequalities and gender stereotypes (Bhana & Anderson, 2013; Francis, 2021).

Schools should provide a safe and conducive learning environment for all learners inclusive of sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Bhana, 2016; Francis, 2017; Reygan, 2016). Furthermore, teachers should have a prominent role in assisting learners to construct their gender and sexual identities (Francis, 2019; Msibi, 2015). Therefore, it is imperative that educators obtain sufficient knowledge of sex, gender and sexuality diversities. By gaining this, they will attain the ability to ensure that their learners reflect an unbiased opinion of these concepts. Against this background, this study investigates primary school teachers' perceptions of sex, gender, and sexuality diversities. The following section elaborates on the rationale of this study and then provides a brief background to it. Thereafter, the significance of the study will be elaborated upon. The research objectives and research questions are subsequently presented. Thereafter, the location of the study is discussed and the chosen methodology is explained.

1.2 Rationale

The motivation for this study primarily arises from my personal experience. Throughout my schooling career, and during my undergraduate degree, I had not been exposed to the concepts of sex, gender, diverse sexuality, heteronormativity, masculinity or femininity. When I began my teaching career, at a primary school, I noticed that individuals who did not conform to societal expectations regarding the behavioural norms of their respective sex were harassed or bullied by their peers. Additionally, I observed that male learners harassed, verbally abused, bullied and even assaulted their fellow students.

These incidents were also directed against male learners who did not participate in sport, learners who behaved differently when compared to their peers or males who achieved good marks in class. Initially, I could not understand what motivated the male learners to act in this manner. However, my colleagues and I attributed these incidents to the usual adolescent behaviours that male learners might encounter. But in the surrounding community, I observed high school students and adults behaving in the same manner and my curiosity was piqued. I beganto wonder whether there was another reason for this behaviour. At the time, I myself believed that gender was a biological concept. I was also under the impression that an individual's gender was purely binary. Specifically, my knowledge of gender was based on the premise that an individual's gender was limited to two categories, male and female. My knowledge of diverse sexualities was rudimentary at best and I did not yet understand that there was a vast spectrum of sexual identities. However, my knowledges of gender and sexuality were significantly enhanced when I started my honours degree. I realised then that gender and sexuality are important concepts that impact our daily lives.

I note here that it is necessary to investigate the understanding that teachers have of sex, gender and sexuality diversities (and the engagements that educators have with sex, gender and sexuality diversities) because researchers have concluded that sex, gender and sexuality diversities are silenced and marginalised in the South African schooling system (Francis, 2017; Francis, 2019). Unfortunately, sex, gender and sexuality diversities are also the target markers of bullying and harassment (Msibi, 2019). Sex, gender and sexuality diverse people uniformly have to endure homophobic insults and taunts during their formal schooling, and it is concerning to note that educators have occasionally condoned these incidents (Msibi, 2019). Consequently, non-normative learners might engage in performative behaviour that restricts their true sexual or gender identities (Delfin, 2020). They might also engage in performative behaviours that attempt to conform with the heteronormative expectations of society at large (Blaise,

2009). These issues can be averted if educators consciously enhance their knowledge of sex, gender and sexuality diversities (MacNaughton, 2000).

By obtaining knowledge of sex, gender and sexuality diversities, educators can act as agents of change and ensure that learners are educated on gender and sexuality (Bhana, 2015). Such learners will also develop a greater understanding and awareness of sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Bhana, 2012). Consequently, individuals who identify with sex, gender and sexuality diversities will become more comfortable and confident with their gender and sexual identities in the midst of their schooling careers (Bhana, 2012). Therefore, educating children on gender and sexuality might even assist learners who identify with sex, gender and sexuality diversities, to gain acceptance from their peers. It is thus crucial that this process begins during the learners' schooling careers.

1.3 Background

There has been increasing academic interest in how gender and sexuality are taught in the classroom (Bhana, 2013; Francis, 2017; Shefer et al., 2015). This increased focus on gender and sexuality could be attributed to the realisation that schools have been identified as an important site where children develop an understanding of gender and sexuality (Preston, 2016; Shefer et al., 2015). Furthermore, prominent scholars have mentioned that questions and issues of gender and sexuality always permeate the entire school environment (Bhana, 2015; Preston, 2016; Shefer et al., 2015; Swanepoel & Beyers, 2019). Additionally, children are also incipiently aware of gender and sexuality and often begin to construct their gender and sexual identities while still at school (Bhana, 2015). Since children spend a considerable amount of time in school while they are still developing a basic understanding of gender and sexuality, their interactions in the classroom assist in forming their understanding of their own gender and sexuality identities (Paechter, 2007). Indeed, interacting with their peers and educators has been identified as a mechanism that assists children in developing their understandings of sexuality and gender (Mayeza, 2015; Mayeza, 2016; Paechter, 2017). Such interactions occur among learners during their time in the classroom and in the playground (Paechter, 2007). However, the interaction between learners and their educators is perhaps the most crucial in the development of gender and sexual identities among children (Paechter, 2007).

It is thus unsurprising that teachers should have an integral role in educating learners on sexuality and gender (MacNaughton, 2000). Researchers have noted that educators should ensure that their learners develop a foundational understanding of gender and sexuality

(Bhana, 2021; Swanepoel & Beyers, 2019). This process should occur in the school environment because teachers serve as important role models for their learners, impart their knowledge to them, and otherwise prepare them for adulthood (Bhana, 2012; MacNaughton, 2000). Therefore, teachers with the requisite knowledge of sex, gender and diverse sexualities should have no difficulty in enhancing their learners' knowledge of these concepts. The Department of Education and the South African Council for Educators (SACE) have acknowledged the importance of educating learners on sex, gender and sexuality diversities by developing policies which overtly call on educators and principals to support learners with sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Department of Basic Education, 2015; SACE, 2018). Specifically, the Professional Teaching Standards, LO CAPS and The Policy on the Standard for Principalship, 2015 have been implemented in schools nationwide (Department of Basic Education, 2015; SACE, 2018). The aim of these programs is to ensure that learners with sex, gender and sexuality diversities are comfortable in school (Department of Basic Education, 2015). However, studies have indicated that teachers more often silence and marginalise sex, gender and sexuality diversities and all discussions thereof (Bhana, 2012; Francis, 2021). It has also been observed that teachers have themselves punished sex, gender and sexuality diversities and have attempted to enforce heteronormative behaviour in schools (Bhana, 2012; Bhana, 2013).

Teachers' attitudes towards learners who identify with sex, gender and sexuality diversities are concerning because if their learners were able to enhance their knowledge on gender and sexuality, the benefits for those individuals who identify with sex, gender and sexuality diversities would be numerous (Blaise, 2009). Sex, gender and sexuality diversities might become more comfortable and secure with their gender and sexual identities (Preston, 2013). Consequently, these individuals would become empowered and might refrain from engaging in heteronormative behaviour (Blaise, 2009). Obtaining knowledge of diverse sexualities might also make children more accepting of sex, gender and sexuality diversities as they grow older (Francis & DePalma, 2015; Wilmot & Naidoo, 2014). This again might increase the probability that individuals who identify with sex, gender and sexuality diversities would be included and accepted in society. Therefore, it is imperative that learners are educated on important concepts such as gender and sexuality. It is also crucial that teachers accept their significant role in ensuring that this process is successful.

In South Africa, previous studies investigating the understanding that primary school teachers' have of gender and sexuality have uniformly focused on Life Orientation (LO) teachers

(Francis, 2013; Francis & DePalma, 2014; Francis & DePalma, 2015). These studies have revealed, plainly, that LO teachers do not have sufficient knowledge of sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Francis & DePalma, 2014). It has also been noted that LO teachers have reservations about educating learners on diverse sexualities and instead prefer to focus on educating their learners about abstinence (Francis, 2013; Francis & DePalma, 2014; Francis & DePalma, 2015).

These factors have prevented learners from being successfully educated on gender and diverse sexualities. A culture of heteronormativity is subsequently fostered and normalised within schools (Bhana, 2021). In these situations, non-normative learners are often on the receiving end of bullying, harassment and homophobic insults (Francis, 2013; Francis & DePalma, 2015). It has also been noted that teachers are sometimes guilty of insulting sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Francis & Reygan, 2016). Moreover, teachers have also forced learners to conform to heteronormative practices within their schools (Allen, 2020; Francis, 2021).

The behaviour of the educators in these studies is counterproductive when considering that educators are agents of change (Allen, 2020; Francis & Reygan, 2016). Teachers have the ability to challenge heteronormative practices, gender inequalities and gender hierarchies (Reygan, 2016). Even unequal gender relations, which position females or sex, gender and sexuality diversities as subordinate, can be challenged by educators if they activate their agency (Bhana, 2012; Bhana, 2021). The process of activating their agency to elicit a change can occur if educators enhance their understanding of sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Bhana, 2012). If the educators possess knowledge of sexuality and gender, there is an increased possibility that learners are successfully educated on gender and sexuality (Msibi, 2015). Sex, gender and sexuality diversities might become integrated and accepted into the schooling system (Msibi, 2015).

Additionally, South African researchers have focused on how children construct their gender or sexuality identities in school, how sexuality is integrated into the curriculum and LO teachers' experiences in teaching gender and sexuality in secondary schools (Bhana, 2016; Bhana, 2021; Francis & DePalma, 2015). There is, however, a greater shortage of scholarly work investigating the understanding that primary school educators have of sex, gender and sexuality diversities in South Africa (Swanepoel & Beyers, 2019). Furthermore, there is limited research on how teachers engage with sex, gender and sexuality diversities within the primary school setting (Swanepoel & Beyers, 2019). Since sex, gender and sexuality diversities permeate the entire school, the educating of learners on sex, gender and sexuality diversities should not be

limited to the LO classroom (Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019; Swanepoel & Beyers, 2019).

From a South African perspective, topics grounded in discussions of sexuality and gender are always included in the LO curriculum (Ngabaza, Shefer & Macleod, 2016). The main reason for this is for learners to develop knowledge of these concepts as they relate to the potential issues and choices facing them in adulthood (Ngabaza et al., 2016). LO teachers are therefore expected to obtain knowledge and training on sexuality and gender (Ngabaza et al., 2016). However, one critique of depending solely on LO educators to integrate sexuality and gender into their lessons is that other educators then do not develop any knowledge of sex, gender and sexuality diversities. This situation is ultimately counterproductive because each staff member should have a role in ensuring that their learners obtain a proper understanding of sex, gender and sexuality diversities. Therefore, it is imperative for all staff members to develop a proper understanding of sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Preston, 2013).

1.4 Significance of this study

This study aims to contribute to the growing literature on gender, sexual diversities and schooling by investigating the perceptions of a selected group of intermediate-phase teachers in a particular primary school in regards to sex, gender and sexuality diversities. It is significant to include teachers that are not necessarily LO specialists, because gender and sexuality discussions permeate the entire school and are not restricted to the LO classroom (Epstein & Morrell, 2012). The teachers who have agreed to participate in this study might benefit by enhancing their knowledge and awareness of sex, gender and sexuality diversities. The educators might too develop an interest in gender and sexuality. These factors may increase the possibility that learners are successfully educated on sex, gender and sexuality diversities. Subsequently, non-normative learners who attend the school might benefit as they become more secure, confident and comfortable with their gender or sexual identities.

Several studies on sexuality education have, as stated, only focused on LO teachers in South Africa; for example, the understanding that secondary school LO teachers have of sex, gender and sexuality diversities or how primary school learners construct their gender or sexuality identities (Bhana, 2016; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019; Swanepoel & Beyers, 2019). These studies have not focused on other subject educators' perceptions of sex, gender, and sexuality diversities (DePalma & Francis, 2014; Swanepoel & Beyers, 2019). Thus, there is a shortage of studies which have focused on intermediate-phase educators and their perceptions of sex, gender and sexuality diversities from a South African perspective (DePalma & Francis, 2014; Swanepoel & Beyers, 2019).

1.5 Objectives

1) To examine primary school teachers' understandings of sex, gender and sexuality diversities
2) To examine how teachers engage with sex, gender and sexuality diversities in the primary school

1.6 Research Questions

1) What are primary school teachers' understandings of sex, gender and sexuality diversities?
2) How do teachers engage with sex, gender and sexuality diversities in the primary school?

1.6 Location of the Study

This study was conducted at Rainbow Primary School (pseudonym) in 2021. Rainbow Primary School is located within a low-income suburb in Durban. The suburb is surrounded by informal settlements. The school is co-educational and state-run. Rainbow Primary School is regarded as a quintile-5 school and a significant portion of the learners are exempt from paying school fees. The school is centrally located and is accessible via a number of major public transport routes. Thus, taxis and buses drive past the school daily. However, the majority of the learners reside in the immediate vicinity of the school and consequently walk to school each day.

1.7 Methodology

Since qualitative studies allowed me to engage with the participants comprehensively and consequently obtain their thoughts and experiences, it was decided to adopt the qualitative approach for the purpose of this study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This study was also conducted within the interpretivist paradigm using a case study design. Case studies, in qualitative research, allow the researcher to conduct an in-depth study of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

1.7.1 Sampling strategy

This study utilised purposive sampling. An essential aspect of purposive sampling is that the researcher's judgment is used to determine which participants will offer the greatest amount of information for the purposes of the study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). Therefore, within the purposive sampling technique, the researcher makes a specific choice about which participants to include in the sample (Punch, 2009). Therefore, purposive sampling was chosen because this sampling technique allowed me to choose teachers who have characteristics that are relevant to this study (Cohen et al., 2018). The sample that I chose for this study consisted of intermediate-phase teachers and included both LO teachers and teachers of other subjects. The

total number of teachers who participated in the study was 12 and in total 3 LO teachers participated. For the purposes of this study, the age of each teacher, educational background and the amount of teaching experience were not considered as criteria for selection into the sample.

1.7.2 Research Methods

The data that was required for the study was produced through individual semi-structured interviews. The questions in the interviews were open-ended. Semi-structured interviews are commonly used in studies of this nature and it was decided to use open-ended questions to ensure that I accurately obtained the teachers' opinions, beliefs and understanding of sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). A semi-structured interview is designed to elicit subjective responses, while an open-ended question allows the participants to respond freely to the interview question (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). An important benefit of my choosing open-ended questions was that I could probe further into my participants' answers if I wished (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). In order to comply with the various lockdown regulations and to ensure that minimal disruptions would occur to teaching time, the interviews were conducted remotely after school.The interviews were scheduled at a time deemed suitable by the educators.

1.7.3 Data Analysis

This study utilised a thematic analysis procedure (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initially, the interviews were transcribed. Thereafter the transcribed interviews were re-read repeatedly. The data was subsequently sorted and organised into categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process is known as data reduction and enabled me to focus on pertinent issues from the data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Organising and sorting the data assisted me in identifying common patterns that appeared in the data. This process makes it easier to identify any themes that might occur. The patterns were then presented thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Conclusions were then made from the data.

1.7.4 Ethical considerations

This study needed to comply with ethical considerations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Since this study was conducted in a school, consent from the principal was required (Swanepoel & Beyers, 2019). This application was made concurrently with my application for ethical clearance. I subsequently obtained the principal's consent and an ethical clearance from the

university. I spoke to each participant in transparent terms and ensured that they were made aware of the purpose of this study. Thereafter, each participant gave written consent for their participation. The participants were notified that the interviews would be recorded. They were also assured that no harm would come to them as a result of their participation in the study. The participants were informed that their identities would be protected. Thereafter, they were made aware that their safety, anonymity and confidentiality would be protected. The participants were also told that they could withdraw from the study at any stage of the interview process if they so wished.

1.8 Chapters outline

Chapter One: This chapter presents the introduction to the study. The rationale, background and significance of the study are also explained. It subsequently discusses the research objectives and research questions of the study and is followed by a brief description of the school where the study is conducted. Thereafter, the methodology that this study employs is mentioned and the chapter outline is subsequently presented.

Chapter Two: This chapter presents the literature review. International and South African studies are synthesised in this section. Initially, literature that conceptualised sex, gender and sexuality diversities is reviewed. Thereafter, scholarly work that depicts sex, gender and sexuality diversities within schools is discussed. This section is followed by a review of literature that examines heteronormativity and schooling. The penultimate section of this chapter reviews literature which is related to teachers' understanding of and engagements with sex, gender and sexuality diversities in primary schools. The final section of this chapter provides the conclusion.

Chapter Three: The theoretical framework of the study is discussed in this section. The theoretical framework of this study draws upon the social construction of gender, queer theory and gender relations theory.

Chapter Four: This chapter presents the methodology that this study utilised. It begins by discussing the qualitative approach. Thereafter, the research paradigm is discussed. The location of the study is subsequently elaborated upon before the chosen sampling techniques are explained. This discussion is followed by an explanation of the ethical considerations and the research methods. The next section focuses on the data analysis techniques. Thereafter,a discussion that details how the study ensured its results were trustworthy is presented. The penultimate section of this chapter discusses the limitations of the study, and thereafter the

conclusion is presented.

Chapter Five: This section consists of a comprehensive analysis of the data collected. The themes developed are:

- Dominance of biological essentialism
- Reinforcing a binary view of gender
- Children learn about gender from society and family
- Childhood sexuality does not exist
- Primary school learners are too young to get educated about sexuality and gender
- Sexuality and gender should be in the LO teachers' domain
- Teachers' discomfort in discussing diverse sexualities with their learners
- Sex, gender and sexuality diversities are easily identifiable
- Teachers' strategies to ensure diverse sexualities are comfortable in the class

Each theme is comprehensively explained and scholarly literature is integrated into each explanation. The explanations also incorporate the theoretical framework of this study.

Chapter Six: This chapter presents a summary of the main findings and recommendations for further research. Finally, this chapter provides the conclusion to this study.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter began with a brief introduction to the study and thereafter the rationale was discussed. This was followed by providing the background and the significance of the study. The objectives and research questions were elaborated upon before the location of the study was discussed. The main research methods of the study were then briefly explained. The next section now contains the literature review. International and South African literature will be synthesised within this section.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the study, provided a motivation and rationale, outlined the research questions and briefly discussed its location. In this chapter, I synthesise the existing literature relevant to my study on teachers' perceptions of sex, gender and sexuality diversities. It begins with conceptualisations of sex, gender and sexuality diversities. The next section discusses sex, gender and sexuality diversities in schools. Thereafter, an investigation of how schools maintain and perpetuate heteronormativity is undertaken, followed by a synthesis of various studies on primary school teachers' understandings of, and engagements with, sex, gender and sexuality diversities.

2.2 Sex, gender and sexuality diversities

To understand why it is necessary to investigate teachers' understandings of and engagements with sex, gender and sexuality diversities, I will initially attempt to understand how sex, gender and sexuality diversities are conceptualised in the current literature. Hence, this section begins by providing a brief outline of sex, gender and sexuality diversities.

Sex is seen as a biological construct consisting of two categories (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013). An individual cannot choose their sex and is instead born into a specific sex (Connell, 1985). Within notions of biological determinism, an individual can be born as either a male or a female (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013). An individual's sexual organs are often used to identify their gender orientation however, there is an uncomfortable silence regarding individuals who are born with intersex variations (Brown, 2022). Research on individuals who are born with intersex variations is limited from a South African context (Brown, 2022). Brown (2022) has noted that individuals with intersex variations are born with non-binary male/female sexual characteristics and they are excluded by society (Brown, 2022). Furthermore, these individuals are subjected to intimidation and harassment because intersex variations are considered unnatural (Brown, 2022).

Gender and sexuality are complex, multi-dimensional concepts (Bhana, 2016; Connell, 1995; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013). An individual has a choice over their gender and sexuality (Bhana, 2016; Connell, 1995; Eckert &McConnell-Ginet, 2013). An individual's gender and sexuality are not dichotomous and are constructed separately over the course of their lifetime

(DePalma & Francis, 2014; Preston, 2013). These concepts are co-constitutive (DePalma & Francis, 2014; Preston, 2013). Therefore, sexuality and gender are inextricably linked (Shefer, 2010).

Gender and sexuality are important concepts that significantly impact on all aspects of our lives (Connell, 1995; Singh, 2013). Individuals are initially exposed to gender and sexuality during their youth (Paechter, 2007). In a seminal paper, Connell (1985) discusses how a baby's name and clothing are always dependent on society's perception of their gender. Gender and sexuality consequently have a substantial impact on the daily activities of all individuals as they grow older (Connell, 1985). This impact is easily observable as these concepts have an influence on an individual's marriage, their choice of clothes, their hairstyle, whether they participate in sporting activities, their behaviour in public, the advertisements that they watch on mainstream media, their friendships and, of course, their relationships (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013; Meyer, 2007; Singh, 2013).

Despite being central to our lives, there are many predominant misconceptions regarding sex, gender and sexuality (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013). Our society believes that an individual's sex, gender and sexuality are separate components of their identity (Valocchi, 2005). The belief that an individual can only be either male and masculine or female and feminine is widespread (Valocchi, 2005). Furthermore, one of the foremost misconceptions regarding gender and sexuality is the perception that these concepts are purely binary (Butler, 2004; DePalma, 2013). The belief that gender is a dichotomy is prevalent globally (Lane, 2020). Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2013) have noted that society perceives gender as a natural concept born of an observable biological process. Sexuality is also deemed to consist of two categories, namely: homosexuality or heterosexuality (Lane, 2020). These two categories are considered strict opposites (Francis, 2021). Thus, our society believes that individuals can be either heterosexual or homosexual (Francis, 2021). Sexuality is predominantly understood as the sexual attraction that exclusively occurs between males and females (Bhana, 2021; DePalma, 2013; West & Zimmerman, 1987). This viewpoint, in addition to enforcing heteronormativity, is aligned with the philosophy of biological essentialism whereby an individual's sexual preferences and their sexual orientation are merged (Connell, 1985). Essentially, sexual preference is then understood to be a biological process (Connell, 2012).

A further misconception occurs when people believe they are born into a specific gender (Bhana, 2021; DePalma, 2013; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Gender is thus viewed as an extension of an individual's sex and it is thought that an individual has no choice over their

gender (Blaise, 2009). An individual's gender is also understood to be an easily observable characteristic (Bhana, 2021; West & Zimmerman, 1987). These viewpoints have been socially constructed and are regarded as an important reason for the high prevalence of heteronormativity, gender inequalities and gender hierarchies, both globally and in South Africa (Brown & Buthelezi, 2020; DePalma, 2013). There is a conflation between an individual's sex, gender and their sexuality diversity (Brown & Buthelezi, 2020; Francis & DePalma, 2014; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019; Preston, 2016). This means that there is a widespread belief that there is no difference between each of these concepts (Preston, 2016). It has been noted that this misconception is regarded as a primary cause of heteronormativity (Brown & Buthelezi, 2020). The ideological dominance of heteronormativity is a cause for concern because heteronormative societies preserve heterosexual attitudes and reinforce heterosexual identities (Dean, 2011; Lane, 2020). Within heteronormative societies, heterosexuality is regarded as the norm (Lane, 2020). Thus, individuals are expected to adhere to heterosexual identities and follow heterosexual behavioural norms (Dean, 2011). Due to the influence of heterosexuality in heteronormative societies, individuals who identify with sex, gender and sexuality diversities are easily marginalised and often find themselves on the receiving end of bullying, harassment or victimisation (Lane, 2020; Misawa, 2013). Consequently, these individuals become insecure with their gender or sexual identities (Lane, 2020; Misawa, 2013).

To gain acceptance from their society, individuals with non-normative gender or sexuality identities are forced to behave in a manner that is synonymous with heteronormativity (Bhana, Nzimakwe & Nzimakwe, 2011; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019). Thus, these individuals are expected to conform to societal expectations regarding their behaviour, appearance and mannerisms while they are also forced to engage in heterosexual relationships (Bhana et al., 2011; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019). To avert these issues, it is important for individuals to enhance their knowledge of sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Bhana, 2021; Butler, 2004). An increase in the knowledge and awareness of sex, gender and sexuality diversities is also crucial to challenge existing perceptions of sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013).

By enhancing their understanding of gender and sexuality, individuals will become aware of sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Butler, 2004; DePalma & Atkinson, 2010). An increased understanding of gender and sexuality might ensure a more accepting and inclusive society (Francis & DePalma, 2015; van Lisdonk, Nencel & Keuzenkamp, 2017). If society is more inclusive, there is a greater possibility that non-normative individuals are welcomed into the fold (Francis & DePalma, 2015; van Lisdonk et al., 2017). Individuals who identify with sex,

gender and sexuality diversities might eventually become more confident in their gender and sexual identities (Preston, 2013). Subsequently, they might refrain from engaging in heteronormative behaviour in their endeavour to appease society (Preston, 2013; Wilmot & Naidoo, 2014). Additional benefits may include the possibility that incidents such as sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies, gender-based violence and prejudice against sex, gender and sexuality diversities are mitigated (Allen, 2020; Bhana, 2013). Therefore, it is crucial for all individuals in our society to enhance their understanding of sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Allen, 2020; Francis, 2013).

The studies that have been reviewed in this section have discussed how individuals are exposed to concepts of gender and sexuality daily and that sex, gender and sexuality have an important role in any individual's life (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013; Lane, 2020). However, it is also noted that substantial misconceptions regarding sex, gender and sexuality persist (Bhana, 2021). A common misconception is that gender and sexuality are binary concepts, which are purely biological (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013). It is imperative that learners enhance their knowledge of gender and sexuality to challenge these misconceptions of sexuality and gender (Francis, 2021). Children can improve their knowledge of sexuality and gender if they obtain a thorough education of sex, gender and sexuality during their schooling career (Francis, 2021). The section following will review studies related to how sex, gender and sexuality diversities manifest in schools.

2.3 Sex, gender and sexuality diversities in schools

Sex, gender and sexuality impact all individuals, inclusive of children (Delfin, 2020). Prior research has postulated that children have limited exposure to sexuality and gender in their youth (Mayeza, 2016). However, children are exposed to gender and sexuality throughout their schooling career (Bhana, Singh & Msibi, 2021; Epstein & Morrell, 2012). Bhana et al. (2021) have further discussed how children begin to construct their gender and sexual identities before they even begin their schooling career. Thus, children are active agents who begin to develop an understanding of gender and sexuality during their youth (Bhana et al., 2021; Mayeza, 2016). MacNaughton (2000) has also mentioned that schools are important sites for the construction of gender and sexual identities. Additionally, scholars have suggested that schools, through their employed educators, have an integral role in assisting learners to enhance their knowledge of sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Bhana et al., 2021; Epstein & Morrell, 2012).

A five-country study by Francis et al. (2019) examined the literature on gender and sexuality diversity and schooling in Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland. Their analysis of their review of reports and publications by relevant ministries, policy documents, published research, relevant statistical data and grey literature from civil society organisations showed significant educational challenges for learners with non-normative gender or sexualities. Furthermore, the researchers found that the policies and schooling cultures in these five countries marginalise gender and sexual diversities and promote heteronormativity. In each of these five countries, individuals with non-normative gender or sexual identities were ultimately marginalised if they did not follow heterosexual norms (Francis et al., 2019).

Enhancing learners' knowledge of sex, gender and sexuality diversities during their formative years at school is imperative for two primary reasons (Epstein & Morrell, 2012): firstly, gender and sexuality permeate the entire school environment as concepts and constructs (Bhana, 2016); secondly, learners construct and enact their gender and sexuality identities throughout their schooling careers (Epstein & Morrell, 2012). If teachers can assist their learners to enhance their knowledge of sex, gender and sexuality diversities and nurture their ability to foster positive gender relations, the prevalence of gender inequalities will be reduced (Epstein & Morrell, 2012). However, the literature indicates that teachers are yet to successfully incorporate sex, gender and sexuality diversities into their learners' daily routines (Allen, 2020; Carlile, 2020; Epstein & Morrell, 2012). Consequently, heteronormativity, gender inequalities and gender hierarchies are perennially reinforced in schools while sex, gender and sexuality diversities are silenced, regulated and marginalised (Allen, 2020; Bhana, 2013; Epstein & Morrell, 2012).

Researchers have found that teachers in the United Kingdom (UK) have likewise not been able to integrate sexuality and gender into their lessons, despite the observation that sexuality and gender have a significant impact on the daily activities of primary school learners (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010; DePalma, 2013; DePalma, 2014). In a study conducted in a British primary school, DePalma (2013) states that the school's uniform was also impacted by heteronormative constructs of gender and sexuality. If learners decided to wear a uniform that was deemed unconventional by their peers, they were invariably mocked and teased (DePalma, 2013). The learners also had a fixed perception regarding the behavioural norms of boys and girls (DePalma, 2013). In this instance, if males behaved in a feminine manner, they were bullied by their peers (DePalma, 2013). The author further stated that the learners' opinions of extracurricular activities and the interactions that occurred between male and female learners

were influenced by sexuality and gender (DePalma, 2013).

Despite the significance of sexuality and gender in primary schools, it was noted that the learners lacked knowledge of sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Carlile, 2020; DePalma & Atkinson, 2010). Consequently, primary schools in the UK had been plagued by a surge in homophobia (Carlile, 2020; DePalma & Atkinson, 2010). According to the literature, non-normative individuals were taunted and insulted, while the learners also reproduced gender stereotypes and gender inequalities in their interactions (Carlile, 2020; DePalma, 2013; DePalma, 2014). For example, if the male learners displayed their emotions publicly, their peers usually alienated them and utilised homophobic insults to taunt them (DePalma, 2014). In an attempt to circumvent these incidents, courses that were meant to educate learners about sex, gender and sexuality diversities, were included in the British curriculum (DePalma, 2014). However, the teachers more often ignored the curriculum and did not educate their learners on sex, gender and sexuality diversity (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010). Instead, the educators simply reinforced heteronormativity and supported the impression that heterosexuality was the only acceptable sexual identity (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010). A consequence of this teaching strategy was that the learners were not taught about sex, gender and sexuality diversities during lessons and were exposed to these concepts through their families, society or the media (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010). Prominent researchers have, moreover, indicated that heteronormativity is a hardy social construct in the UK (Carlile, 2020; DePalma, 2013; DePalma, 2014; DePalma & Jennett, 2010). The studies that have been synthesised here have hypothesised that the learners replicated the behaviour of a heteronormative society (Carlile, 2020; DePalma & Atkinson, 2010). Accordingly, this might have contributed to the widespread homophobia that was observed within primary schools (Carlile, 2020). Consequently, primary school learners who identified with sex, gender or sexuality diversities were most often bullied and harassed (Carlile, 2020).

Researchers have noted too that the unfair treatment which was meted out to learners who identified with sex, gender and sexuality diversities was a direct consequence of the heteronormative practices that were widespread within the schools (DePalma, 2013; DePalma, 2014). According to DePalma & Atkinson (2010), learners began to use homophobic terms from a young age, and this was particularly evident in the playgrounds, which are highly gendered and sexualised. The education authorities in the UK tried to challenge the heteronormative practices that were rife within the schooling system by implementing a project entitled *No Outsiders* (DePalma, 2013; DePalma, 2014; DePalma & Jennett, 2010).

The No Outsiders project aimed to create improved strategies to develop a fully inclusive curriculum and utilised the opinions of educators and researchers (DePalma, 2013; DePalma & Atkinson, 2010; DePalma & Jennett, 2010). The main aim of the No Outsiders project was to create a school environment where learners were not marginalised or bullied because of their sexual or gender identities (DePalma, 2013). DePalma (2013) adds that the No Outsiders project intended to create an environment where individuals with non-normative gender or sexuality identities were accepted and included in schools. The *No Outsiders* project was deemed especially urgent because British primary schools are highly gendered and sexualised environments (DePalma, 2013; DePalma & Atkinson, 2010; DePalma & Jennett, 2010). This observation resonates with research from Finland (Ronnlund, 2015).

In a study that was conducted in Finland, Ronnlund (2015) discusses how the playground is a gendered and sexualised environment. The author observed learners in the playground, noting that they divided the area into portions and allocated specific sections of the playground to each other based on their sex (Ronnlund, 2015). These divisions contributed to the children reinforcing gender and sexual identities because each sex was allotted activities typically associated with either masculinity or femininity (Ronnlund, 2015). This was observed by the fact that sporting activities or contact games, which are traditionally associated with masculinity, were common in the portion of the playground that was reserved for male learners (Ronnlund, 2015). Female learners were denied access to these areas and were expected to participate in non-contact activities in their allocated areas (Ronnlund, 2015). The Finnish study was conducted within the interpretive paradigm and the author utilised interviews to elicit information from 17 children who were between eight and nine-years-old (Ronnlund, 2015). The Finnish study did not focus on teachers, in contrast to the British studies where teachers were the primary focus.

The observation that gender and sexuality are prevalent in schools is not limited to northern countries or studies. Indeed, research which has been conducted in Africa has concluded that our continent's schools are also gendered institutions where learners construct their sexual and gender identities daily through interacting with their peers and educators (Brown, 2017; Dunne, 2007; Dunne, Humphreys & Leach, 2006). Dunne (2007) whose study touched on how gender and sexuality permeate everyday school practices in Ghana and Botswana, has illustrated that the way learners line up in morning assemblies, the sports that learners are allowed to play, the school's dress code and the punishments that are meted out by teachers are all gendered in nature. Additionally, gender inequalities were enhanced by educators as they allowed the male

prefects significantly more authority in comparison to their female counterparts (Dunne, 2007). A further observation made was that teachers played an active role in the construction of gender and sexual identities within primary schools (Dunne, 2007). To obtain these findings, Dunne (2007) worked within the interpretive paradigm and chose ethnographic case studies as her preferred methodology.

According to Dunne et al. (2006), teachers did not explicitly discuss sex, gender and sexuality diversities during their lessons. Instead, the authors concluded that the teachers preferred to promote heteronormativity. A consequence of this strategy was that both gender roles and the gender binary were reinforced in their lessons (Dunne et al., 2006). The authors also noted that gender hierarchies and gender inequalities prevailed in these schools (Dunne et al., 2006). These studies have added to the notion that primary schools in Africa are not gender-neutral and instead promote heterosexual identities (Brown, 2017; Dunne, 2007; Dunne et al., 2006). In these heteronormative societies, sex, gender and sexuality diversities are silenced within schools (Brown, 2017; Dunne et al., 2006). The subsequent section will now review scholarly works from South Africa to understand how sex, gender and sexual diversities manifest in South African schools.

2.3.1 Sex, gender and sexuality diversities in South African schools

South Africa is a deeply patriarchal country, as mentioned (Morrell et al., 2012; Shefer, 2010; Singh et al., 2015). The prevailing cultural beliefs in our country are still fundamentally influenced by apartheid, which was inherently conservative (Francis, 2019; Shefer, 2010). The conservative culture that permeates the country has resulted in the promotion of heteronormative values, heterosexual identities and masculinity (Morrell et al., 2012; Shefer, 2010). The social inequalities present in South Africa have also contributed to the development of a violent form of hegemonic masculinity, which is very much prevalent in the country (Morrell et al., 2012; Shefer, 2010; Singh et al., 2015).Thus, the gender norms in South Africa solidify male dominance, encourage female subordination and promote heterosexual identities (Francis, 2019; Morrell et al., 2012; Shefer, 2010; Singh et al., 2015). This contributes to the development of gender hierarchies and gender inequalities in the country (Bhana, 2015). Within these gender hierarchies, females are submissive towards males (Bhana, 2018). Furthermore, the gender and sexuality binaries are continually reinforced within these social conditions (Francis & DePalma, 2014). It is in this social context that South African learners inevitably begin to understand and construct their gender and sexual identities (Francis, 2019; Morrell et al., 2012).

Research shows that South African learners are aware of heterosexuality, masculinity, femininity and gendered roles (Bhana et al., 2011; Mayeza, 2017). Children are also highly gendered and sexualised beings and the interactions and relationships that exist between learners are influenced by sexuality and gender (Bhana et al., 2011; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019; Swanepoel & Beyers, 2019). Therefore, gender and sexuality significantly impact children during their schooling careers (Bhana et al., 2021). Indeed, the relationships that exist between each sex and additionally the interactions that occur between learners are influenced by gender and sexuality (Bhana, 2018; Bhana et al., 2021; Govender & Bhana, 2021). Studies have indicated that the relationships and interactions that occur between learners at school are substantially influenced by heteronormativity (Bhana, 2018; Govender & Bhana, 2021).

Govender & Bhana (2021) have observed that children regard heterosexual relationships as a sign of popularity and thus usually strive to enter into a relationship with a member of the opposite sex. They contend that learners believe heterosexual relationships are required to impress their peers (Govender & Bhana, 2021). These relationships are also impacted upon by questions of sexuality as female learners dress up in feminine outfits and use makeup to entice their male counterparts (Bhana, 2021). School uniforms are stipulated according to South Africa's policy on school uniforms (Department of Education, 2005). This policy is not gender neutral and subscribes to heteronormative practises. Male learners are required to use shirts and trousers while female learners are required to wear skirts (Department of Education, 2005). Boltman (2021) has argued that learners with non-normative gender or sexual identities are uncomfortable with their school unforms. Indeed, the learners have stated that their uniforms have played a significant role in reduced satisfaction during their time at school (Boltman, 2021).

Due to the prevalence of hegemonic masculinity, these relationships are indicative of gender inequalities (Bhana et al., 2011; Bhana, 2015). Subsequently, schools have become reflective of South African society and unfortunately male domination, female subordination and heteronormative ideals are prevalent as a consequence (Bhana et al., 2011; Bhana, 2015). The gendered activities that learners engage in daily are also impacted upon by heteronormativity (Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019; Mayeza, 2017). South African researchers have noted that gendered activities are not restricted to the classroom and also occur in the playground (Bhana, 2018; Mayeza, 2016).

In a case study conducted among thirteen Grade 7 girls, Bhana (2018) collected data through individual interviews and focus group discussions. While conducting this study, the author

noted that gendered activities are prevalent in the playground (Bhana, 2018). During playtime, male learners preferred to participate in rough or physical sports such as soccer or wrestling, which are traditionally associated with masculinity (Bhana, 2018). Male learners who did not participate in contact sports were mocked by their peers and accused of being feminine (Bhana, 2018). This observation was corroborated by Mayeza (2016), who mentions that homophobic taunts are frequently used to insult males who do not participate in masculine sports. South African researchers have further noted that female learners were satisfied by participating in non-contact activities such as singing or dancing (Bhana, 2018; Govender & Bhana, 2021). When questioned, the female learners stated that they used dancing or singing activities to elicit a response from the boys (Bhana, 2018; Govender & Bhana, 2021). Thus, female learners perform singing and dancing activities to reinforce heterosexuality in the playground (Govender & Bhana, 2021).

Heterosexuality is further enshrined in schools through activities such as 'spin the bottle', a game where female learners are encouraged to kiss a male peer if the bottle points towards them (Bhana, 2018). South African learners, therefore, have the impression that heterosexuality and heterosexual relationships are the norm (Bhana, 2018; Govender & Bhana, 2021). Scholars have mentioned that heterosexuality is enshrined through various other activities that the learners engage in within schools (Bhana et al., 2011; Mayeza, 2016). Mayeza (2016) conducted research among primary school learners in a township and noticed that sporting activities are used to reinforce heterosexual norms. Mayeza (2016) utilised an ethnographic approach and used semi-structured interviews to elicit data. It was further noted that boys who did notparticipate in soccer during recess were regarded as feminine and were often mocked by their peers (Mayeza, 2016). The girls who participated in soccer games were considered masculine (Mayeza, 2016). Consequently, these girls were regarded as tomboys (Mayeza, 2016). Thus, when it came to choosing a suitable romantic companion, the boys disregarded girls who played soccer with them (Mayeza, 2016). This decision was influenced by the assumption that females who participated in sporting activities alongside boys were homosexual (Mayeza, 2016).

The literature that has been reviewed in this section has signalled how sexuality and gender have a significant impact within primary schools in South Africa (Bhana, 2018; Mayeza & Bhana, 2017; Moosa, 2021). Indeed, the authors of these studies have noted that gender and sexuality permeate the entire school environment and are not restricted to a single classroom (Mayeza & Bhana, 2017; Mayeza, 2016; Mayeza, 2017). It was also noted that heteronormativity was prevalent in primary schools (DePalma, 2014). A common observation between the South

African studies and international research is that an individual's sexuality and gender are not restricted to a single classroom (DePalma, 2014; Mayeza, 2016; Mayeza, 2017). Furthermore, it was noticed that a learner's daily activities are significantly impacted by sexuality and gender both in South African schools and internationally (Bhana, 2018; Dunne et al., 2006; Swanepoel & Beyers, 2019). South African authors have also stated that schools promote heterosexual identities and reinforce gendered norms (Govender & Bhana, 2021; Mayeza, 2016). Heterosexuality and heteronormativity are promoted despite schools having an important role in assisting learners to construct gender and sexual identities (Bhana, 2016; Bhana et al., 2011; DePalma, 2014). The next section therefore seeks to review studies that are related to the role that teachers and schools have in enforcing heteronormative practises among primary school learners.

2.4 Heteronormativity and schooling

The studies that were synthesised previously reveal that teachers are the agents who enforce heteronormativity and ensure that heterosexual identities are regarded as the norm (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010; Dunne et al., 2006). Consequently, heterosexuality becomes entrenched in schools and learners use heterosexual relationships as a mechanism to attain a higher social status among their peers (Govender & Bhana, 2021). Researchers have also noted that learners regard heterosexual relations as desirable (Govender & Bhana, 2021; Msibi, 2019). Thus, within schools, both teachers and learners have a role in promoting heteronormativity and subsequently silencing sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Govender & Bhana, 2021; Mayeza, 2017).

Since the majority of interactions that occur within schools are between learners and their teachers, this section will now focus on the role that teachers have in reinforcing heteronormative practices (MacNaughton, 2000). Additionally, because South Africa is a patriarchal country, this review will be conducted in reference to patriarchal societies (Bhana, 2018; Morrell et al., 2012). Schools are widely regarded as sites where learners can access care, support and knowledge (Bhana, 2015; Francis, 2021; MacNaughton, 2000). Schools should therefore provide an inclusive and accepting environment to all learners (Francis, 2021). Moreover, schools have an integral role in assisting learners to construct their sexual and gender identities (Dean, 2011). Thus, learners should have the opportunity to obtain knowledge of sex, gender and sexuality diversities during their schooling careers (Dean, 2011). Both international and South African researchers have noted that schools, through teachers, rules and regulations, directly promote heteronormativity and enforce heterosexuality (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010;

Francis, 2021).

Consequently, non-normative individuals are regulated, silenced, harassed and marginalised in schools (Allen, 2020; DePalma & Atkinson, 2010). This is counter-productive because schools should embrace sex, gender and sexuality diversities and ensure that learners are well-versed in these concepts (Allen, 2020). DePalma & Atkinson (2010) mention that schools are reflective of social norms. Schools have routinely promoted masculinity, heteronormativity and gender normativity at the expense of sex, gender and sexuality diversities in patriarchal societies (Morrell et al., 2012; Vavrus, 2009). Schools also perpetuate gender stereotypes that reinforce male dominance and female submissiveness (Preston, 2013). Patriarchal societies have a preconceived notion that aggression is an important characteristic of masculinity (Moosa & Bhana, 2020; Morrell et al., 2012). Therefore, male learners will subsequently aspire to be robust and aggressive (Moosa & Bhana, 2020).

In South Africa, because of hegemonic masculinity, males attempt to assert their dominance through violent acts of aggression (Bhana, 2021; Moosa & Bhana, 2020; Morrell et al., 2012). Females or sex, gender and sexuality diversities are often the victims (Bhana, 2021; Moosa & Bhana, 2020; Morrell et al., 2012). These acts of violence are considered a hallmark of hegemonic masculinity (Morrell et al., 2012). Children are also susceptible to the fallout of hegemonic masculinity (Morrell et al., 2012). Indeed, studies from a South African perspective have indicated that rowdy and aggressive behaviours from male learners are prevalent within primary schools and furthermore, this type of behaviour is implicitly accepted by teachers (Bhana, 2016; Bhana, 2018). Gender relations within the school are ultimately affected because sex, gender and sexuality diversities wearily accept acts of aggression as the norm (Francis & Msibi, 2011; Mayeza, Bhana & Mulqueeny, 2021). Aggression might thus be condoned just because of the belief that aggression, rowdiness and dominance are critical components of masculinity and male privilege (Morrell et al., 2012).

Male learners thus attempt to prove their masculinity by exerting dominance over sex, gender and sexuality diversities or females through acts of aggression (Mayeza et al., 2021). Female learners might understand that subordination and passivity are in themselves important traits of femininity and thus they may subsequently decide to remain submissive (Bhana, 2021). By choosing to remain submissive, the female learners inhibit their agency in the face of male dominance (Bhana, 2021). This may lead to female learners accepting their male counterparts' behaviour as they do not feel sufficiently empowered to confront them, which also heightens

existing gender inequalities (Bhana, 2021). Accordingly, harmful gender norms and inequitable power relationships become prevalent within schools (Bhana, 2018; Francis & DePalma, 2014).

In patriarchal societies, schools have implemented rules that are consistent with dominant social norms (Dean, 2011; Dunne, 2007). These schools directly promote heterosexual identities and masculinity at the expense of sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Dean, 2011; Dunne, 2007). The schools also enforce rules that promote heterosexuality (Dean, 2011). For example, the school rules will ensure that female learners are required to wear skirts in school, prevent males from using jewellery, restrict the range of hairstyles among learners, discourage female students from participating in sports and even ensure that a male king and a female queen get elected at proms (Dean, 2011).

As a result, a culture of heteronormativity is created and reinforced within schools (DePalma & Jennett, 2010; Paechter, 2017). In this manner, schools begin to produce and subsequently promote heterosexual identities (Dean, 2011). Dean (2011) adds that heterosexual identities are thus regarded as the norm. Learners will behave in accordance with the heterosexual expectations of society and will also attempt to engage in heterosexual relationships (Dean, 2011; DePalma & Jennett, 2010). A study conducted by Moosa & Bhana (2020) has concluded that gender hierarchies, which promote male dominance, are consequently created and female learners are made subservient. Thus, gender inequalities prevail while sex, gender and sexuality diversities are subsequently viewed as deviants within the schooling system. As per Allen (2020), sex, gender and sexuality diversities are marginalised, victimised and punished within the schooling system. Sports have been also identified as a source of heteronormativity in South African schools (Mayeza & Bhana, 2017; Moosa, 2021). Sporting activities are utilised by male learners to enforce a violent form of hegemonic masculinity against either each other or females (Mayeza & Bhana, 2017; Moosa, 2021). Male learners exhibit aggression towards individuals who they believe perform poorly on the sports field (Moosa, 2021). Males have occasionally used violence to ensure that females do not participate in sporting activities (Mayeza & Bhana, 2017). Moosa (2021) has alluded that these situations arise due to heteronormative practices that are prevalent within schools.

The observation that heteronormativity has an impact on the relations within schools is consistent with the conclusion that was made by Mayeza (2016). The authors of these studies have noted that increasing the awareness and knowledge that learners have of gender is necessary to ensure that heteronormativity is challenged within schools (Mayeza, 2016; Moosa,

2021). The authors have also reasoned that with an enhanced knowledge of gender, learners will gain the ability to reduce gender inequalities and, additionally, improve gender relations (Mayeza, 2016; Moosa, 2021). South African learners have also reinforced heteronormative attitudes within the classroom (Mayeza, 2017). Indeed, it has been observed that learners have discouraged each other from playing with toys that are traditionally associated with the opposite sex (Mayeza, 2017). Malesare regarded as gay if they wish to play with toys that are associated with females (Mayeza, 2017). Consequently, the male learners are insulted or physically abused if they use toys that are traditionally used by girls (Mayeza, 2017). The classroom is also segregated by learners based on gender normativity and sex (Francis, 2021). It was noted that certain spaces in the classroom are exclusively reserved for males or females and learners have insulted their peerswho do not conform to these segregated spaces (Francis, 2021).

In addition to enforcing the school's rules, teachers have a prominent role in assisting learners to construct their gender and sexual identities (Allen, 2020; MacNaughton, 2000). It has been noted that teachers have neutralised gender and sexuality (MacNaughton, 2000; Vavrus, 2009). A reason for this might be that teachers believe children who attend primary school should not be educated on sex, gender and sexuality diversities becausethey are innocent, gender-neutral and asexual (Delfin, 2020). There is also a prevalent belief that learners do not have agency (Delfin, 2020). These perceptions have contributed to the misconception among teachers that gender and sexuality do not influence children's lives (MacNaughton, 2000). Teachers choose to ignore homophobic incidents and encourage male and female learners to behave in a manner that is complicit with societal norms (Allen, 2020; DePalma & Atkinson, 2010; Francis, 2019). Consequently, the educators act in a manner that overtly promotes heteronormativity (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010).

Indeed, studies have mentioned that teachers silence sex, gender and sexuality diversities, reinforce gendered practices, enhance gender inequalities and promote heteronormativity within schools (Francis, 2019; Meyer, 2007). Teachers thus serve to heighten gender inequalities and ensure heterosexual identities are regarded as the norm (Meyer, 2007). Teachers have also prevented learners from participating in activities that are traditionally associated with members of the opposite sex (Mayeza, 2016; Mayeza, 2017). For example, female learners have occasionally been prevented from participating in physical sporting activities, or else male learners have been dissuaded from participating in sports such as netball (Mayeza,2016). Since primary schools are gendered and sexualised spaces where children actively construct their gender and sexual identities, learners might thus begin to understand that heterosexuality is the norm (Bhana et al., 2011; Francis, 2019; MacNaughton, 2000). The

learners might also understand that heterosexuality and heteronormativity are acceptable and desirable. They might eventually develop heterosexual identities or engage in gender performativity (Butler, 2004). These acts will occur to the detriment of individuals with non-normative gender or sexualities.

According to the literature that has been reviewed in this section, teachers are the agents who enforce heteronormativity and regulate sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Francis, 2019; Meyer, 2007). A consequence of enforcing heteronormativity is that sex, gender or sexually diverse learners are silenced and marginalised and subsequently become insecure in regard to their gender or sexual identities (Mayeza, 2016; Mayeza, 2017). Sex, gender and sexuality diverse learners will subsequently engage in heteronormative behavior in an attempt to gain acceptance and inclusion (Mayeza, 2016; Mayeza, 2017). It is thus imperative that teachers enhance their understanding of sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Meyer, 2007). The subsequent section will therefore attempt to review scholarly works that have investigated the understanding that educators have of sex, gender and sexuality diversities. Literature which depicts the engagements that educators have with learners who identify as sex, gender and sexuality diversities will also be reviewed.

2.5 Teachers' understanding of and engagements with sex, gender and sexuality diversities in primary schools

The literature that has been discussed in the preceding sections has suggested that schools have an integral role in assisting learners to construct their gender and sexuality identities. Additionally, teachers and school rules reinforce heteronormativity (Brown & Buthelezi, 2020). It has been noted that learners should regularly acquire knowledge of sex, gender and sexuality diversities during their schooling career. However, schools may not be able to integrate sex, gender and sexuality diverse learners successfully because of social norms or because of a lack of knowledge among staff members (Bhana, 2013; Msibi, 2012; Preston, 2013). Therefore, this section will review scholarly literature that has focused on teachers' understandings of and engagements with sex, gender and sexuality diversities. This will be done in three subsections: initially studies that have occurred in the "developed world" will be synthesised. Thereafter, scholarly literature from the "developing world" will be reviewed. This section concludes by investigating South African studies.

2.5.1 Teachers' understanding of and engagements with sex, gender and sexuality diversities in primary schools within the "developed world"

Research which has attempted to investigate the understanding that primary school teachers have of sex, gender and sexuality diversities has been conducted in countries such as the United States of America and Canada (Malins, 2016; Preston, 2013). In either country, scholars have noted that the teachers in their studies exhibited some understanding of sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Malins, 2016; Preston, 2013). In Canada, teachers were aware of sex, gender and sexuality diversities and, on the whole, felt that it was necessary to engage with learners with non-normative gender or sexualities in their classroom (Malins, 2016). However, the educators refrained from educating learners on gender and sexuality during their lessons due to parental pressures and religious sensitivities (Malins, 2016). Therefore, the teachers found themselves unable to engage with sex, gender and sexuality diversities during their lessons (Malins, 2016). To reach this conclusion, Malins (2016) utilised case studies, chose a sample of five elementary school teachers and conducted two semi-structured interviews with each of the participants. In the American study, the author mentioned that the teachers reinforced gender stereotypes while social factors such as race or culture also affected the teachers' ability to educate learners on sexuality (Preston, 2013). The authors of the North American studies did not include individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds in their sample (Malins, 2016; Preston, 2013). If individuals from diverse backgrounds were included in the study, a different cultural and religious context might have been integrated into the researchers' understanding of sex, gender and sexuality diversities.

Studies from the UK have noted that in patriarchal societies, sex, gender and sexuality diversities are silenced by teachers because of the heteronormative expectations of society at large (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010; DePalma & Jennett, 2010). It is also noted that teachers have an active role in the perpetuation of homophobia and transphobia in heteronormative societies (DePalma & Jennett, 2010). This might occur because teachers are hesitant to educate learners about sex, gender and sexuality diversities and refuse to engage with learners with non-normative gender or sexualities (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010; DePalma & Jennett, 2010). Some common observations noted between the studies which were conducted in the UK included the conclusions that teachers directly promoted heteronormativity, silenced sex, gender and sexuality diversities and refrained from educating learners on sexuality, diverse sexualities or gender (DePalma & Jennett, 2010; DePalma & Atkinson, 2010). The primary reason for the teachers' refusals to educate their learners on sex, gender and sexuality diversities was the fear

of upsetting parents (DePalma & Jennett, 2010). In this instance, the parents had the belief that their children were too young to be exposed to sex, gender or sexuality diversities (DePalma & Jennett, 2010).

The parents' belief that their children are too young to gain exposure to sex, gender and sexuality diversities resonates with Australian studies (Ullman & Ferfolja, 2015; van Leent & Ryan, 2015). Australian teachers mentioned that they have attempted to ensure that learners who identify with sex, gender and sexuality diversities are comfortable in their classrooms but they refrained from discussing sex, gender or sexuality diversities due to parental pressure (Ullman & Ferfolja, 2015; van Leent & Ryan, 2015). It was also noted that the teachers refused to resolve instances of homophobic bullying (van Leent & Ryan, 2015). The authors of this study worked within the interpretive paradigm, utilised case studies and conducted semi-structured interviews which comprised open-ended questions (van Leent &Ryan, 2015).

Ullman & Ferfolja (2015) add that Australian teachers do not understand sex, gender and sexuality diversities. Consequently, the teachers stated that they did not have confidence in their ability to engage with sex, gender and sexuality diversities in the classroom (Ullman & Ferfolja, 2015). The authors further noted that teachers did not discuss sex, gender and sexuality diversities in the classroom and thus indirectly fostered a culture of heteronormativity (Ullman & Ferfolja, 2015). A common feature of the studies which have been conducted in developed countries is that societal and familial pressures have prevented teachers from engaging with sex,gender and sexuality diversities (DePalma & Jennett, 2010; Preston, 2013; van Leent & Ryan,2015).

The literature that has been reviewed in this section suggests that sex, gender and sexuality diversities are uniformly silenced by their educators (DePalma & Jennett, 2010; Vavrus, 2009). The studies surveyed have noted that teachers regulate and inhibit diverse sexualities because of social norms and parental pressures (Preston, 2013; Vavrus, 2009). It is further observed that the prevailing culture of each society has a significant impact in negating sexuality and gender within schools. It was noted that teachers have not engaged successfully with sex, gender and sexuality diversities in the "developed world" and, additionally, that teachers only have a basic understanding of sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Malins, 2016; Ullman & Ferfolja, 2015). The next section will synthesise scholarly works that are related to primary school teachers' understandings of and engagements with sex, gender and sexuality diversities within the "developing world".

2.5.2 Teachers' understanding of and engagements with sex, gender and sexuality

diversities in primary schools within the "developing world"

Studies investigating how primary school teachers interact with sex, gender and sexuality diversities within the developing world have predominantly been conducted in Asia and Africa (Dunne, 2007; Dunne et al, 2006; Ramaswamy, 2021; Sinacore, Chao & Ho, 2019). These studies have been pursued in patriarchal societies such as Taiwan, India and Ghana (Dunne et al., 2006; Ramaswamy, 2021; Sinacore et al., 2019). Each of these countries is plagued in its own variation with a high prevalence of homophobia and gender-based violence (Dunne, 2007; Dunne et al., 2006; Ramaswamy, 2021; Sinacore et al., 2019). This section begins by reviewing the Asian studies and thereafter, African studies will be reviewed.

In Taiwan, the government has enacted a gender equity act because of a surge in gender-based violence and gender inequity related incidents within Taiwanese schools (Sinacore et al., 2019). A study was conducted to investigate teachers' perceptions of the gender equity act and during the course of their research, the authors noted that the teachers did not have a functional understanding of sex, gender and diverse sexualities (Sinacore et al., 2019). Consequently, the teachers refused to engage with sex, gender and sexuality diversities, ignored homophobia and concealed the prevalence of gender-based violence in the school (Sinacore et al., 2019). It was concluded that sex, gender and sexuality diversities were silenced, regulated and marginalised in Taiwanese schools (Sinacore et al., 2019).

Sex, gender and sexuality diversities have also been silenced in India (Das, 2014; Ramaswamy, 2021). Indian researchers have touched on how their curriculum silences sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Das, 2014; Ramaswamy, 2021). According to Das (2014), the curriculum in India only mentions sex, gender and sexuality diversities when educating learners on HIV. Specifically, the curriculum implicitly links homosexuality with HIV transmission (Ramaswamy, 2021). The curriculum, therefore, stigmatises sex, gender and sexuality diversities because learners may conclude that HIV transmission predominantly occurs among homosexual individuals (Ramaswamy, 2021). Teachers are subsequently influenced by the curriculum and do not engage with sex, gender and sexuality diversities during lessons (Das, 2014; Ramaswamy, 2021). Indian researchers have also concluded that teachers in India do not provide any information on sex, gender and sexuality diversities during their lessons (Das, 2014; Ramaswamy, 2021). A potential criticism of the Indian studies is that the authors, on the whole, did not generate primary data and instead conducted their study in the form of a literature review (Das, 2014; Ramaswamy, 2021).

A common feature of the Asian studies is the observation that teachers view gender and

sexuality as binary concepts (Das, 2014; Ramaswamy, 2021; Sinacore et al., 2019). The lack of understanding that the educators have of these concepts has prevented them from engaging with sex, gender and sexuality diversities in the classroom (Das, 2014; Ramaswamy, 2021; Sinacore et al., 2019). The authors of the studies have stated that the teachers have also regulated sex, gender and sexuality diversities within their lessons (Das, 2014; Ramaswamy, 2021; Sinacore et al., 2019). By regulating sex, gender and sexuality diversities, these schools have become gendered institutions where gender inequalities, GBV and homophobia are widespread (Das, 2014; Ramaswamy, 2021; Sinacore et al., 2019). This observation resonates with studies that have been conducted in African countries such as Namibia, Ghana and Botswana (Brown, 2017; Dunne, 2007).

In Ghana and Botswana, it has been noted that teachers similarly do not exhibit an understanding of sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Dunne, 2007). Moreover, in addition to allocating tasks to their learners based on their sex, the teachers have not attempted to discuss sex, gender or sexuality diversities during lessons (Dunne, 2007). A consequence of this teaching strategy is that the educators have helped to perpetuate gender stereotypes, gender inequalities and additionally have created gender roles within the schools (Dunne, 2007). A Namibian study has also concluded that the staff plays a significant role in creating a culture of heteronormativity (Brown, 2017). In Namibia, it was noticed that staff members do not engage with sex, gender and sexuality diversities in a positive manner (Brown, 2017). The teachers preferred to insult sex, gender and sexuality diverse people (Brown, 2017). The educators stated in explanation that they used insults to enforce heteronormative behaviour and heterosexual norms onto their learners (Brown, 2017). It was also noted that the teachers attempted to force sex, gender and sexuality diversities to engage in heterosexual relationships (Brown, 2017).

The African studies I've surveyed are linked by the observation that the teachers in consideration did not understand sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Brown, 2017; Dunne, 2007). The teachers relied on the curriculum to obtain their own knowledge of sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Brown, 2017; Dunne, 2007). However, in Namibia, the school curriculum silenced sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Brown, 2017). In Ghana and Botswana, in addition to neglecting sex, gender and sexuality diversities, the curriculum ensured that males were given preferential treatment (Dunne, 2007). The educators' reliance on the curriculum might explain why teachers in these countries did not possess an understanding of sex, gender and sexuality diversities and furthermore why the engagements that teachers had with sex, gender and sexuality diversitieswere based on heteronormative practices (Brown, 2017; Dunne, 2007).

As per the literature that has been reviewed in this section, the teachers have a rudimentary understanding of sex, gender and sexuality diversities. Moreover, the lack of understanding that the educators display of sex, gender and sexuality diversities has a negative impact on their ability to successfully engage with learners who identify with sex, gender or sexuality diversities (Brown, 2017; Ramaswamy, 2021; Sinacore et al., 2019). These observations are consistent with research that has been conducted in the "developed world" (DePalma & Jennett, 2010; Ullman & Ferfolja, 2015). It was also noted that heteronormativity, gender inequalities and gender hierarchies were widespread in schools globally (Brown, 2017; DePalma & Jennett, 2010; Malins, 2016; Sinacore et al., 2019; Ullman & Ferfolja, 2015). Since schools are consistently reflective of society, patriarchy might be reinforced and teachers might reinforce heteronormative practices (Brown, 2017; Das, 2014). Therefore, it is necessary to synthesise literature from a South African perspective to understand if teachers from South Africa have an appropriate level of knowledge and understanding of sex, gender, and sexuality diversities. Studies will also be reviewed to understand how South African educators have engaged with sex, gender and sexuality diversities.

2.5.3 Teachers' understanding of and engagements with sex, gender and sexuality diversities in primary schools in South Africa

South African primary schools are highly gendered and sexualised environments (Bhana, 2016; Govender & Bhana, 2021). Indeed, learners are exposed to sex, gender and sexuality on a daily basis within South African primary schools (Bhana, 2012; Bhana, 2016). Learners encounter gender and sexuality within the classroom, in the playground and during their relationships (Govender & Bhana, 2021; Moosa, 2021). Learners also enact their gender and sexual identities daily (Govender & Bhana, 2021: Moosa, 2021). Despite this impact of sex, gender and sexuality on the learner's daily lives, researchers have indicated that educators and learners simply do not understand these concepts (Bhana, 2012; Swanepoel & Beyers, 2019). Consequently, gender and sexuality are neutralised while gender inequalities, homophobia and heteronormativity are prevalent in South African schools (Bhana, 2012; Reygan, 2016). Females and learners who showcase sex, gender and sexuality diversities are often on the receiving end of homophobic insults, violence and acts of aggression (Mostert, Gordon & Kriegler, 2015).

As per Shefer (2019), it is necessary to educate learners about sex, gender and sexuality diversities to challenge gender inequalities, homophobia and heteronormativity. With enhanced knowledge of sex, gender and sexuality diversities, individuals with non-normative gender or sexual identities could become more secure and comfortable with their identities (Shefer,

2019). The Department of Education (DoE) has understood the importance of educating learners on sex, gender and sexuality diversities and has incorporated sex and sexuality education into the LO curriculum (Wilmot & Naidoo, 2014).The aim of the sex and sexuality education programme is to ensure that learners can make informed choices about their sexuality and health (Ngabaza et al., 2016). The DoE has also stated that masculinity, femininity, gender power relations, gender norms and gender should be incorporated into the sex and sexuality education programme (Ngabaza et al., 2016).

The DoE has also developed The Policy on the Standard for Principalship, 2015, which is specifically aimed at principals (Department of Education, 2015). This policy aims to ensure that principals support learners with sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Department of Education, 2015). Based on this policy, the principal of each school must ensure that learners with sex, gender and sexuality diversities should enjoy a safe and conducive schooling environment (Department of Education, 2015). Furthermore, SACE has implemented a specific requirement that all professional educators should respect their learners regardless of their sexual orientation and additionally provide them with the necessary support during their schooling careers (SACE, 2018). These policies should theoretically ensure that learners with sex, gender and sexuality diversities are confident and comfortable with their gender or sexual identities (Department of Education, 2015; SACE, 2018).

Furthermore, according to the DoE, the sex and sexuality education programme should be taught within a gender framework (Bhana et al., 2021). An additional aim of the programme is to challenge any gender inequalities that may exist within schools (Bhana et al., 2021). However, despite the best intentions of the DoE, this programme has been largely unsuccessful (Mayeza & Vincent, 2019). The curriculum has been identified as a reason for the failure of the sex and sexuality programme because the LO curriculum is silent about sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Mayeza & Vincent, 2019; Msibi, 2015; Reygan, 2016). Researchers have concluded that LO teachers have relied on the curriculum and thus educating learners on gender and sexuality is not a priority for LO teachers (Mayeza & Vincent, 2019; Ngabaza et al., 2016; Wilmot & Naidoo, 2014).

Scholars have therefore concluded that the LO curriculum neglects sex, gender and sexuality diversities and instead focuses on abstinence (Mayeza & Vincent, 2019). Researchers have also stated that there is a pronounced focus on heterosexual relationships within the LO curriculum (Mayeza & Vincent, 2019; Reygan, 2016). Thus, the curriculum implicitly encourages learners to engage in heterosexual relations (Francis & Kuhl, 2020; Wilmot & Naidoo, 2014).

Furthermore, within the LO curriculum, sex, gender and sexuality diversities are regarded as deviants (Mayeza & Vincent, 2019; Msibi, 2015; Wilmot & Naidoo, 2014).

Wilmot & Naidoo (2014) add that the curriculum does not discuss sexuality and instead exclusively focuses on abstinence. By silencing sex, gender and sexuality diversities in this manner, the curriculum directly promotes heteronormativity (Mayeza & Vincent, 2019). The curriculum creates the impression that sex, gender and sexuality diversities should be hidden (Reygan, 2016). Additionally, since the curriculum has excluded sex, gender and sexuality diversities, the possibility of discussing these concepts is removed entirely (Francis & Kuhl, 2020). LO teachers rely on the curriculum and subsequently neglect sex, gender and sexuality diversities in their lessons(Francis & Kuhl, 2020; Msibi, 2015).

A further reason that the programme has been unsuccessful is that most LO teachers display a foundational lack of understanding of sex, gender, and sexuality diversities (Bhana et al., 2011; Bhana, 2013; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019; Shefer, 2019). These studies have focused on LO teachers and revealed that they have reservations about educating learners on diverse sexualities due to misconceptions they cling to regarding sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Francis, 2013; Francis & DePalma, 2015; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019). Shefer (2019) has stated that teachers are under the impression that an individual's sex does not differ from their gender. Researchers have stated that this viewpoint is pretty much entrenched in educational circles (Bhana et al., 2011; Bhana, 2013; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019).

South African studies have concluded that LO educators believe that gender is a dichotomous concept, consisting of two categories, chiefly: males and females (Bhana et al., 2011; Bhana, 2013; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019). These educators also believe that sexuality is a binary concept (Bhana et al., 2011; Bhana, 2013). They thus believe that an individual's sexuality is limited to either homosexuality or heterosexuality (Bhana et al., 2011; Bhana, 2013). Francis & Monakali (2021) have stated that teachers lack a working understanding of sex, gender and sexuality diversities. They suggest further that educators are unaware of various sexual identities such as transgender individuals (Francis & Monakali, 2021). They also note that the LO teachers in question chose to neglect sex, gender and sexuality diversities and instead preferred to silence sex, gender and sexuality diversities during their lessons (Reygan & Francis, 2015). As per Mayeza (2017), an important misconception among South African educators is the belief that sex, gender and sexuality diversities are biological in nature. This belief is consistent with biological essentialism (Mayeza, 2017).

The LO educators' lack of understanding regarding diverse sexualities ultimately culminates in

a situation where they are reluctant to engage with sex, gender, and sexuality diversities (Francis, 2013; Msibi, 2015; Shefer, 2019). Bhana (2016) has detailed how educators have denied the existence of childhood sexuality. This view is primarily influenced by a lack of knowledge of sexuality (Bhana, 2016). Moreover, South African educators believe that learners are innocent, and thus should not be exposed to sexuality (Bhana, 2016; Shefer et al., 2015).

Consequently, the educators do not engage with learners who are sex, gender or sexuality diverse. It has also been noted that teachers do not incorporate gender into their lessons (Bhana et al., 2011; Francis & DePalma, 2014; Shefer, 2019). Gender stereotypes, gender hierarchies, gender regimes and negative gender norms are created or reinforced in South African schools as a result of this teaching strategy (Bhana et al., 2011; Francis & DePalma, 2014; Shefer, 2019). Studies have also touched on how homophobia is occasionally rationalised by teachers (Francis & Reygan, 2016; Shefer, 2019). Teachers may condone homophobic acts because sex, gender and sexuality diversities are in direct contrast to the predominantly conservative South African culture (Msibi, 2011; Msibi, 2019; Shefer, 2010; Shefer, 2019). 'Culture' has thus been cited as an additional obstacle that prevents South African teachers from engaging with sex, gender and sexuality diversities in the classroom (Francis, 2013; Francis & Reygan, 2016; Wilmot & Naidoo, 2014). A substantial portion of teachers have mentioned that educating learners on sex, gender and sexuality diversities is in direct conflict with their cultural or religious beliefs (Francis, 2013; Francis & Reygan, 2016). Certain cultures or religions, of course, cast sex, gender and sexuality diversities as sinners or deviants (Francis, 2013; Francis & Reygan, 2016; Msibi, 2011).

Sex, gender and sexuality diversities are also regarded as abnormal and are marginalised within these cultures or religions (Francis, 2013; Msibi, 2011). In South Africa, religion is used to enforce heteronormativity (Msibi, 2011). Individuals also use religion as a basis to cast aspersions on the character of people who identify with sex, gender or sexuality diversities (Msibi, 2011). Therefore, teachers believe that by engaging with sex, gender and sexuality diversities, they are actively challenging their cultural or religious beliefs (Bhana, 2012; Francis & Reygan, 2016). Thus, teachers might be hesitant to engage with sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Bhana, 2012; Shefer, 2019).

Teachers might also be reluctant to enhance their knowledge of sex, gender and sexuality diversities due to these cultural or religious constraints (Francis & Reygan, 2016). The lack of understanding that teachers have about sex, gender and sexuality diversities can be observed when they encourage learners with non-normative gender or sexual identities to behave in what

they deem to be a socially acceptable manner (Msibi, 2012). Francis (2019) has stated that heteronormative behaviour is regarded as the only socially acceptable form of behaviour, which is then consequently enforced by educators. The educators also overlook homophobic incidents or insult learners who are non-conformist (Francis, 2021; Msibi, 2012). The teachers' primary motive for insulting their learners is to ensure that non-conformist individuals behave in accordance with heterosexual norms (Francis & Reygan, 2016).

The teachers' cultural reservations about educating learners on sex, gender, and sexuality diversities is common among the various stakeholders in South African schools (Bhana, 2012; Msibi, 2012). It was noted that parents, teaching unions and the community actively oppose the notion that learners should be educated on sex, gender and sexuality diversities as they are of the opinion that learners are innocent and should not be exposed to these concepts (Francis, 2013; Francis & DePalma, 2015; Francis & Kuhl, 2020). There is also a perception that schools should be reserved for academic matters only (Bhana, 2016). This opinion is prevalent among teaching unions (Francis & Kuhl, 2020). Unions have explicitly stated that parents should educate their children on sex, gender and sexuality diversities because the topic is too sensitive for educators (Francis & Kuhl, 2020). Teachers might refrain from engaging with sex, gender and sexually diverse learners within South African schools to appease these key stakeholders (Bhana, 2012; Francis, 2013).

A study that was conducted to understand the perceptions that learners have of sexuality lessons revealed that LO teachers prefer to silence sex, gender and sexuality diversities and instead focus on abstinence during sex and sexuality lessons (Shefer et al., 2015). Shefer et al. (2015) used focus group discussions to collect data, chose case studies as their preferred methodology and worked within the interpretive paradigm. This study focused on obtaining LO students opinions about their teachers' strategies for incorporating sex, gender and sexuality diversities into their LO lessons (Shefer et al., 2015). Consequently, the researchers did not include educators in the sample (Shefer et al., 2015). In their conclusion, the authors mentioned that the LO students believed that their teachers did not understand sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Shefer et al., 2015).

Furthermore, according to the LO students, their teachers did not attempt to engage with sex, gender and sexuality diversities during their lessons (Shefer et al., 2015). An unintended consequence of this teaching strategy was that the LO teachers fostered heteronormativity (Ngabaza et al., 2016; Shefer et al., 2015). The educators also reproduced harmful gender norms, gender stereotypes and gender inequalities (Ngabaza et al.,2016; Shefer et al., 2015). Msibi (2012) attempted to understand the experiences of learners with non-normative sexual

or gender identities. However, this study differs from Shefer et al. (2015) as the focus was exclusively on township schools. The difference in the location of the study did not prevent Msibi (2012) from reaching similar conclusions to Shefer et al. (2015). Indeed, this study noted that South African teachers do not understand sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Msibi, 2012).

These studies resonate with research that was conducted by Francis & Monakali (2021). These authors utilised in-depth interviews to conduct research among learners who identified as sexuality diverse and noted that the educators did not understand sexuality diversities at all (Francis & Monakali, 2021). The learners mentioned that their educators did not engage with them and encouraged them to observe heteronormative practices (Francis & Monakali, 2021). The learners also stated that their educators occasionally insulted them in front of their classmates (Francis & Monakali, 2021). According to the authors, this was done to enforce heteronormativity (Francis & Monakali, 2021).

An additional study concluded that educators did not understand sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Msibi, 2015). This author conducted research among Bachelor of Education students and noted that the students did not understand sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Msibi, 2015). Indeed, the students' understanding of sex, gender and sexuality diversities was negatively impacted upon by cultural factors and the media, which included television shows (Msibi, 2015). This observation does not bode well for sex, gender and sexuality diversities since the majority of these students will become educators in South African schools. In a study that was conducted among LO educators, it was revealed that the teachers did not have the confidence to educate learners on sex, gender and sexuality diversities (DePalma & Francis, 2014). The educators stated that they did not wish to integrate sex, gender and sexuality diversities into their lessons primarily because they did not understand these concepts (DePalma & Francis, 2014). It was noted that the educators were aware of popular terminology such as bisexuality or homosexuality but did not understand the term "sexuality diversity" (DePalma & Francis, 2014). Upon further inspection, it was noted that the educators did not realise or understand that various sexual identities such as transsexuality existed (DePalma & Francis, 2014).

Teachers' rudimentary understandings of sex, gender and sexuality diversities might have negative connotations for their engagements with learners who identify with sex, gender or sexuality diversities. South African literature has provided substantial evidence that LO teachers either silence or insult sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Moosa, 2021; Msibi, 2012;

Ngabaza et al., 2016). The teachers have also refused to engage with sex, gender and sexuality diversities and instead insist that they conform to heterosexual identities (Msibi, 2012; Ngabaza et al., 2016). Furthermore, teachers have actively attempted to neutralise gender in their classrooms (Mayeza, 2017).

It was further noted that the educators refused to engage with any learner who was assumed to be sex, gender or sexually diverse (Msibi, 2012). The learners stated that they were verbally abused by their educators (Msibi, 2012). The educators also attempted to enforce heterosexual norms onto their learners (Msibi, 2012). These observations are consistent with research that was conducted by Reygan & Francis (2015). In their study, these authors concluded that LO educators refused to discuss sex, gender and sexuality diversities in their lessons (Reygan & Francis, 2015). Consequently, the educators expressed discomfort in engaging with any learner who might be sex, gender or sexually diverse (Reygan & Francis, 2015). Moreover, South African research has also indicated that educators have utilised homophobic insults and taunts in their efforts to silence learners with non-normative gender or sexuality identities within their classroom (Msibi, 2012). Insulting sex, gender and sexually diverse learners might be the educators chosen mechanism to condition their learners to adhere to heterosexuality (Francis & Monakali, 2021; Msibi, 2012).

Additionally, educators have chosen to reprimand learners who do not conform to heterosexual norms (Moosa, 2021). Occasionally, the educators' engagements with learners who identify as sex, gender or sexually diverse were punctuated with attempts to prevent the learners from participating in certain activities (Francis, 2019). The educators insulted the learners in the presence of their peers as a means of dissuading them from participation (Francis, 2019). When teachers have attempted to engage with their learners, their engagements are occasionally riddled with misconceptions about sex, gender and sexuality diversities (DePalma & Francis, 2014). The educators have confused sex, gender and sexuality to the extent that lesbians are regarded as masculine while gay men are perceived as feminine (DePalma & Francis, 2014).

These misconceptions further impact the engagements that teachers have with sex, gender and sexuality diversities to the extent that female learners are discouraged from wearing pants because the educators believe that only lesbians choose to wear pants (Msibi, 2012). Educators perceive learners who identify as sex, gender or sexually diverse as immature individuals who are in simply enjoying a passing phase of their lives (Francis & Kuhl, 2020). Educators believe that learners who identify with sex, gender and sexuality diversities will mature and eventually conform to heterosexuality (Francis & Kuhl, 2020).

This section has worked to synthesise the prior literature that has depicted teachers' understanding of sex, gender and sexuality diversities from a South African perspective. Literature which has investigated the engagements that teachers have with sex, gender and sexuality diversities was also reviewed in this section. The studies that have been reviewed were predominantly conducted among LO educators. It was noted by most that such teachers have a rudimentary understanding of sex, gender and sexuality diversities. It was further noted that the LO educators did not engage with sex, gender and sexuality diversities. Instead, the educators havechosen to silence and regulate sex, gender and sexuality diversities. This has created a situationwhere a culture of heteronormativity has prevailed within South African schools. According tothe literature reviewed in this section, teachers' understandings of and engagements with sex, gender and sexuality diversities warrant further scrutiny. Needless to say, this is especially pertinent in South Africa.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed literature that is relevant to the present study of teachers' perceptions of sex, gender and sexuality diversities. The chapter began by discussing how sex, gender and sexuality diversities are conceptualised. The subsequent section reviewed literature that was related to sex, gender and sexuality diversities in schools. The section began by synthesising literature from an international context before focusing on South Africa. Thereafter, heteronormativity and schooling were discussed. The penultimate section of this chapter reviewed scholarly studies that were related to teachers' understandings of and engagements with sex, gender and sexuality diversities in primary schools. This review was initially conducted from a "developed world" perspective before focusing on the "developing world". Thereafter, literature that was related to the South African context was reviewed. The next chapter discusses the theoretical framework that was adopted for the purpose of this study.

Chapter Three

Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

A theoretical framework is always fundamental to the research process, and each study should have a well-defined theoretical framework (Lederman & Lederman, 2015). The theoretical framework is used as a basis to justify the importance of the study and is used to link the gaps that have been identified in the literature (Lederman & Lederman, 2015). It is, in short, the rationale for a study that intends to fill the gaps that exist in our collective knowledge (Lederman & Lederman, 2015). The researcher also uses their theoretical framework to understand the data that is collected in their field work (Lederman & Lederman, 2015). Furthermore, it influences the design, data collection process and data analysis methods of the study (Lederman & Lederman, 2015). The theoretical framework of this study drew upon the social construction of gender, gender relations theory and queer theory. These theories are related and build on each other and form a useful framework for my enquiry on primary school teachers' perceptions of sex, gender and sexuality diversities. The next section will discuss the social construction of gender.

3.2 The social construction of gender

The social construction of gender states that an individual's gender is continuously constructed through their social interactions (Lorber, 1994). Thus, an individual will develop an understanding of their gender through society and social interactions (Lorber, 1994). The social construction of gender further states that gender is a complicated and multi-dimensional phenomenon that involves and implicates the relationships between individuals, institutions and society (Connell, 1995; Connell, 2012; West & Zimmerman, 1987). The historical context of a society and the social interactions within it are factors that have an impact on how individuals begin to understand and construct gender (Connell, 1995). Butler (2004) adds that an individual's gender and sexuality are complex identities that are forged over time through repeated social acts.

According to Connell (1995), as children grow older, society's beliefs regarding both their characteristics and how they should behave resonate with them. Their social interactions also have an impact on how they come to construct gender (Connell, 1995). The overriding notion within the social construction of gender is that the identities, behaviour and expectations placed on each individual occur through society's own constructed ideas (Payne, Swami &

Stanistreet, 2008; West & Zimmerman, 1987). An individual identifies with their respective sex with societal assistance while the social construction of gender occurs through a wide spectrum of activities (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Prominent scholars note that while an individual may be born into a specific sex, their gender is something gradually achieved throughout their lifetime (Butler, 2004; Connell, 1995; Connell, 2012; Payne et al., 2008; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Thus, in contrast to sex, gender is not a biological construct (Lorber, 1994). Individuals enhance their understanding of gender as they grow older (Bhana et al., 2021; Lorber, 1994; Payne et al., 2008; West & Zimmerman, 1987). This process occursthrough social interaction, social learning and observation (Connell, 1985; Connell, 1995; Lorber, 1994). The construction of gender begins as soon as a baby is born and a name is chosen (Connell, 1995; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013). Societal pressure and expectations also influence choices such as the colour of the baby's clothes and the type of toys that the baby should play with (Connell, 1995; Meyer, 2007). These choices are invariably linked to the perception that society has of gender (Connell, 1995; Meyer, 2007; Paechter, 2007). A child's sex does not have an impact on their behaviour (Butler, 1990). However, society behaves in a specific manner based on the child's sex (Butler, 2004; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013). For example, if the child is female, the manner with which she is spoken to or disciplined differs from that of a male child (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013).

Moreover, society expects females to behave in a feminine manner and males are required to be masculine (Connell, 1995). Males and females are subsequently praised by society to the extent that they comply with society's behavioural expectations while individuals who do not conform are chastised (Connell, 1985). Consequently, as they grow older, children begin to alter their behaviour to abide by societal expectations regarding the expected behaviour of their respective sex (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013). Thus, society has a crucial role in the construction of gender and sexuality identities (Butler, 2004; Paechter, 2007; Preston, 2013).

When constructing their gender identities, children will comply with social norms (Lorber, 1994). Therefore, they will adhere to social expectations and social norms in heteronormative societies (Lorber, 1994). Consequently, gender regimes and gender categories are created (Lorber, 1994). Within these gender regimes and gender categories, females and sex, gender and sexuality diverse people, are made subservient to males and heterosexual identities (Delfin, 2020; Lorber, 1994; Paechter, 2017; Preston, 2013). Gender scholars assert that an individual's gender is not fixed (Butler, 2004; Connell, 1995). Instead, the individual's gender changes in relation to social interaction (Connell, 2012; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013;

Payne et al., 2008; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Butler (1990) elaborates by saying that an individual's sex does not determine their behaviour, sexual or otherwise and that gender is instead an act that is based on a multitude of contextual factors. According to Payne et al. (2008), an individual performs gender based on their interactions with other members of society. Since gender is enacted in public daily, an individual's gender becomes assessed and eventually legitimised by society (Butler, 2004; Payne et al., 2008).

Schools are social institutions where numerous interactions occur daily (Bhana, 2016). Thus, researchers have mentioned that schools have an integral role in the social construction of gender (Bhana et al., 2021; Swanepoel & Beyers, 2019). During their schooling careers, children perform gender consistently (Bhana, 2016; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013). The numerous interactions that exist within schools assist children to construct their gender identities (Bhana, 2016). Children will also observe and thereafter begin to display the behavioural mechanisms of their teachers and peers (Connell, 1995). An interaction between learners that assists in the construction of gender may arise when younger learners listen to their older counterparts and accept their perspectives on the appropriate behaviour of each gender (Paechter, 2007). Older learners might have a preconceived notion about what is acceptable (Paechter, 2007). For example, there could be a belief among older students that female learners should not be allowed to participate in a sporting activity or a physical game during recess because these activities are not typically associated with femininity. An additional example might be that individuals with non-normative sexual or gender identities could be told by their peers that they need to behave in a particular manner.

The interactions that occur between learners and their teachers are crucial in as much as they assist learners in fully constructing and understanding their gender identities (Bhana, 2016; Paechter, 2007). Teachers are a reference point for learners however, teachers might also reinforce socially accepted behavioural norms in the classroom, ignore homophobic language or else discipline learners who do not behave in a normative manner (Msibi, 2012). Renold (2006) adds that even the manner that teachers choose to discipline learners influences the development of the learner's gender or sexual identities. The learners' gender or sexual identities can be affected if a teacher disciplines any one learner for not displaying the socially accepted behaviour of their respective gender (Paechter, 2007; Renold, 2006). In this instance, teachers might promote heterosexual identities and consequently punish sex, gender and sexuality diversities if they do not follow heteronormative practices (Paechter, 2007; Renold, 2006). According to the social construction of gender, a direct consequence of these

interactions will ultimately lead to learners displaying gender identities that are socially accepted, even if they are not authentic.

This section has discussed theoretical ideas of the social construction of gender. In the next section, I discuss the second and related theory that this study utilises namely: gender relations theory. This theory was chosen because of the important role that gender has in the daily interactions that occur between learners, learners and teachers and learners and schooling, during their time at school.

3.3 Gender relations theory

Gender relations theory can be used to explain how society and social interactions have an impact on the interactions that exist between girls, boys and their teachers in a social institution such as a school (Connell, 1987; Kessler et al., 1985). Gender relations have an important role in shaping the gender identities of children (Kessler et al., 1985). Furthermore, an individual's social, collegial and sexual relationships are all gendered in nature (Butler, 1990; Connell, 1985). Gender relations theory regards these relationships as an important componentof society at large (Connell, 1987). This section briefly elaborates on gender relations theory.

Gender is a relation, albeit a complex multidimensional relation, that exists between multiple individuals and categories (Connell, 2012). Gender relations theory has given a prominent place to the gendered relations that exist between males and females (Connell, 1987; Connell, 2012). These relations ensure that gender is regarded as a social structure (Butler, 2004; Connell, 1987; Connell, 2012; Kessler et al., 1985). Connell (1987) suggests that there are three main structures in the field of gender relations namely: the division of labour between males and females, the power structures that exist between males and females and the desire that exists between the sexes. The term structure is used as a reference for the patterns that exist between these institutions (Connell, 2012). The structure of gender relations in society is referred to as a gender order whereas the gender relations that occur in an institution, such as a school, are called a gender regime (Connell, 1987; Connell, 2012).

The relationships are impacted upon and influenced by society and social interactions. Due to societal expectations, individuals are expected to perform specific gender roles (Kessler et al., 1985). This might be problematic because individuals are then forced to conform to society's beliefs which might be based on gender stereotypes. These gender roles reinforce gender stereotypes regarding the behaviour of males and females (Connell, 1987; Kessler et al., 1985). Unfortunately, gender stereotypes and gendered roles lead to the creation of gender

inequalities (Butler, 2004; Connell, 1987; Kessler et al., 1985). Thus, gender stereotypes and gender roles affect the relations that exist between each sex (Butler, 2004; Connell, 1987; Kessler et al., 1985). Gender hierarchies are eventually formed where males display heterosexual power over females, who remain submissive (Bhana et al., 2021; Connell, 1987; Singh, 2013). Therefore, these gender hierarchies give rise to situations where male domination and female subordination are prevalent (Connell, 2012; Singh, 2013). Furthermore, in a patriarchal society, males exhibit dominance over females in an attempt to display their masculinity (Bhana, 2021). Unfortunately, females remain passive and submissive as they believe that these traits are synonymous with femininity (Bhana, 2021). Gender relations of this nature are unequal and may develop within schools (Mayeza et al., 2021).

Gender scholars have mentioned that in addition to being a social institution, schools are also highly gendered and sexualised (Connell, 1987; Kessler et al., 1985). Schools thus have a significant impact on the gender relations that exist between each sex (Connell, 1987; Kessler et al., 1985; Muhanguzi, Bennett & Muhanguzi, 2011). As children navigate through school, gender and sexuality have an impact on their daily interactions (Muhanguzi et al., 2011). The impact of gender and sexuality can be observed in the interactions that occur in the playground, the relationships between the learners and within the classroom where learners enact their gender and sexual identities (Kessler et al., 1985). The interactions that occur between learners contribute to the gender relations that exist within schools but teachers have a crucial role in creating and maintaining these gender relations (Kessler et al., 1985).

Kessler et al. (1985) state that teachers may indirectly approve of the hierarchal gender relations between learners by not addressing instances where male learners tease or bully learners with non-normative gender or sexual identities or female learners. Indeed, teachers monitor their learners and determine the type of relations and interactions that might be acceptable (Muhanguzi et al., 2011). Gender relations are also an important source of tension that teachers endure in the classroom when attempting to discipline learners or motivating learners (Kessler et al., 1985). This may occur when male teachers find it difficult to punish female learners while male learners do not accept punishments that are handed out by female educators.

Within schools, informal rules exist alongside the official rules to guide the learners' behaviour (Dunne et al., 2006). When these rules are enacted or enforced, cultural and institutional rules emerge (Dunne et al., 2006). Schools create or reproduce a gender regime in this way and this 'regime' serves to regulate and normalise unequal power relations (Dunne, 2007; Kessler et al., 1985). Gender regimes in schools may be observed in the attire that learners wear, the sports

that they can participate in and even the subjects that are allocated among teachers (Connell, 1987; Kessler et al., 1985). These gender regimes essentially promote heteronormativity and ensure that sex, gender and sexuality diversities remain subordinate (Connell, 1987; Mayeza et al., 2021). Heterosexuality is privileged and the relationships between learners are assumed to be heterosexual in nature (Moosa & Bhana, 2020). In the next section, I will discuss queer theory, which provides some valuable theorising to challenge this notion of heteronormativity (Francis, 2019; Gamson & Moon, 2004; Msibi, 2015).

3.4 Queer theory

As per Butler (1990), queer theory illustrates that an individual's gender and sexuality are created socially and culturally. Queer theorists believe that there are numerous ways to express sexual and gender identities (Blaise, 2009; Blaise & Taylor, 2012; Gamson & Moon, 2004). A common belief is that 'queer' refers merely to lesbians and gays however various sexual identities including but not limited to transgender, bisexual and pansexual, are included within queer theory (Blaise, 2009; Butler, 1990; Gamson & Moon, 2004). Queer theory is all-encompassingand does not silence any sexual identity (Blaise & Taylor, 2012). Thus, because of the focus on sexuality diversities, queer theory provides the ideal framework to understand the teachers'engagements with and understandings of sex, gender and sexuality diversities. The rest of this section elaborates upon queer theory.

According to Blaise (2009), heterosexual identities are currently normalised. Consequently, heterosexuality has been viewed as hegemonically desirable and has been afforded a position of power over various other sexual identities (Valocchi, 2005). Queer theory can be utilised to understand how the norms surrounding heterosexuality are manufactured and normalised (Hartman, 2018). Further, queer theory has been identified by prominent researchers as a useful tool that can be drawn upon to challenge these norms (Francis, 2019; Gamson & Moon, 2004; Msibi, 2019). Queer theorists also state that queer theory can successfully challenge situations wherein individuals who identify with sex, gender and sexuality diversities are silenced and marginalised (Francis, 2019; Gamson & Moon, 2004; Msibi, 2019). Queer theory enables individuals to critically question the relationship that exists between an individual's sex, gender, and their sexuality (Blaise, 2009). By challenging these relationships, it becomes possible to challenge the belief that babies are born with a fixed gender or sexual identity (Blaise, 2009).

Moreover, queer theory opposes any future in which heterosexuality and sexuality diversities are constructed in a hierarchal manner whereby heterosexual identities are deemed the

dominant sexual identity (Francis, 2021). Queer theory challenges the dominance of heterosexuality and heteronormativity (Butler, 2004). Additionally, queer theory might enhance the general understanding of sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Butler, 1990).

Sexuality and gender are traditionally understood through the heterosexual matrix (Blaise, 2009; Valocchi, 2005). According to Butler (1990), the heterosexual matrix is a sex-gender-sexuality tripartite system which elaborates that an individual's sex causes their gender and their gender forms the basis of their desire. Masculinity, femininity and heterosexuality are regarded here as easily understandable (Blaise, 2009). Within the heterosexual matrix, heterosexuality is viewed as compulsory therefore, an individual desires members of the opposite sex only (Blaise, 2009; Valocchi, 2005). Sex and gender are also regarded as stable (Blaise & Taylor, 2012). According to the heterosexual matrix, an individual can be either male and masculine or female and feminine (Blaise, 2009; Gamson & Moon, 2004).

The heterosexual matrix assumes that sexuality is based on this observation and attraction can only occur between members of the opposite sex (Butler, 2004). Therefore, heterosexual identities are actively promoted (Butler, 1990). The heterosexual matrix can be used to explain why society has historically played a prominent role in fostering the belief that heterosexuality is the norm (Valocchi, 2005). The heterosexual matrix has enabled the belief that males need to be defined as masculine and females need to be feminine (Valocchi, 2005). The heterosexual matrix has therefore enabled sex, gender and sexuality diversities to be categorised as deviant by society (Blaise, 2009; Misawa, 2013). Consequently,social processes have played an active role in the marginalisation of sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Misawa, 2013). This is counter-productive because harmful power dynamics and negative gender roles are consequently reinforced in society and within schools (Meyer, 2007; Renold, 2006). Queer theory can be used to challenge the heterosexual matrix (Callis, 2009).

Queer theory encourages individuals to view gender and sexuality as co-constitutive (Callis, 2009; Valocchi, 2005). Individuals who subscribe to queer theory do not solely emulate heterosexual orhomosexual individuals (Callis, 2009). Instead, the mechanisms that create heterosexuality andhomosexuality are critically questioned (Callis, 2009). Historically, an individual's gender and sexual identity were viewed as fixed and stable (Malins, 2016; Valocchi, 2005). Queer theorists challenge this perception with the assumption that individuals continually learn about their gender and sexuality (Francis, 2019; Valocchi, 2005). Thereafter, individuals will perform their gender and sexuality throughout their lifetime (Butler, 1990; Valocchi, 2005). Gender and sexuality are enacted in a manner that contributes

to the perception that these concepts are fixed and stable (Francis, 2019; Msibi, 2019). Indeed, queer theorists recognise that sexuality and gender are performative acts (Francis, 2019; Valocchi, 2005). Thus, according to queer theorists, an individual performs their gender and sexuality in a manner that contributes to the illusion thatthese concepts are stable (Butler, 1990; Francis, 2019).

Queer theorists have indicated that society's current perception of gender normalises heterosexuality (Meyer, 2007; Misawa, 2013). Moreover, according to queer theorists, deconstructing the normative view of gender serves to legitimise lesbian and gay identities (Meyer, 2007). Prominent queer theorists explain that queer theory allows for the preconceived notions that society has regarding sex, gender and sexuality diversities to be actively questioned (Meyer, 2007; Gamson & Moon, 2004). Since queer theory challenges society's perceptions of sex, gender and sexuality diversities and attempts to establish diverse sexualities as positive ideals, it is unsurprising that queer theory has been identified as a powerful lens that can be used to analyse and promote diverse sexualities (Francis, 2019; Misawa, 2013; Preston, 2013; Renold, 2006).

Queer theory does not identify with any single sexual identity but instead investigates all identities and behaviours that are defined as normative and deviant (Gamson & Moon, 2004). According to Valocchi (2005), identities that do not conform to the gender or sexual binary are usually considered deviant. Therefore, queer theory has an expansive scope and all human behaviours are covered within this theory (Gamson & Moon, 2004; Francis, 2019). Queer theory emphasises that all forms of sexual behaviour are socially constructed (Callis, 2009; Gamson & Moon, 2004). Additionally, Butler (1990) states that an individual will perform their sexuality based on their social interactions (Butler, 1990). Consequently, an individual's sexual identity is influenced by their interactions within society (Delfin, 2020). According to Butler (1990), when it comes to sexual relationships, traditionally members of each side of the binary believe that they should have a sexual partner from the "opposite sex". Individuals who do not conform to these expectations are often harassed and questioned (Butler, 1990).

While queer theory has a substantial scope, considerable attention is devoted to the heterosexual and homosexual binary (Valocchi, 2005). The heterosexual and homosexual binary are regarded as important components of social life. However, queer theorists emphasise that an individual's sexuality cannot be understood through the binary categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality (Callis, 2009; Gamson & Moon, 2004; Valocchi, 2005). Sexuality is regarded as a multi-dimensional concept and queer theory further dictates that an

individual's sexual identities are fluid, dynamic and positional (Callis, 2009; Gamson & Moon, 2004; Malins, 2016). Queer theory infers that an individual's desires cannot be defined by the sex of the subject that they desire (Valocchi, 2005).

In this manner, queer theory actively questions the heterosexual and homosexual binary (Callis, 2009; Gamson & Moon, 2004; Misawa, 2013). Valocchi (2005) suggests that the heterosexual and homosexual binary are unstable, and therefore queer theory can be used to actively challenge and thereafter deconstruct the binary. Queer theory further aims to challenge the traditional models of thought regarding gender and sexuality identities (Preston, 2007). Queer theory postulates that traditional gender and sexual identities are problematic, and subsequently assists in deconstructing these identities (Preston, 2007). In schools, queer theory encourages teachers to view gender and sexual orientation in a specific manner, which should ultimately enable them to challenge heteronormativity, gender roles and gender stereotypes (Malins, 2016).

Schools are sites where heterosexuality is promoted and each learner is automatically assumed to be heterosexual (Hartman, 2018). This viewpoint has become entrenched within schools and heterosexuality is regarded as the norm (Hartman, 2018). Hartman (2018) adds that non-heterosexual identities are consistently viewed with suspicion and are questioned in schools. Indeed, diversesexualities are regarded as unacceptable (Hartman, 2018). Children are aware of heterosexual identities from an early age and attempt to enter into relationships with the opposite sex (Blaise & Taylor, 2012). Engaging in heterosexual relationships is a means of conforming to heteronormative expectations (Blaise, 2009). Learners also routinely conform to gender stereotypes that reinforce heterosexuality within the classroom (Blaise & Taylor, 2012). Teachers ensure that their learners behave in accordance with these heterosexual behavioural norms (Blaise & Taylor, 2012; Renold, 2006). If children do not behave in the anticipated manner, they are punished, harassed and occasionally abused by their teachers (Blaise, 2009; Meyer, 2007; Renold, 2006). Thus, teachers ensure that heterosexuality is regarded as desirable and is thus a reference point for all behaviour (DePalma, 2013; DePalma, 2014; Renold, 2006). Furthermore, heterosexual behaviour is rewarded and gendered norms become prevalent (Blaise, 2009; Blaise & Taylor, 2012).

To assist sex, gender and sexuality diversities in becoming more secure in their identities, schools need to ensure that teachers and learners develop a proper understanding of sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Blaise & Taylor, 2012). Meyer (2007) suggests that teachers need to understand that by silencing sex, gender and sexuality diversities they reinforce a culture of

heteronormativity. Furthermore, by ignoring sex, gender and sexuality diversities harmful power dynamics are maintained within schools (Meyer, 2007). Queer theorists feel that queer theory is an ideal mechanism to challenge and prevent these outcomes from occurring (Blaise & Taylor, 2012; Callis, 2009; Gamson & Moon, 2004).

Queer theory, therefore, provides the ideal framework to enhance societal awareness of sex, gender and sexuality diversities among teachers and learners (Francis, 2019). In addition to raising awareness of the various sexual identities, queer theory can be used to question and challengeschools that reproduce heterosexual norms (Francis & Monakali, 2021). Within a patriarchal society such as South Africa, queer theory thus enables learners to challenge and deconstruct heteronormativity in their schooling careers (van Leent & Ryan, 2015). Learners mightsubsequently increase their awareness of sex, gender and sexuality diversities and this might eventually lead to the acceptance of individuals who identify with sex, gender and sexuality diversities in society (Misawa, 2013).

Moreover, queer theory might enhance the educators' knowledge of sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Meyer, 2007). Thus, the challenges that individuals who belong to the various groups within the sexual diversities umbrella encounter in their schooling careers might be reduced and these individuals might subsequently gain acceptance and inclusion from their peers and educators (Francis & Monakali, 2021). Queer theory is therefore highly relevant to schools and has been identified by researchers as an important framework that can be drawn upon to challenge heteronormativity (Blaise & Taylor, 2012; Francis, 2021; Msibi, 2019). The theoretical framework of this study has drawn upon three inter-related theories. Each of the theories are used to understand teachers' perceptions of and responses to responsibilities towards learners with sex, gender and sexuality diversities. However, it needs to be emphasised mentioned that teachers' duties and responsibilities towards learners with sex, gender and sexuality diversities are also professionally mandated in South Africa (SACE, 2018). Thus, understanding teachers' responsibilities towards learners with sex, gender and sexuality diversities solely through social constructions is insufficient (SACE, 2018). Indeed, teachers should also act in accordance with the rules and regulations that are implemented by the relevant professional statutory bodies in the country.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the theoretical framework that was utilised in this study. The chapter began by briefly discussing the importance of a theoretical framework. The theoretical framework draws on three related theories: namely the social construction of gender, gender relations theory and queer theory. I have explained the relevance of each theory to my study on primary school

teachers' perceptions of sex, gender and sexuality diversities. The followingchapter will discuss the methodology of my study.

Chapter Four

Research Design and Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the theoretical framework that will be used in this study. This chapter elaborates upon the methodology and research design. Gray (2014) refers to the methodology of a study as a philosophy that guides the entire research process and adds that the methodology explains the techniques that are used to identify, select and collect information. The research methodology of a study provides clarity on how the research process was undertaken (Gray, 2014). Corbin & Strauss (2008) assert that the research design of a study includes planning and executing the research project. Punch (2009) states that the research design is necessary to assist the researcher to initially identify the research problem and thereafter publish their results. Thus, the research design connects the data that is collected to the research questions and additionally to the conclusions (Punch, 2009). The research design is dependent on the nature of the research problem and the research questions (Creswell, 2007). As stated previously, the research questions of this study are:

1) What are primary school teachers' understandings of sex, gender and sexuality diversities?
2) How do teachers engage with sex, gender and sexuality diversities in the primary school?

The rest of this chapter is structured as follows: the subsequent section will discuss the research approach of this study. Thereafter, an explanation of the chosen paradigm will be provided and the research site subsequently discussed. The sampling technique is then explained and thereafter the data generation method that this study utilised is discussed. This section is followed by an explanation of the data analysis process. Thereafter, the ethical considerations of the study are discussed. The limitations of the study are then covered in the penultimate section before the chapter ultimately concludes.

4.2 Qualitative Research Approach

This study has used a qualitative research approach to generate relevant data. Qualitative research involves a flexible and data-orientated research design (Hammersley, 2013). Qualitative research allows the researcher to examine the phenomena in question in the context in which it occurs and consequently the researcher can obtain an in-depth understanding of it (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The research questions should be the primary

consideration when choosing a research approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In order to respond to the research questions that underpinned this study, I needed to conduct an in-depth investigation. Furthermore, the research questions of this study required me to obtain a comprehensive understanding of my participants' viewpoints. These outcomes can only be achieved through the use of the qualitative approach. Thus, for the purposes of this study, the qualitative approach was preferred. The rest of this section will provide a brief description of its vagaries.

Qualitative research focuses on the outside world to understand and explain a phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Qualitative research is an enquiry driven process that attempts to obtain subjective responses from the participants regarding the phenomena under investigation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Further, this research approach does not compare groups of individuals (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Instead, qualitative research is utilised to obtain an in-depth understanding and interpretation of the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2007). Obtaining an in-depth understanding and interpretation of the participants' experiences is made possible because the verbal approach is used by qualitative researchers (Cohen et al., 2018). Cohen et al. (2018) add that qualitative researchers use the verbal approach because they are interested in obtaining meaning and interpretations. Therefore, qualitative research is preferred when the researcher wishes to conduct an in-depth investigation (Creswell, 2007; Hammersley, 2013).

The qualitative research process was ideal for this study since it allowed me to gain insights into the teachers' understanding of and engagements with sex, gender, and sexuality diversities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). After deciding upon the research approach, it was necessary to choose a research paradigm. This process is outlined in the next section.

4.3 Research Paradigm

A research paradigm is defined as a belief system that directs the study (Gray, 2014; Hammersley, 2013). The research paradigm assists researchers to initially view the phenomena and thereafter provide contrasting assumptions about the phenomena (Hammersley, 2013). The choice of a paradigm has an impact on the data generation and data analysis process (Gray, 2014; Hammersley, 2013). This study was conducted within the interpretivist paradigm. The rest of this section is devoted to explaining why the interpretivist paradigm was chosen for this study.

The interpretivist paradigm allows the researcher to understand and describe how the participant views their world in detail (Gray, 2014; Hammersley, 2013). It is used to obtain a greater understanding of how the participants perceive the context of their lives (Hammersley, 2013). A researcher who uses the interpretivist paradigm is also encouraged to keep an open mind because a key premise of the method is that the subjects' beliefs are not static (Cohen et al., 2018). The interpretivist paradigm thus allows the researcher to interpret, analyse and present the data of their study (Hammersley, 2013).

A researcher who works within the interpretivist paradigm interprets the data to understand and describe the agency, attitude and behaviour of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Furthermore, the interpretivist paradigm is ideal for small-scale research and focuses on the individual (Gray, 2014). Moreover, the interpretivist paradigm allows me to be subjective during the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The main reason for choosing the interpretivist paradigm is that it allows me to understand and describe how the educators in consideration made sense of their world (Gray, 2014). Thus, I was able to gain insight into their own understandings of and engagements with sex, gender and sexuality diversities.

4.3.1 Case Study

The chosen methodology of a study is useful because it provides direction to the researcher (Hammersley, 2013). The methodology also assists the researcher to generate the information that is required for the study (Hammersley, 2013). Case studies, which are closely linked to qualitative research, were the preferred methodology for this study. As per Creswell (2007), a case study is as an extensive, in-depth examination of a small sample. An in-depth examination enables the researcher to attain a comprehensive understanding of a specific project (Creswell, 2007). Case studies are descriptive in nature and aim to capture the participants' experiences accurately (Gray, 2014).

Case studies attempt to provide an explanation of the phenomena under investigation (Gray, 2014). Thus, case studies provide an extensive description of the participants' perceptions in a real-world scenario (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Case studies also emphasise that there are many possible scenarios and encourage the researcher to have an open mind (Creswell, 2007). Case studies, therefore, ensured that I could obtain a comprehensive

understanding of how teachers engage with and understand sex, gender and sexuality diversities in their classroom. These characteristics provided the rationale for choosing case studies. The location of the study will now be discussed.

4.4 Research Location

This study was conducted at Rainbow Primary School. Rainbow Primary School is easily accessible off the M19 highway and is approximately a 15-minute drive from the Durban city centre. The surrounding community is plagued by poverty, crime, unemployment and poor service delivery. There are three informal settlements in the suburb. A substantial number of individuals reside in informal settlements and a significant portion of the learners themselves reside in these settlements. The inhabitants of the informal settlements obtain employment in the surrounding communities. The suburb is also affected by frequent water and electricity outages.These outages sometimes result in violent protests, which are influenced by the need for improved service delivery within the community.

The suburb in which the school is located does not have amenities such as a shopping centre, a library or a community sports field. The school does have a soccer field, a swimming pool, a tuck-shop and a hall. Extra-curricular programmes such as the school prom, the awards ceremony,dance recitals and spelling bees are conducted in the hall. These facilities were built by members of the community. These individuals also maintain the facilities. The school obtains a monthly rental fee from them. This rent is an important source of income for the school and governing body teachers are paid from this income. The learners who attend the school are multi-racial and under-privileged. The school conducts a daily feeding programme.

The feeding programme is reliant on donations that are made by charitable organisations. The main goal of the feeding programme is to ensure that underprivileged learners are given breakfast before the morning assembly. For many students, this meal is crucial as they do not carry lunch to school. Rainbow Primary School caters for learners who are in Grade R to Grade 7. In total,Rainbow Primary School has 764 learners enrolled at the school. A breakdown of the learners based on their sex reveals that there are 406 male and 358 female learners. Rainbow Primary School currently has 24 teachers. In total, 6 teachers are male while 18 teachers are female. 21 teachers are employed by the DoE while 3 educators are employed by the governing body. The school also employs a secretary, 3 female cleaners, a librarian and a male caretaker.

I decided to conduct this study at Rainbow Primary School primarily because I am currently employed as an educator at the school. Since I am employed at the school, the educators are familiar with me. It was anticipated that being familiar with the educators would increase the possibility that they would speak openly with me. Additionally, I am also familiar with the participants' schedules. Thus, I was able to conduct the interviews with minimal disruption to the participants' personal and teaching time. My familiarity with the staff also assisted me in complying with covid-19 restrictions whilst I collected the data, because I was able to access the participants' contact details. Consequently, I was able to collect the data remotely. Furthermore, my familiarity with the staff assisted me to set up interviews after school hours.

4.5 Sampling Methods

Punch (2009) refers to sampling as the process of selecting a few individuals from a larger group. The selected individuals should be useful participants who are able to provide the researcher with information that is needed to understand the phenomena (Punch, 2009). Thus, sampling is an important aspect of the research process (Gray, 2014; Punch, 2009). Consequently, the sampling strategy of a study such as this should be carefully considered (Gray, 2014; Punch, 2009). In qualitative research, the researcher's judgement and the focus of the study areused to select a sampling strategy that will allow the researcher to obtain the clearest understanding of the phenomena under investigation (Punch, 2009). The sampling strategy forthis study was carefully considered and I chose purposive sampling to select the sample for thisstudy. Punch (2009) states that qualitative researchers have predominantly chosen to use purposive sampling to obtain a representative sample of the population. Punch (2009) adds thatpurposive sampling is used to provide an in-depth insight into the research question.

Purposive sampling allows the researcher to choose the sample based on certain characteristics (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Because the researcher chooses the individuals who comprise the sample, purposive sampling is ideally suited for small-scale studies (Cohen et al., 2018). Purposive sampling is also less complicated and less expensive to set up in comparison to other types of sampling methods (Cohen et al., 2018). Additionally, purposive sampling enables an in-depth investigation of the participants' viewpoints (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Purposive sampling is also conducted in a deliberate manner with a specific purpose (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). With purposive sampling, I used my own judgment to choose the participants for this study (Creswell, 2007).

Thus, I chose participants who offered the greatest amount of information for the study (Punch, 2009). For this study, I included each of the 16 teachers currently in the intermediate phase. A small sample size is a characteristic of the qualitative research approach (Cohen et al., 2018). The small sample size was beneficial as it enabled me to gain in-depth information from the educators, which was necessary to fully capture their experiences (Cohen et al., 2018). The sample that I chose for this study included LO teachers and teachers who do not educate learners in LO. The sample was made up of 4 male and 12 female teachers in the intermediate phase and of the total number, 1 male and 3 female teachers were LO specialists. For the purposes of this study, the age of each teacher, educational background and the amount of teaching experience were not considered as criteria for selection into the sample.

Each of the 16 teachers expressed a willingness to participate in the study; however, only 12 teachers participated in the study. Some of the reasons that were attributed to non-participation included coronavirus outbreaks in the teachers' immediate family, an increased workload due to various lockdowns or the looting enforced shutdown and electricity outages due to load-shedding. Theparticipants consisted of 9 female educators and 3 male educators. Each of the female LO educators participated in the study, while the male LO educator was unable to participate. Thenext section will provide some background information about each teacher. Each teacher has been allocated a pseudonym to protect their identity.

4.5.1 Summary of teachers

No	**Pseudonym**	**Sex**	**Age**	**Education**	**Teaching experience**	**Subjects taught**
1	Fatima	F	26	Bachelor of Education degree	5 years	English, Afrikaans and Mathematics
2	Clifford	M	49	Bachelor of Arts degree and a Higher	20 years	Mathematics, Social Science and

				diploma in Education		Natural Science
3	Audrey	F	30	Bachelor of education degree	8 years	English, Afrikaans, Mathematics, Natural Science and Social Science
4	Ingrid	F	57	Masters in Education	38 years	English and Life Orientation
5	Meera	F	56	Masters in Education	35 years	Life Orientation
6	Carol	F	47	Diploma in public management and a certificate in teaching	7 years	Natural Science, Social Science and Technology
7	Peter	M	29	Bachelor of education degree	3 years	Mathematics, English and Afrikaans
8	Shireen	F	59	Diploma in education	38 years	English and Economic Management Sciences
9	Simon	M	27	Bachelor of education degree	3 years	Afrikaans and Creative Arts
10	Yvette	F	34	Bachelor of education degree	13 years	English and Natural Science.
11	Yasthi	F	59	Bachelor of education degree	37 years	English, Afrikaans, Mathematics and Life Orientation
12	Vanitha	F	31	Honours in Education	7 years	English and Maths

This section has provided a brief background of the educators who agreed to participate in this study. An important consideration of the research process is that the study is conducted in an ethical manner. The next section will explain how the study has complied with the ethical principles of research.

4.6 Ethical considerations

Two important principles of the research process emphasise that studies should not be conducted for harmful purposes and additionally that no individual should be harmed because of their participation in a study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Cohen at al. (2018) add that each study should conform to the ethical principles of research.Thus, it was necessary for this study to comply with the ethical considerations that are consistent with the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Before this study began, permission was requested from the University of KwaZulu-Natal to conduct it. Once ethical clearance was obtained by the university, gatekeeper's permission was sought from the principal of Rainbow Primary School. Since this study was conducted in a school, the gatekeeper's consent from the principal was necessary (Swanepoel & Beyers, 2019). Furthermore, because the study focused on teachers, permission was also required from the DoE to conduct the study among their employees. Permission was subsequently obtained from the DoE and the school's principal. The permission letters as well as the ethical clearance are included in the appendix of this study.

The participants were made aware of the purpose of this study and were informed that it had been undertaken for academic purposes only. Thereafter, consent forms were issued to the teachers who agreed to participate in the study. Written consent was obtained from each teacher before each interview was conducted. The teachers were informed that the interviews were recorded. The teachers were also assured that they would not be harmed as a result of participating in it. They were informed that their identities would be protected and were also told that their safety, anonymity and confidentiality were of paramount importance. I notified each of the educators that their identities would not be revealed under any circumstance.

To ensure that the participants remained anonymous, each participant and the school where the study was conducted were allocated a pseudonym (Cohen et al., 2018). The use of pseudonyms serves to protect the participants' identity. Furthermore, the suburb where the school is located

was not disclosed. The participants were also informed that they could withdraw from this study at any time if they chose to and that their participation remained on a voluntary basis. Additionally, no participant received any financial gain by participating in this study. The participants were also informed that I would not gain financially or materially from conducting this study. The participants were assured that the findings from the study would be reported truthfully, that the findings would be not distorted and that they would have access to the completed report.

The data that was obtained from this study was safely stored in an encrypted folder on my personal laptop. My laptop is only accessed through a password and I was the only individual that had access to it during the period in which the study was conducted. The data was only shared with my supervisor. The data will be safely stored for a period, in compliance with ethical principles and thereafter the data will be destroyed at a future date. The participants were informed of these facts. The participants did not raise any objections to the safety protocols that were adopted for the study. After the participants were informed of the safety protocols, they signed their consent forms. The participants' written consent was obtained before the data generation process began. This section has elaborated on the mechanisms that were utilised to ensure that the study was conducted in an ethical manner. The subsequent section explains the chosen research method.

4.7 Research method

The choice of a data collection method is dependent of the type of data that is required for the study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Qualitative researchers have the option of utilising either primary or secondary data for their studies (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). For the purposes of this study, it was necessary to generate primary data. Having considered both the research paradigm and the methodology of this study, it was decided to generate data through individual interviews. I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews for this study. This section will briefly elaborate on why semi-structured interviews were chosen for this study.

4.7.1 Semi-structured interviews

An interview is a research method that is used to collect data in qualitative research (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Qualitative interviews assist the researcher to investigate the participants' experiences and understand their world (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). A qualitative interview could be defined as a conversation that occurs between the interviewer and the respondent

(Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Gray, 2014). The interview is controlled and directed by the interviewer and the interviews are conducted with the specific purpose of collecting information that is relevant to a study (Gray, 2014). Interviews consist of constant dialogue between the researcher and the participant therefore interviews are ideal to elicit the opinions and beliefs of the participants (Cohen et al., 2018). Interviews could be either structured or semi-structured (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). A structured interview is a rigid process and consists of a series of questions that are asked in a predetermined order (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

In contrast to structured interviews, a semi-structured interview offers the researcher a greater degree of flexibility and the questions are not necessarily asked in sequence (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). McIntosh & Morse (2015) note that although semi-structured interviews have a set list of questions for the participants to answer, the interviewer can alter the questions based on the situation. A semi-structured interview resembles a conversation and allows the participants the opportunity to express themselves freely (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Moreover, the interviewer has a greater probability of following up on important information in a semi-structured interview when compared to a structured interview (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). This process is referred to as probing and is considered an important trait of a semi-structured interview (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Probing questioning was a useful technique that allowed me to question the teachers further if they had divulged anything interesting (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the data generation method of this study fortwo primary reasons. Firstly, the research questions of this study required subjective answers. Secondly, the flexibility and freedom offered by a semi-structured interview allowed me to direct the interview to relevant and important issues (McIntosh & Morse, 2015).

The questions in the semi-structured interviews were open-ended. Open-ended questions also allowed the participants to respond freely to the interview question (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Open-ended questions provided me with the opportunity to probe further if I chose to (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Open-ended questions have an additional advantage namely, I could clarify any misunderstandings that occurred (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). I decided to use open-ended questions to ensure that I was able to obtain the teachers' opinions, beliefs, thoughts, perspectives and experiences related to their understandings of and engagements with sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). These factors enabled me to obtain comprehensive answers to the interview questions.

The length of the interviews ranged from 20 minutes to 45 minutes. The interviews were conducted in English. Before the interviews began, the educators were asked about their proficiency in English and each educator stated that they were highly proficient. Intotal, 11 participants stated that English was their home language while the home language of 1 participant was isiZulu. Conducting the interview in English was not difficult for this participant and there was no need for a translator. I treated each participant with respect and made them aware that their contributions were valuable. At the end of each interview, I thanked the participant for their time.

The interviews were conducted after school hours, at a time that was deemed appropriate by the participants themselves. Shortly before the agreed upon date, the participants were contacted and reminded about the interviews. The interviews were conducted when the participants and I were at our respective homes. To adhere to the covid-19 regulations, the interviews were conducted online, through zoom calls. The interviews were not rushed and the participants were at ease during the interview process. The participants understood the questions and did not ask me to clarify any of them. Some participants seemed nervous initially however they gained confidence as the interviews progressed. None of the participants were uncomfortable with the content of the interviews. The fact that I was currently employed as a teacher at the research site aided the process as well added some challenges for me as a researcher. did not influence the data collection process. A possible advantage of my insider researcher position was that some the teachers seemed more open with me. Indeed, they appeared eager and willing to assist me with my study. However, the same insider position presented some challenges where teachers expected me to know about how they teach and responded briefly to my questions. The interviews were recorded and the participants were made aware that they would be recorded before the interviews began. Thereafter, in preparation for the data analysis procedure, the interviews were subsequently transcribed and analysed.

4.8 Data Analysis

Once the data generation process was complete, it was necessary to analyse the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data generation process typically results in the generation of substantial quantities of data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Certain portions of the data might be deemed irrelevant for the purposes of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, the process of data analysis is necessary because data analysis simplifies the data that was collected and removes any information that is deemed unnecessary (Cohen et al., 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Data analysis assists the researcher in identifying pertinent information that was collected from the interview process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Thus, data analysis is an important component of qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Moreover, analysing the data further assists the researcher by identifying any patterns that may exist in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Cohen et al., 2018). This study used thematic analysis, which is a method that identifies, analyses and reports patterns in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initially, the data was transcribed and thereafter, textual transcriptions were generated. The process of transcribing the interviews enabled me to become more familiar with the data, provided important details and furthermore allowed me to focus on important information (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additionally, transcribing the recorded data reduced the possibility that I made an error during the data analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

After the data was transcribed, the transcribed interviews were read. Reading the data increased my understanding and familiarity with the information gathered. This process increased the probabilitythat common themes or patterns were identified (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thus, by reading thetranscribed interviews, I was able to significantly reduce the probability that I made an error inthe data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thereafter, the data was sorted and organized into categories (Cohen et al., 2018). This process is known as data reduction (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data reduction is required to simplify the collected data (Cohen et al., 2018). Data reduction assisted me by removing any unnecessary information (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thepatterns were subsequently identified and presented thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Cohen et al., 2018). Conclusions were then drawn from the data. This section has provided an explanation of the data analysis procedure. The next section will explain how trustworthiness was attained in this study.

4.9 Trustworthiness

A crucial aspect of qualitative research is that the study needs to ultimately be considered trustworthy (Creswell, 2007). If the study is regarded as trustworthy, other researchers will have more confidence in its results (Creswell, 2007; Hammersley, 2013). Furthermore, if researchers do not regard a study as trustworthy, then the study is effectively regarded as worthless (Creswell, 2007; Hammersley, 2013). Therefore, trustworthiness is a crucial requirement of qualitative research and qualitative researchers should ensure that their research is always deemed trustworthy (Hammersley, 2013). Qualitative researchers regard credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability as contributing towards the attainment of

trustworthiness (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). If each of these 4 aspects are achieved, then a study is perceived as trustworthy.

Credibility is a measure of how accurately the researcher has captured and represented the participants' reality (Creswell, 2007). In the research process, it is crucial for the researcher to engage with the participants to ensure that their views have been accurately represented (Cohen et al., 2018). Each interview was recorded to ensure that the results were credible. Recording the interviews enhanced credibility because the recording reduced the probability of errors being made when the interviews were transcribed (Cohen et al., 2018). Thereafter, the transcribed data was read to the participants who confirmed its authenticity. Furthermore, participants were asked to verify the transcriptions of their words to confirm that they were not misinterpreted. This ensured that the results accurately represented the participants' opinions. The participants were also afforded the opportunity to correct any inaccurate information that might have transpired in the transcription process. The interviews were not rushed and this ensured that there was a prolonged engagement with the participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Credibility was subsequently enhanced as prolonged engagement reduced the probability of any misunderstandings in the interview process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). These processes assisted me in accurately capturing the educators' reality.

Confirmability refers to the extent that the results of a study can be confirmed by other researchers (Hammersley, 2013). To improve the confirmability of this study, the entire research process was explained thoroughly. Thus, other researchers would have enough details to decide if they would reach similar conclusions. In order to achieve dependability, the data that was generated from this study was compared to previous studies. The comparison was achieved by incorporating scholarly literature into the data analysis. This process enabled me to explain any variations that occurred between cases (Hammersley, 2013).

Transferability refers to the extent that the study can be transferred to another context (Creswell, 2007; Hammersley, 2013). The transferability of a study can be increased by its depth (Hammersley, 2013). By choosing case studies, which entail an in-depth examination of the sample, the transferability of this study might be enhanced (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2007). I have also provided an extensive description of the suburb and the school where the study was conducted. These descriptions could lead to a further study being conducted in another area with similar characteristics to the school and the suburb. Additionally, I have provided an in-depth explanation of the research methods that this study utilised. Therefore, other researchers can use the same research methods in their study. These characteristics

increase the transferability of my study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2007).

This section has explained how trustworthiness was ensured in this study. It is important to note that the results of each study might be negatively impacted upon by potential limitations (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Hammersley, 2013). This study was no exception. The following section will explain the limitations that were encountered during this study.

4.10 Limitations

A limitation is an issue that might affect the findings and conclusions of the study (Creswell, 2007). In this study, a substantial limitation was the scheduling of the interview process. Since the interviews had to be conducted online in accordance with the covid-19 restrictions, they had to be scheduled at a suitable time for each and every participant. The interviews were scheduled for after school when the participants and I were at home. Scheduling the interviews proved challenging since the interviews had to be conducted after school, during the teachers' personal time. There were occasions when the teachers cancelled the interview a few minutes before the scheduled time because of unexpected circumstances such as a family issue. The availability of some participants was occasionally an issue because of family commitments. Unexpected issues such as load shedding or poor connectivity provided further challenges to the interview process. These issues meant that the interviews were occasionally rescheduled.

A further limitation arose because of the extended school vacation. The school vacation was extended due to the increase in covid-19 infections. The extended vacation increased the workload of teachers in the third term. This placed increased demands on both the participants and myself. Since teachers were sacrificing their personal time for the interviews, they might have rushed through the interviews to minimise the loss of their personal time. A further challenge was encountered during the transcribing phase. The interviews were conducted online through zoom interviews and occasionally when I went through the recording, certain words could not be heard clearly. Fortunately, this did not have a significant impact on my data analysis. The process that was undertaken to transcribe the data was time-consuming, but I attempted to transcribe the interviews on the day that the interviews were conducted. This meant that I had to limit the number of interviews that I conducted each week.

4.11 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the research methodology that was utilised in this study. The chapter began by discussing the qualitative research design and briefly discussed why this strategy was chosen. Thereafter, the interpretive paradigm was elaborated on. The choice of the research

site, Rainbow Primary School, was then discussed and the sampling method of this study was subsequently explained. It was briefly explained why this study used purposive sampling. The ethical considerations of this study were then discussed, and this section was followed by an explanation of the data generation method. The chosen data generation method of the study namely, semi-structured interviews, was then elaborated upon. The data analysis methods were subsequently discussed before an explanation of how the study ensured that the results are trustworthy. The limitations of the study have also been acknowledged. The chapter that follows will be devoted to the data analysis process.

Chapter Five

Data Analysis

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the research methodology and detailed the process that was used to generate the data that this study requires. This chapter aims to analyse and present the data of this study. The data was generated through semi-structured interviews with teachers. The interviews were transcribed and the transcriptions were subsequently analysed thematically. The following themes emerged from the analysis of the data:

- Dominance of biological essentialism
- Reinforcing a binary view of gender
- Children learn about gender from society and family
- Childhood sexuality does not exist
- Primary school learners are too young to get educated about sexuality and gender
- Sexuality and gender should be in the LO teachers' domain
- Teachers' discomfort in discussing diverse sexualities with their learners
- Sex, gender and sexuality diversities are easily identifiable
- Teachers' strategies to ensure diverse sexualities are comfortable in the class

This chapter is devoted to a discussion of these themes. Scholarly literature has been incorporated into the discussion. Furthermore, the theoretical framework of this study namely the social construction of gender, queer theory and gender relations theory were utilised to understand the data.

5.2 Dominance of biological essentialism

The data shows that there were varying understandings on offer concerning the connections between sex, gender and sexuality among the educators. The majority of teachers held the perception that gender and sexuality have roots in biology. These teachers have also stated that an individual'sgender consists of two distinct categories: an individual can be either a male or a female. The teachers also voiced diverging views on childhood sexuality. Their views are discussed in two sub-themes below.

5.2.1 Sex and Gender

The participants were asked if there was a difference between an individual's sex and their gender. In total, seven out of the twelve educators interviewed stated that there is no difference between an individual's sex and their gender. The teachers mainly believed that gender comprises two categories and is a biological process. Seminal researchers have, of course, rejected a simple biological explanation of the differences that exist between sex and gender (Butler, 1990; Connell, 1985). They instead argue for a conceptualisation of gender as a social construction (Butler, 1990; Connell, 1985). Thus, the educators' opinions are in contrast to these researchers (Butler, 1990; Connell, 1985).

However, five teachers stated that an individual's sex and gender differ. Amongst these were Peter and Ingrid and when probed further, various contradictory responses were evident. For example:

Interviewer: *"Do you believe that there is a difference between an individual's sex and their gender?"*

Peter: *"Yes"*

Interviewer: *"If yes, in your opinion, what is the difference?"*

Peter: *"When we speak about gender, it's either male or female. When we speak about sex, I think it's more broader than that, as there are quite a few categories for sex instead of just male or female"*

Despite stating that there is indeed a difference between an individual's gender and their sex, Peter conflates the two concepts in his reasoning. Peter's answer divulges that he understands that an individual's gender consists of two categories. According to Peter, the categories will indicate if the individual is either a male or a female. Peter, therefore, aligns himself with a binary understanding of gender and alludes that gender is a biological process.

According to Ingrid, an individual's gender is uncomplicated and can be easily observed. She said:

Ingrid: *"The gender of the child is clear and you can observe it."*

This is similar to Peter's understanding of gender. The opinions that Peter and Ingrid expressed thus suggest a conflation of sex and gender. Despite stating that sex and gender differ, both teachers believe that an individual's gender is a binary concept, which is easily identifiable. Therefore, Peter and Ingrid subsequently reinforce the dichotomous gender categories and contribute to the heteronormative belief that there are only two specific genders (Francis, 2019).

Peter and Ingrid's belief that gender consists of two categories is consistent with international and local studies, which have inferred that teachers tend to conflate sex and gender (Brown & Buthelezi, 2020; Francis & DePalma, 2014; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019; Preston, 2016). The authors of these studies conducted their research among LO and Sexuality Education teachers (Francis & DePalma, 2014; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019; Preston, 2016). Therefore, Ingrid (an LO educator) has a similar perspective to her peers in this regard (Francis & DePalma, 2014; Preston, 2016). These studies have also noted that LO and Sexuality Education teachers have reinforced the gender binary (Brown & Buthelezi, 2020; Preston, 2016). Additionally, these educators have continued gendered norms and enforced a culture of heteronormativity within their schools (Mostert et al., 2015; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019). This is one of the ways in which teachers can be said to have an integral role in shaping gender identities in the classroom (Mayeza & Bhana, 2017). However, if teachers lack knowledge on gender, they might support gender stereotypes, recreate negative gender norms and reinforce gender roles in their daily interactions with the learners (Mayeza & Bhana, 2017).

However, some teachers at Rainbow Primary School displayed more nuanced understandings ofsex and gender. This is evidenced in the responses given by Clifford, Meera and Audrey. Clifford's statement is as follows:

Clifford: *"Sex is what they are biologically born with and gender is the way that they see themselves"*

Clifford recognises that there is a distinction between an individual's sex and gender. He accepts that sex is a biological concept. He moreover understands that the individual has no choice regarding their sex. However, Clifford also states that an individual has a choice over their gender and explains that gender represents the lens through which individuals view themselves. Clifford illustrates an awareness that transcends the usual assumption that an individual's gender has its roots in biology (Connell, 1985). Meera includes an understanding of the role of society in the construction of gender. She said:

***Meera**: "Sex is what they are born with, either a boy or girl. Gender is what society perceives you as and is also changing."*

Meera confidently states that individuals are born into a specific sex and that sex is a mutually exclusive dichotomy, which the individual has no control over. She adds to Clifford's view of gender being constructed by including the role of society. She further mentions that gender is notstatic and is instead fluid. By making this comment, Meera infers that gender is non-binary. Meera further understands that gender is a social construct and she infers that the individual has some degree of control over their gender. Meera's opinion corroborates influential researchers who have signified that gender is a social construct (Butler, 1990; Connell, 1985).

Audrey expresses similar views:

Audrey: "*Well I have watched an interview where a celebrity (Demi Lovato) said she was non-binary and a gender expert was also on the panel. The expert explained that an individual's sex is purely biological and something they have no choice over. They are born as a male or a female. But the person explained that gender is something that is not binary and the person can choose their gender based on what they identify as."*

Drawing on the input of gender experts, Audrey positions gender as a non-binary concept. She reveals an understanding that individuals have a choice over their gender. She further recognises that gender is not restricted to two categories. She suggests that individuals have no choice over their sex and mentions that sex is a biological concept.

It was evident that some educators' understanding of gender extended beyond biological essentialism (Connell, 2012). These educators successfully differentiated between sex and gender. Their opinions also resonated with important characteristics of the social construction of gender (Connell, 1995). Specifically, the teachers' viewpoint that gender is a non-binary, fluid concept that is not related to an individual's sex, and their realisation that society has an impact upon the individual's chosen gender, is consistent with important aspects of the social construction of gender (Bhana, 2021; Connell, 1995; Payne et al., 2008). Audrey, Clifford and Meera thus display a greater understanding of sex and gender in comparison to their peers.

5.2.2 Sexuality diversities

When asked what their understanding of a diverse sexuality in primary school entailed, the teachers seemed to struggle with the vocabulary to discuss the topic. Some teachers drew on popular terms, as commonly utilised in the media, such as bisexual, gay and lesbian. However, the teachers' responses seemed to imply that they do not understand non-heterosexual identities. This implies that the educators do not make sense of the potential complexities of any individual's sexuality (Msibi, 2015). This can be observed in the responses that were received from Simon, Shireen and Fatima.

Simon has displayed an awareness of non-heterosexual identities. He stated:

Simon: *"Lesbian girls and gay guys, in other words someone who isn't heterosexual."*

Simon seems to understand that there are non-heterosexual identities. However,he believes that there only two non-heterosexual identities; namely: gay and lesbian individuals.Thus, he seems to believe that homosexuality is the only option available to individuals who are not heterosexual. It is evident that there is a lack of recognition of the various social groups within the umbrella of sexuality diversities on his part.

Vanitha expresses similar sentiments to Simon.

Vanitha: *"Girls or boys who are either lesbian or gay."*

Vanitha's perception of sexuality diversity seems to be limited to individuals who are homosexual. Her answer is congruent with the belief that sexuality is a binary concept that consists of homosexuality or heterosexuality. By exclusively mentioning boys and girls, Vanitha denies the possibility that gender is a multi-dimensional concept. Thus, she perpetuates the gender binary. It is evident that both Simon and Vanitha believe the only non-heterosexual identities are either lesbians or gay individuals.

Shireen also has a limited understanding of diverse sexualities. This is evident in her response.

Shireen: *"I think someone who is diverse and not heterosexual, like a gay student"*

Shireen also expresses a limited awareness on sexuality diversity and additionally positions heterosexuality as the norm. Shireen is under the impression that sexuality diversities solely consist of gay individuals. In this regard, Shireen's opinion is similar to the thoughts that were

expressed by Simon. Vanitha, Simon and Shireen are of the opinion that diverse sexualities are limited to same sex couples. Their responses are similar to those Sexuality Education teachers who have revealed that they have a limited understanding of sexuality diversities (Lane, 2020). With their statements, these educators fail to acknowledge the various sexual identities that exist (Lane, 2020).

The lack of understanding that Vanitha, Simon and Shireen have of sexuality diversities is consistent with research conducted in South African schools (DePalma & Francis, 2014; Francis, 2017). South African educators do not understand sexuality diversities and this might have a negative impact on the schooling experience of individuals who identify with sex, gender or sexuality diversities (Bhana, 2015; Brown & Buthelezi, 2020). Indeed, learners who identify with sexuality diversities stated that their teachers do not understand sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Francis, 2017). The learners subsequently expressed feelings of isolation, frustration, self-doubt and unhappiness (Francis, 2017). DePalma & Francis (2014) further concluded that LO teachers were uncertain on what sexuality diversity meant and instead focused solely on heterosexuality in their lessons. The teachers thus reinforced a culture of heteronormativity and silenced sex, gender and sexuality diversities during their lessons (Bhana, 2015; Brown & Buthelezi, 2020; DePalma & Francis, 2014).

Other educators seemed to have a broader view of sexual diversities. For example:

Fatima: *"When a learner is gay or lesbian. I think the term I read is LGBT."*

Interviewer*: "Could you please elaborate on what you understand by LGBT"*

Fatima: *"Lesbian, gay, bisexual or transvestite."*

According to Fatima, sexuality diversities are predominantly gay or lesbian individuals. When probed further, she mentions two other categories demonstrating that she does understand a wider range of sexuality diversity in comparison to Simon and Shireen. However, when Fatima was probed to clarify her understanding of the acronym LGBT, she used the term transvestite instead of transgender. Fatima's confusion regarding transgender individuals corroborates the findings that were attained by Francis & Monakali (2021). Drawing upon queer theory, the authors noted that educators were unaware of the various sexual identities that existed beyond homosexuality (Francis & Monakali, 2021). Consequently, such educators contributed to the suppression of sexuality diversities in the school (Francis & Monakali, 2021).

According to the social construction of gender, an individual's gender and sexuality are performative acts, which are based on social interaction (Butler, 1990). Thus, an unfortunate consequence of neglecting sexuality diversities might occur when learners begin to suppress their sexual identities and eventually act as if they are heterosexual in an attempt to blend in with their peers (Butler, 1990). The responses of Vanitha, Fatima, Simon and Shireen suggest that my educators subscribe to heteronormativity and maintain the sex, gender and sexuality binary. Their opinions are consistent with those of other educators in the country (Francis, 2017; Francis, 2019). However, it is important to note that this perception differs from that of prominent scholars who have concluded that sex and gender differ while sexuality and gender are non-binary concepts (Butler, 2004; Connell, 1987; Connell, 2012). Thus, social groups within the sexuality diversities umbrella might experience difficulty integrating into Rainbow Primary School.

The educators at Rainbow Primary School have divergent understandings of sex, gender and sexuality diversities. It is noted too that the educators have maintained the gender and sexuality binaries. Their lack of knowledge of sex, gender and sexuality diversities might lead to the proliferation of gender stereotypes within the school. Therefore, to understand if gender stereotypes are prevalent within Rainbow Primary School, the educators were asked if the school perpetuated gender stereotypes. The subsequent section will elaborate upon their answers.

5.3 Reinforcing a binary view of gender

An analysis of the data revealed that the educators consistently reinforced the perception that gender is a binary concept. The educators also mentioned that gender stereotypes were present in the school. Indeed,ten out of the twelve educators who were interviewed believed that gender stereotypes were perpetuated. This section will elaborate on the gender stereotypes the teachers have mentioned during the interview process and begins by conducting an analysis of Clifford's comments.

Clifford: *"Well I have seen it in school, I am a sports specialist and have a full academic load. Obviously, with strong independent women there are a lot of talks about women quite rightly having equal opportunities. But when it came to doing extracurricular activities with the learners after school with regards to sport, the ladies were only too happy to give it to the males and I think that this is unfair. It's very hypocritical. If people want to fight for equal*

rights and say that there shouldn't be discrimination between genders then everyone should put their hands to the wheel."

A common gender stereotype dictates that involvement in sporting activities are symbolic of masculinity (Connell, 1985; Plaza et al., 2017). Sporting events are therefore viewed as an important site where masculine identities are either constructed or reinforced (Plaza et al., 2017). According to Plaza et al. (2017), the stereotype furthers the belief that participating in sporting activities is not a feminine activity. Females thus are driven to avoid involvement in sports because of the prevailing view that males are more suited to sports (Paechter, 2007; Plaza et al., 2017). Schools are susceptible to this stereotype and females who become involved in a sporting activity are regarded as masculine (Mayeza, 2016).

Yvette acknowledges that educators perpetuate gender stereotypes within the classroom by differentiating between the sexes.

Yvette: "*Maybe we do it subconsciously. I might ask boys to help me move something heavy instead of a girl. Or for a colouring task, I will ask a girl."*

Yvette reinforces the gender stereotype that males are suited to physical tasks (Dunne, 2007; Paechter, 2007). Specifically, the stereotype professes that physicality is typically associated with masculinity (Dunne, 2007). This might be the reason she has decided to allocate physical tasks to male learners. Moreover, by differentiating tasks based on the learner's sex, Yvette also reinforces gender roles within the school.

Yasthi feels that school uniforms serve to perpetuate gender stereotypes.

Yasthi: *"By looking at the types and colours of the school uniform. During lunch breaks, girls are not allowed to play sporting activities with the boys."*

Yashti touches on an important source of heteronormativity within schools; namely, the school uniform (Paechter, 2017). Traditionally, in schools, female learners are expected to wear uniforms, which project femininity while male learners are required to use school uniforms that represent masculinity (Paechter, 2017). Sex, gender and sexuality diversities are thus forced to conform to societal expectations regarding their gender by wearing conformist school uniforms (Dean, 2011). School uniforms are, therefore, an important basis for heteronormativity, reinforcing the gender binary and endorsing gender roles (Paechter, 2017).

Paechter (2007), drawing on the social construction of gender, elaborates on this by saying that schools provide the ideal site for gender stereotypes to flourish. A prevailing gender stereotype dictates that physical tasks, including sporting activities, are associated with masculinity and should be reserved for males, while cleaning is regarded as a feminine task and should thus be associated with females (Dunne, 2007; Paechter, 2007). According to the educators, stereotypes of this nature are maintained at Rainbow Primary School. The educators' answers also suggested that gender roles are created at Rainbow Primary School. Francis & Monakali (2021) provide evidence that non-binary learners in South African schools experience discomfort when they have to navigate gender-segregated roles during their formal education (Francis & Monakali, 2021). Gender-segregated roles perpetuate and reinforce gender stereotypes (Francis & Monakali, 2021). Additionally, gender-segregated roles maintain the gender binary (Dunne, 2007; Reygan & Francis, 2015).

The gender stereotypes and gender roles that are common at Rainbow Primary School are not unique to the school. Gender roles and gender stereotypes are prevalent in schools everywhere (Allen, 2020; Brown & Buthelezi, 2020). Moreover, educators are the primary reason that gender stereotypes prevail in schools globally (Heyder & Kessels, 2015). Bhana (2018) suggests that gender is currently understood through expressions of masculinity and femininity, which are enacted through these tasks. A consequence of understanding gender through this prism is the normalisation of the gender binary and heteronormativity (Bhana, 2018; Bhana, 2021).

To understand if my educators directly fostered gender stereotypes, they were also asked if they believed that there were any differences between boys and girls in terms of capabilities. Their responses reflected gendered patterns and are detailed below.

Fatima: "*Girls are more timid and lack confidence. They are also well behaved and do not get into trouble. Boys on the other hand are always getting into trouble, they are also loud and constantly interrupt my lessons. The girls also seem to get higher marks in my lessons and they also seem to be more interested in the subjects that I teach. They are up to date with their homework. I also noticed that boys prefer to play rough, aggressive games like soccer in the playground. The girls prefer non-contact games such as jump rope or hopscotch. In terms of capabilities, I think that at the primary school stage, girls seem more capable in schoolwork and non-physical stuff while boys are the opposite. In terms of interests, the boys seem to be interested in video games and girls don't have any interest in this. The older girls are more*

interested in makeup and fashion."

Fatima focuses on the biological differences that occur between the sexes instead of any differences that might be socially constructed. She sees the differences that she notices as biological and fixed. Her reliance on biological essentialism thus reinforces the gender binary (Connell, 1985). Fatima believes that girls begin to conform to feminine norms, as they grow older. By stating that older girls are interested in makeup or fashion, she believes that females aspire to heterosexual femininities (Paechter, 2017). Furthermore, with her statement that girls are more capable at schoolwork, Fatima recreates the stereotype that boys are easily distracted and disinterested learners (Heyder & Kessels, 2015).

Vanitha was a bit more tentative in her discussion of gendered differences:

Vanitha: *"However, I did notice that in general boys are more rowdy in terms of behaviour. They prefer to play physical games. Boys tend to get into more trouble than girls as well."*

Vanitha mentioned her observations of gendered behaviour amongst learners but did not attribute them to biological differences. She did, however, add to the stereotype that boys are suited to physical activities (Paechter, 2007). A common link between Fatima and Vanitha's answers was the view that boys are rowdy. By expressing these opinions, the educators helped to further a common gender stereotype (Heyder & Kessels, 2015). Indeed, the misconception that boys are rowdy learners prevails globally (Heyder & Kessels, 2015).

In a similar fashion to Fatima, Simon feels that male learners bear an inherent form of aggressiveness within them. According to Simon, this inherent form of aggressiveness is why they become involved in altercations within the school. He also reinforces the gender binary with his comment.

Simon: *"Boys tend to be more physical and loud in school. They always get into fights or altercations. They seem to have a natural aggressiveness within them. Boys also seem to have less capabilities in subjects that require swatting and are better in maths and science. Boys are more focused on sports or cars. They always mention they saw a sports game over the weekend and want to discuss the game with me."*

He states that males are more capable in subjects such as mathematics. With his comment, Simon touches on three important gender stereotypes prevalent in schools. Firstly, the belief that boys are naturally aggressive; secondly, the perception that boys are more suited to subjects

such as mathematics and science; and thirdly, the impression that boys are more interested in sports than girls are (Connell, 1985; Heyder & Kessels, 2015; Paechter, 2007).

Simon's opinion on his male learners' academic suitability towards mathematics and science is also a common stereotype of masculinity (Heyder & Kessels, 2015). This one dictates that males are mostly lazy students who have a natural ability for numerical subjects (Heyder & Kessels, 2015). Furthermore, this stereotype implies the belief that females are studious and have an inherent ability in subjects that require creativity (Heyder & Kessels, 2015).

A recurring theme from the interview process was the notion that teachers believe that male learners are rowdy and extroverted in comparison to female learners who are introverted and timid. This specific gender stereotype is common among the educators at Rainbow Primary School and has critical implications for gender relations and gender inequalities that might exist within the school (Connell, 1985; Heyder & Kessels, 2015; Paechter, 2007). By making these statements, the educators subscribe to a common gender stereotype that has its roots in the social construction of gender. A dominant perspective of the social construction of gender is the belief that males are extroverted, loud, boisterous and rowdy while in a clear juxtaposition females are considered to be introverted, shy and timid (Connell, 1985; Paechter, 2007). These observations, regarding the behaviour of males and females, are widespread in academic literature (Connell, 1985; MacNaughton, 2000). Indeed, there is a reigning misconception that rowdiness is an important trait of masculinity while being introverted is indicative of femininity (Connell, 1985).

The analysis within this section focused on the views of teachers that aligned to understandings of a binary view of gender. The analysis also revealed that the educators fostered gender stereotypes. The following theme discusses the educators' opinions on the sources of children's knowledge on gender.

5.4 Children learn about gender from society and family

The educators held a common view: that society and children's own families have an integral role in educating children on gender. A common thread that linked the educators' opinions was the belief that parents were predominantly responsible for educating their children about gender. This can be evidenced in the educators' responses.

Vanitha: *"Their parents would have educated them on their gender by now and they would also ensure that the children dress and behave like their respective gender. They are exposed to social media, and TV shows and would realise that they are male or female based on these observations. They also interact with boys and girls in school and realise that they are the same gender as their friends."*

Vanitha expresses a belief that an individual's gender is reinforced both socially and culturally. She maintains the gender binary by acknowledging that the children "realise" they are either male or female. Vanitha clearly has a preconceived notion about the clothing that boys and girls shouldwear. This is evidenced by her statement that parents ensure their children are dressed and behave in accordance with their respective sex. Vanitha also states that parents enforce heteronormative ideas onto their children in the terms of their clothing and behaviour. She also seems to have a fixed perspective regarding the behavioural norms and appearance of each sex. However, Vanitha excludes the possibility that any one child might recognise themselves in a sex, gender or sexuality diversity.

Simon explains that children begin to understand their gender by observing their parents.

Simon: *"They will watch their parents and realise that they belong to the gender of their parents. Boys will understand that they are like their dad while girls will realise that they are like their mum. Also the way that they dress, they will realise that they are a male or female based on the way they dress."*

Simon conforms to the belief that gender is a binary system consisting of males or females. He also merges sex and gender with his comment. Simon then excludes the possibility that the child might identify with sex, gender or sexuality diversities. He assumes that the child will identify as male or female based on their observations. He implicitly rejects the possibility that the child might identify as non-binary. Thus, Simon indirectly perpetuates a culture of heteronormativity.

Vanitha and Simon together display an understanding that society has an impact on the construction ofgender. Their opinions are congruent with the social construction of gender (Connell, 1985; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Indeed, a crucial aspect of the social construction of gender is the understanding that individuals will identify with their respective gender with the assistance ofsociety (Connell, 1985; Connell, 1995). The social construction of gender further maintains that each child develops their own understanding of gender through social

learning, social interaction and by observing society (Connell, 1985; Connell, 1995; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Furthermore, by stating that children firstly learn about gender from their parents or society and thereafter act in accordance with that specific gender, the educators indirectly acknowledge that gender is performative (Butler, 1990). The realisation that gender is performative is an important hallmark of the social construction of gender (Butler, 2004). The educators believe that children develop an understanding of gender before they enter school. They do this through social learning and social interaction within their family. The next section discusses the educators' understandings of sexuality.

5.5 Childhood sexuality does not exist

A common finding from my data analysis is that the educators believe children develop an understanding of their sexuality when they reach puberty. By subscribing to this belief, the educators do not take cognisance of the possibility of childhood sexuality. They further state that children become aware of their sexuality though social media or by watching television shows. A typical response in this regard was:

Meera*: "In the past due to non-exposure, once learners got to puberty then we decided, I am this or that and have feelings for boys or girls. But now with exposure to social media or community or people living in crowded circumstance, it's not their sexuality but instead children begin to imitate the people that they see they think that they want to be cool like this person they decide that they want to be a transvestite because they are exposed to the individual. It's not because they want to be or have the awareness, it's because they are exposed to it."*

Meera denies the existence of childhood sexuality. She states that children are not aware of sexuality and instead simply mimic other individuals in society. By mentioning transvestites, Meera demonstrates an understanding of a broad range of sexuality diversities and an awareness that an individual's sexuality is not limited to homosexuality or heterosexuality.

Fatima, for her part, seems to believe that children become sexualised through external influences. Her opinion is documented below.

Fatima: *"I think that they get exposed to sex in public like in the movies, the internet and on tv shows. They also occasionally become sexually active at this age and they are fully aware of their bodies by now. The kids would have also reached puberty by now. They would have also been involved in relationships with the opposite gender by now, so they will be aware of their sexuality through this process. They also have access to the internet and cellphones by this age. These outlets are very informative and will assist them with the information that they need to become aware of their sexuality."*

Fatima is of the opinion that children attain an awareness of their sexuality during puberty. She does display an awareness of childhood sexuality, but she finds it rare. In addition to confusing an individual's sex with their gender, Fatima denies the existence of same sex relationships. She sees heterosexual relations as the norm and consequently perpetuatesheteronormativity.

Puberty being the time for sexual development, was a notion also promoted by Shireen. She also mentions that sexuality is promoted by media exposure. She said:

Shireen: *"They have reached puberty and during this time they learn about changes in their bodies and are exposed to sex when they watch tv or see movies. Their curiosity also increases and they want to know more about sex. Also at this age, they are interested in the opposite sex and they also start getting boyfriends or girlfriends."*

Shireen mentions that sexuality is promoted by media exposure. She also infers by her statements that heterosexuality is the norm. Further, she hypothesises that learners strive to enter heterosexual relationships. According to Blaise (2009), educators who understand that heteronormativity is the norm, have encouraged their learners to engage in heterosexual relationships. Evidence of this is widespread in patriarchal societies (Msibi, 2011). In these societies, learners who identify with sex, gender or sexuality diversities are regarded as being 'deviant' by their educators (Msibi, 2015). Unfortunately, sex, gender and sexuality diverse people are thus forced to engage in heteronormative behaviour in an attempt to gain acceptance by their peers and educators (Msibi, 2012).

The opinions of Fatima and Shireen are compatible with the heterosexual matrix (Valocchi, 2005). The heterosexual matrix postulates that individuals will only be attracted to the opposite sex (Valocchi, 2005). The heterosexual matrix also furthers the belief that sex, gender and sexuality diversities are abnormal (Valocchi, 2005). In these situations, sex, gender and sexuality

diversities will ultimately be silenced within the school (Bhana, 2021). Since queer theory aims to challenge both the belief that heterosexuality is the norm and the heterosexual matrix, the educators' opinions are in contrast to those of queer theorists (Francis, 2021; Gamson & Moon, 2004).

However, the educators' opinions are not isolated to Rainbow Primary School and are instead prevalent in South African schools in general (Francis & Monakali, 2021; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019; Mayeza & Vincent, 2019). South African researchers have concluded that teachers predominantly believe that heterosexuality is the norm (Francis & Monakali, 2021; Mayeza & Vincent, 2019; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019). The authors of these studies note that the teachers sampled understood gender as a fixed and rigid concept, which ultimately influenced their belief that learners desire the opposite sex and consequently engage in heterosexual relations (Mayeza & Vincent, 2019; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019). By understanding gender in this context, the teachersmarginalised and silenced sex, gender and sexuality diversities within these schools (Mayeza & Vincent, 2019; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019).

In this theme, I discussed the educators' views on childhood sexualities. The view that childhood sexuality does exist was common among them (including of LO educators such as Meera). In the next theme, I discuss the educators' views on teaching about sexuality in primary schools.

5.6 Primary school learners are too young to get educated about sexuality and gender

Several educators believed that primary school learners are too young to be educated on sex, gender and sexuality diversities. Some selected responses are discussed below.

Fatima: *"No I don't think so. They are just too young to be taught about diverse sexualities. They should focus on the subjects that they are taught such as maths and science and get prepared for high school. Maybe diverse sexualities is too complex for children to understand. We also don't know if the parents will approve of their children learning about diverse sexualities. I personally think that diverse sexualities should not be taught in school because only subject related matters should be taught in the school. The learners should get this information from their families. In terms of gender education, I think that it would be a waste of time because the learners will already have a good idea of their gender by the time they attend primary school."*

Fatima here leans on the strictness of the curriculum to corroborate her belief that sexuality should not be a focal point of her lessons. She explicitly comments that school is for academic matters only. In her opinion, the learners' parents should take the responsibility for educating their children on diverse sexualities. Fatima acknowledges that gender is a separate matter and is fixed before school entry. She seems to have the idea that the learners' genders are uniformly consistent with their sex. However, she incorrectly conflates gender and sex. She consequently buys in to the dichotomous view that an individual's gender consists of two categories. She also believes thatchildren are aware of their gender when they attend school.

Simon believes that learners should gain knowledge on gender but says that learners should not be educated on sexuality.

Simon: *"Maybe on gender but no, they are too young to be educated on sexuality. They would not understand this and should not be exposed to sexuality until they are older. I think in certain areas primary school children are innocent and educating them on sexuality will make them lose their innocence. Also, maybe they wouldn't even understand sexuality. This might be beyond their capabilities or perhaps they are too immature at this stage of their lives to learn about sexuality. But I think that older students in high school should be educated on these topics."*

Simon thinks that it is acceptable for learners to attain knowledge of their gender. However, he feels that it is inappropriate for the learners to obtain knowledge of sexuality. His reasoning is that children will 'lose their innocence' if they are educated on sexuality. These comments imply that Simon does not believe in childhood sexuality. Simon thinks that gender and sexuality would be suitable subjects in secondary schools, where learners have already reached puberty. His thoughts are consistent with the findings that have been obtained from influential studies already conducted in the gender and sexuality field (Bhana, 2016; MacNaughton, 2000; Paechter, 2007). The authors of these studies concluded that teachers believe that primary school learners do not require an education on their sexuality or gender (Bhana, 2016; MacNaughton, 2000; Paechter, 2007; Paechter, 2017). The educators believe this because they are of the opinion that their learners are inherently innocent, gender-neutral and asexual (Bhana, 2016; MacNaughton, 2000; Paechter, 2007; Paechter, 2017). Unfortunately, this perception does not take cognisance of the important role of sexuality and gender in childhood development (Reygan, 2016). A commonality between Simon and Fatima's opinions was the belief that primary school learners are too young to understand lessons on gender and sexuality.

Additionally, Simon and Fatima asserted that children only become aware of their sexuality when they reach puberty. Thus, the educators denied the existence of childhood sexuality (Bhana, 2016).

By neglecting gender and sexuality, the educators could implicitly reinforce patriarchal gender elations and heteronormativity within the school (Bhana, 2012; Bhana, 2016; Paechter, 2017). Moreover, gender inequalities might also be maintained between the sexes in schools and gender stereotypes reinforced (Brown & Buthelezi, 2020; Mayeza et al., 2021). The educators, by failing to acknowledge either gender or sexuality, are unable to challenge these issues (Bhana, 2016; Bhana et al., 2021; Govender & Bhana, 2021). However, certain educatorsat Rainbow Primary School do have contrasting opinions. These teachers believe that it is imperative for learners to get educated on gender and sexuality. Their opinions will be elaborated upon below.

Clifford: *"Society is changing at an exponential rate in terms of what children are exposed to. The children are not equipped to deal with these issues which used to be in the domain of adults previously. There is a high rate of teenage pregnancies and abuse and suicide and these things, which also lead to drug abuse. I feel that these things can be dealt with (not completely) by education at schools. The hope seems to be that very few homes have a proper dialogue on these topics and schools are the idea place to do it. The challenge is wrapping educator's minds on these concepts. They are parents and come from both different generations and cultures where sex and sexuality is not something that is openly spoken about in the home. Especially in the primary school age."*

Clifford feels that children will eventually gain exposure to gender and sexuality due to social factors. His perception is that children are not adequately prepared to deal with gender and sexuality hence there is a need for them to gain exposure to these concepts in school. Clifford's belief resonates with South African scholars who have mentioned that incorporating gender and sexuality into the curriculum has the potential to reduce gender-based violence and teenage pregnancy (Bhana, 2012; Shefer et al., 2015; Wilmot & Naidoo, 2014). By mentioning teenage pregnancies too, Clifford focuses on how gender and sexuality education might have a positive impact on heterosexual relationships. But while doing so, Clifford implicitly suggests that heterosexual relations are the norm. Moreover, in his answer, Clifford fails to mention sex, gender and sexuality diversities.

There would be numerous benefits for individuals who identify with sex, gender and sexuality diversities if educators were to discuss sexuality and gender with their learners (Mayeza et al., 2021; Misawa, 2013; Preston, 2013). Perhaps the most important benefit would occur if individuals who identified with sex, gender and sexuality diversities became more secure with their identities during their schooling career (Preston, 2013). There is a tacit acknowledgement from Clifford that teachers may oppose educating learners on gender and sexuality. This opinion is consistent with the current South African literature wherein teachers clearly state their discomfort with educating learners on gender and sexuality (Bhana, 2012; Reygan & Francis, 2015; Shefer et al., 2015).

Vanitha focuses on tolerance in her statement.

Vanitha: *"I feel that children need to be taught tolerance and they need to be accepting of everyone regardless of how they look, act or talk. They might just be more accepting of gender and diverse sexualities when they are older if they learn about gender and diverse sexualities in their youth. It is also very important for them to learn about gender and diverse sexualities, so they might also be protected from abuse."*

Interviewer: *"How would they be protected from abuse?"*

Vanitha: *"All children are exposed to the internet and social media. Learners are naturally curious and if they are unsure of gender and diverse sexualities, they might interact with predators on the internet as they search for information. Schools can prevent this by educating the learners and providing them with the facts and information that they require. In South Africa, this is very important because we live in such a violent country"*

Vanitha concurs with Clifford by stating that primary school learners should be educated on gender and sexuality in order to protect themselves from abuse. However, her reasoning differs from Clifford's in one critical aspect. Vanitha feels that learners will be more tolerant and accepting towards sex, gender and sexuality diversities if they are educated on these concepts in their youth. Her opinion is consistent with South African educators who believe that sex, gender and sexuality diversities should be tolerated (Mostert et al., 2015). However, merely 'tolerating' individuals who are sex, gender and sexuality diverse should not be encouraged (van Lisdonk et al., 2017). Researchers have mentioned that tolerance is a phenomenon that encourages individuals to tolerate a phenomenon that they dislike (van Lisdonk et al., 2017). Tolerating a phenomenon is thus encouraged by society to promote harmony (van

Lisdonk et al., 2017). Therefore, advocating for tolerance has limitations and it is preferable to focus on acceptance and inclusion (van Lisdonk et al., 2017). Indeed, ensuring that society is accepting and inclusive towards sex, gender and sexuality diversities is perhaps the most important aim of educating individuals on sexuality and gender (Msibi, 2019; van Lisdonk et al., 2017).

Vanitha, in her statement, neglects two of the most pertinent aims of educating learners on sex, gender and sexuality diversities; namely, inclusion and respect (Francis & DePalma, 2015). Learners who identify with sex, gender and sexuality diversities strive for acceptance, inclusion and respect from their educators, peers and society (Francis & DePalma, 2015). Vanitha briefly mentions the high rate of violence in the country and feels that obtaining knowledge of gender and sexuality might prevent children from becoming victims of sexual abuse. Vanitha's opinion is consistent with that of researchers who have also expressed the belief that increased knowledge on sexuality and gender might reduce the high rate of violence against women and individuals who identify with sex, gender and sexuality diversities in South Africa (Bhana, 2012; Morrell et al., 2012; Msibi, 2019; Reygan, 2016).

Carol thinks that learners should attain an education on sexuality and gender to ensure that they obtain the correct information on these concepts. She states that:

Carol: *"Yes because that's where things start, we can't wait for them to grow older. They can talk to their friends and sometimes get information, which is misleading, or not enough. If we teach them they can get proper information from their teachers or their elders."*

Carol feels that learners need to get educated on gender and sexuality in primary schools because they develop an interest in these concepts at this stage of their lives. She states that teachers should have the responsibility to ensure that their learners are educated and subsequently obtain the correct information on sexuality and gender. Carol's opinion is prudent when considering that the internet has made sure that children do have easy access to almost all information. However, children might glean incorrect ideas, or be unable to attain the pertinent facts if they search for knowledge on the internet. Therefore, as Carol states, educating learners on gender and sexuality is necessary to prevent this scenario from occurring.

Having presented and analysed the educators' opinions on whether the learners should be educated on sexuality and gender in this theme, the next will discuss educators' views about which subject teachers should incorporate sexuality and gender into their lessons.

5.7 Sexuality and gender should be in the LO teachers' domain

The respondents were asked who should educate their learners on gender and sexuality. The predominant view among the educators was that sexuality and gender should be taught by specialist educators. They stated that LO teachers should bear the responsibility for educating learners on their gender and sexuality. This section begins by analysing Fatima's statement.

Fatima: *"I think LO teachers. They are equipped to teach on gender and diverse sexualities. I read that diverse sexualities is supposed to be included in the LO curriculum so LO teachers have the mandate to teach on diverse sexualities, they also have the information that is necessary on diverse sexualities. Any other subject teacher wouldn't be allowed to stray away from the approved curriculum and anyway we don't have the knowledge to teach learners on diverse sexuality."*

Fatima feels that LO teachers are the ones best equipped to educate learners on gender and sexuality. Fatima's opinion might be influenced by the belief that LO educators have obtained a special training on sex, gender and sexuality diversities (DePalma & Francis, 2014). She also mentionsthat she herself does not have the requisite knowledge of sexuality or gender. Fatima's belief that shelacks knowledge of sexuality and gender is also prevalent among LO educators (Brown & Buthelezi, 2020). Indeed, LO educators have stated that they lack knowledge on sexuality and gender (Brown & Buthelezi, 2020).

Researchers have concluded that insufficient knowledge of sexuality and gender among educators might be an underlying reason for the perpetuation of heteronormativity within schools (Brown & Buthelezi, 2020). She then leans on the curriculum to justify her view that LO teachers should bear the responsibility of educating learners on gender and sexuality. However, as mentioned, previous studies have noted that the LO curriculum does not encourage educators to explicitly discuss sex, gender and sexuality diversities (DePalma & Francis, 2014). Wilmot & Naidoo (2014) have alluded to the fact that the LO curriculum silences sex, gender and sexuality diversities. Fatima's comments are consistent with many other educators who feel that LO educators should be tasked with educating learners on gender and sexuality. Yasthi added that women are more suited to teach such subjects.

Yasthi: *"I think that females are most suited, in the school situation, Life Skills and Natural Sciences. Ladies should teach this because they have a motherly approach."*

Yasthi, an LO teacher, maintains that LO teachers, alongside natural science teachers should be tasked with educating their learners on gender and sexuality. Yasthi attributes an individual's gender and sexuality to natural or biological processes by mentioning natural science educators. Yasthi indicates that female educators should educate learners about sexuality and gender simply because they have a motherly approach to teaching. Yasthi, with her declaration, implicitly preserves a longstanding gender stereotype that female educators are motherly in their teachingstyle (Moosa & Bhana, 2020).

Fatima and Yasthi's assumptions are consistent with others who assert that LO teachers should have knowledge on gender and sexuality (DePalma & Francis, 2014). However, previous research has indicated that LO teachers themselves feel inadequately prepared and very much see the needto enhance their knowledge on gender and sexuality (DePalma & Francis, 2014; Francis & DePalma, 2015). Perhaps this might be why LO teachers do not discuss sex, gender and sexuality diversities in their lessons (DePalma & Francis, 2014; Francis & DePalma, 2015). Itis important to note that there were disparities in the educators' opinions. Some educators state that the entire staff must educate the learners on sexuality and gender.

Carol's comment is analysed next and she provides a contrasting viewpoint to her peers.

Carol: *"All teachers. You don't need to be an LO teacher to teach the learners about growing up. All teachers have the experience of growing up and should teach the learners based on their experience."*

Carol feels that each educator should be able to teach their learners about sexuality and gender. Carol then notes that sexuality and gender are crucial components of growing up, showing that she understands that educators have experienced issues based on their own gender and sexuality and she feels that the teachers' experiences are sufficient to educate the learners. She, therefore, states that LO educators are not explicitly required to ensure that learners gain knowledge on sex, gender and sexuality diversities.

Vanitha echoes Carol's sentiments by agreeing that all teachers should ensure that their learners are educated on gender and sexuality.

Vanitha: *"I think that all teachers need to do this. I think the more learners are exposed to understanding the opposite sex and diverse sexualities, it would create more tolerance as they grow up and they would not be afraid to come out if they are gay or transgender. More exposure will also create the viewpoint that it is acceptable to be a diverse sexuality. All teachers need to play a role in this regard, regardless of the subject that they teach. Each lesson should have a portion dedicated to educating learners on gender or diverse sexualities.For example, instead of using a husband and wife in the English or Afrikaans texts, maybe a same sex couple should be used. This will make the children realise that this is normal and they will eventually become more tolerant and understanding."*

Vanitha pointedly suggests that all teachers, should educate their learners on sexuality and gender regardless of the subjects they teach. She professes that learners who identify with sex, gender and sexuality diversities might potentially gain acceptance from society and become more confident within their identities.Vanitha further believes that if all educators discuss gender and sexuality, their learners will become more accepting and tolerant towards sex, gender and sexuality diversities. A further benefit might accrue if the learners can enhance their knowledge of sex, gender and sexuality diversities and ultimately challenge heteronormativity. She makes a pertinent statement as well about using same sex couples in school texts as reference points.

In the previous excerpt, Vanitha touched on an important issue within the South African curriculum, chiefly that the curriculum overtly promotes heteronormativity (Francis & Kuhl, 2020; Wilmot & Naidoo, 2014). Consequently, the South African curriculum silences and represses sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Francis, 2012; Francis & Kuhl, 2020; Wilmot & Naidoo, 2014). The South African schooling system creates the perception that sex, gender and sexuality diversities are deviants and abnormal (Francis, 2012;Francis & Kuhl, 2020). Francis & Kuhl (2020) further state that the curriculum normalises heterosexuality, promotes heterosexual relationships and reinforces gender stereotypes and gender norms. The authors subsequently conclude that there is an urgent need to include moresexual diversity within the curriculum (Francis & Kuhl, 2020). The authors believe that including more information on sex, gender and sexuality diversities in the curriculum will reduce the prejudice that sex, gender and sexuality diversities encounter at school (Francis & Kuhl, 2020). This might eventually lead to learners who identify with sex, gender and sexuality diversities gaining broader acceptance and may consequently lead to these learners actually enjoying their schooling careers.

This theme discussed the educators' opinions regarding which subject teachers should be responsible for ensuring their learners are educated on sexuality and gender. The majority of educators at Rainbow Primary School stated that LO educators should have the responsibility to ensure that learners are educated on gender and sexuality. The educators attempted to justify their opinion by stating that LO teachers have the relevant training in sexuality and gender. The following theme discusses the educators' comfort in discussing gender and sexuality with their learners.

5.8 Teachers' discomfort in discussing diverse sexualities with their learners

The preceding section detailed how the majority of educators at Rainbow Primary School feel that gender and sexuality should be taught by LO educators. When provoked to determine if they would be comfortable with educating learners on diverse sexuality during their own lessons, seven of the educators at Rainbow Primary school stated that they were not themselves comfortable with discussing diverse sexualities with their learners. This section will discuss the educators' responses.

Peter: *"When it comes to speaking about sexuality, there are so many things that go into it and younger children may not understand it. And the different types of mindsets because of the homes they come from, they may not understand it in the way we want them to. They can take it the wrong way and it may also create problems between the learners. Some may not understand and pick on their fellow learners."*

Peter states that primary school learners are not ready for discussions about sexuality. He feels that sexuality is too complex for his learners to understand. He states that each family is different and this may have an impact on the children's understanding of sexuality. Peter believes that the different backgrounds of his learners might cause friction in his classroom if sexuality is discussed. Therefore, he hypothesises that younger learners would be unable to comprehend diverse sexualities

While Peter talked about his learners' lack of capacity, Shireen pointed out that as an educator, she did not have a sufficient understanding of sexualities. Consequently, she felt that her lack of understanding had a negative impact on her ability to teach her learners about diverse sexualities. Shireen's comment is detailed below:

Shireen: *"Well I don't understand diverse sexualities enough to discuss with learners. I was also brought up without being exposed to diverse sexualities in school, so I think that my learners should not be exposed in primary school. I am also very conservative so I just won't be comfortable. I also think that parents will not approve of this because we are a conservative society.*

Interviewer: *"Why should they not be exposed to diverse sexualities in primary school?"*

Shireen: *"They are too young, they shouldn't be exposed to this at this stage. Let them learn the basic school subjects that will assist them in high schools. They can learn as they grow older. Preferably in high school from grade 10 onwards."*

Even though Shireen acknowledged her own lack of understanding and capacity to teach about sexualities, she used the same reasoning to promote the same perspective in current learners. She also openly believes that parents and society might object to the teaching of diverse sexualities to learners. Her opinion is influenced by the observation that South Africa is a conservative and patriarchal society, which overtly promotes heterosexual identities (Francis & Kuhl, 2020; Morrel et al., 2012). She attempts to rationalise her view by leaning on her background. Shireen thinks that the school environment should be reserved for purely academic matters. Therefore, she believes that sex, gender and sexuality diversities should not be mentioned in her classroom.

However, Shireen is not alone in believing that sex, gender and sexuality diversities should be neutralised. Indeed, evidence from all over South Africa has suggested that LO educators have also silenced sex, gender and sexuality diversities in this manner (Bhana, 2012; Francis, 2013). The educators who have participated in these studies have stated that schools should be reserved for purely academic purposes (Bhana, 2013; Francis, 2013). Their opinion is influenced by the belief that sex, gender and sexuality diversities do not have an impact on curriculum-related issues (Bhana, 2013; Francis, 2013). Shireen does not believe in childhood sexuality and instead feels that sexuality is relevant only for older learners who are approaching adulthood. With this statement, Shireen denies the existence of childhood sexuality.

Audrey draws on religion to explain her own heteronormative position:

Audrey: *"For me personally, it is in how I was raised. I am a Christian and a lot of our beliefs, in fact all our beliefs have the idea of male and female relationships. A man should be with a*

woman and vice versa. Being lesbian or gay is definitely unacceptable, so my religious beliefs will prevent me from talking about this. I have also grown up with the opinion that children shouldn't be exposed to diverse sexualities on any level."

Audrey's narrative discloses that she has a close-minded view of diverse sexualities. Her reflections indicate that her religious beliefs are the primary reason that she opposes educating her learners on diverse sexualities. As stated, her religion promotes exclusively heterosexual relationships. Specifically, according to Audrey, her religion is based on heteronormative ideals. As depicted previously, religion has been used to promote heterosexuality in South Africa (Msibi, 2011, Msibi, 2015). Therefore, Audrey's use of religion as a barrier against educating learners on diverse sexualities is not unique (DePalma & Francis, 2014; Francis, 2013). A significant portion of LO educators have reasoned that their religious beliefs prohibit them from discussing sex, gender and sexuality diversities in lessons (DePalma & Francis, 2014; Francis & Msibi, 2011; Francis, 2013). The LO educators in these studies have stated that sex, gender and sexuality diversities are unacceptable and should not be discussed with learners in the classroom (DePalma & Francis, 2014; Francis & Msibi, 2011).

Audrey's opinion is consistent with these educators (DePalma & Francis, 2014; Francis & Msibi, 2011). It is also apparent that Audrey, in a similar manner to Shireen, denies the existence of childhood sexuality. Since queer theory increases awareness of sexuality diversities inclusive of children, queer theory provides the tools, which can be used to challenge this limited view of childhood sexuality (Blaise, 2009). This may in turn activate the agency of the educators.

Some educators felt strongly about the importance of sexuality education. For example:

Clifford: *"Yes extremely so, I have already done this as the Natural Science teacher and having taught Life Orientation. I have been doing this for many years. The learners are shy but I break down this barrier by saying it is educational. It is normal for the children to laugh and snigger and feel embarrassed or slighted or offended if they come from a conservative home, I have been doing it responsibly and enjoyed the lessons."*

Clifford here recognises the existence of childhood sexuality and appreciates the importance of discussing diverse sexualities. Clifford expresses a willingness to discuss diverse sexualities with his learners. However, by discussing diverse sexualities during his natural science lesson, it is possible that he attributes diverse sexualities to a biological process. Thus, he

might implicitly believe in biological determinism (Connell, 1985). He further realises that his learners might not be mature enough to comprehend diverse sexualities. Nonetheless, he feels that he has incorporated diverse sexualities into his lessons in a responsible manner. His actions stand in contrast to educators who believe that their learners are too immature to understand diverse sexualities (MacNaughton, 2000). The teachers' beliefs influenced their strategy which was toneglect and silence sexuality diversities (MacNaughton, 2000).

The majority of educators at Rainbow Primary School expressed that they felt a certain degree of discomfort with discussing sexuality diversities in the classroom. The educators also felt that their learners were too young to gain anything from exposure to diverse sexualities. The educators believed that their learners would lose their innocence if they were exposed to sexuality diversities and they further thought that discussing sexuality diversities would contradict their religious beliefs. In an attempt to understand how the educators engage with learners who are sex, gender and sexuality diversities, the educators were asked to explain the strategies they currently use to promote inclusivity in their classroom. Their answers will be elaborated upon in the following section.

5.9 Sex, gender and sexuality diversities are easily identifiable

In order to investigate how my educators identified a learner who might identify with sex, gender or sexuality diversities, the participants were asked if they had encountered learners who were non-conformist in terms of their gender or sexuality. The teachers stated that they had - based on their mannerisms or physical appearance. The educators indicated that they treat all learners equally and would not differentiate between their learners. However, some educators attempted to enforce heteronormative characteristics on learners who were perceived as sex, gender and sexuality diverse. This section begins with an analysis of Yasthi's comments.

Yasthi: *"Well a few of my learners. The way they communicate, their behavioural patterns and their physical appearance. Example they love to dress in red or pink however, it is important to note that society is governed by norms and values and one is expected to behave in a particular manner now as educators we must get away from this mindset and develop a positive mindset and respect the learners' dignity."*

Yasthi infers that she identifies sex, gender or sexuality diversity by noting observable characteristics such as the learners' clothing or behaviour. By making this statement, she reinforces stereotypes regarding an individual's appearance (Msibi, 2012). In a patriarchal

society, that promotes masculinity and heteronormativity, an individual's appearance is often used to enforce heterosexuality (Msibi, 2012). Within these societies, individuals who do not adhere to socially accepted norms are viewed as sex, gender or sexually diverse (Msibi, 2012). Yasthi does acknowledge that educators, including herself, need to challenge this mindset. Peter also uses observable characteristics to identify a learner as belonging to a sex, gender and sexuality diversity. He said:

Peter: *"Based on what I have seen, I guess I have seen a male learner maybe wearing nail polish so obviously that's not something normal males would do because it's something for girls. We didn't discriminate against him or his behaviour but we encouraged him that wearing nail polish is not smooth behaviour. But he was able to express himself the way he wanted without thinking about his gender so that was good."*

Peter believed that a male learner was sex, gender or sexually diverse because the learner used nail polish. Society considers the use of nail polish as feminine and males who use nail polish are often shunned (Dean, 2011). Peter's opinion is thus synonymous with heterosexual identities that have been socially constructed over time (Dean, 2011). These heterosexual identities ensure that males must respect masculine norms, and the use of cosmetics such as nail polish is consistent with femininity (Dean, 2011). Sex, gender and sexuality diversities are subsequently marginalised and bullied by their peers if they do not adhere to traits that are consistent with masculinity (Mayeza, 2016). Peter, in his comment, perpetuates the gender binary while he further conflates the individual's sex and gender. By attempting to dissuade the learner from using nail polish, Peter has indirectly reinforced heteronormative characteristics against his learner.

Peter thereby infers that he regulates heterosexual identities. With his actions, Peter has disciplined the learner's gender and sexual identity to the detriment of sex, gender and sexuality diversity. Peter's actions and misconceptions of sex, gender and sexuality diversities are replicated wholesale in South African schools (Msibi, 2015). South African educators most often regard learners who are non-conformist as sex, gender and sexuality diverse (Francis, 2021; Msibi, 2015). Unfortunately, these same educators silence these learners during lessons and often condone homophobic bullying (Francis, 2019; Francis, 2021; Msibi, 2015). According to Msibi (2012), queer theory aims to counter this by challenging society's perception of sexual and gender identities. Thus, queer theory provides a useful tool to challenge the heterosexual identities that have been created. Ultimately, the educators' perceptions of sex,

gender and sexuality diversities might be challenged.

Simon states that he attempted to enforce heteronormative behavioural traits on his learners during sporting activities. He stated:

Simon: *"I tried to get them to play soccer when the boys are short of players but other than that I haven't really interacted with them. I prefer to observe the other boys who are all playing soccer in case they get hurt. When they attend my lessons, they are treated the same as other learners."*

Simon has only engaged with the learners to enforce heteronormative ideals onto them. Moreover, by attempting to get his learners to play soccer, Simon recreates a common gender stereotype which dictates that boys should participate in soccer games because it is a masculine sport (Paechter, 2007; Plaza et al., 2017). In South Africa, soccer is viewed as an ideal way to construct masculine and heterosexual identities (Mayeza, 2016). Simon, with his statement, has reinforced this viewpoint. He then states that he does not engage with sex, gender and sexuality diversities in his lessons and thus indirectly reveals that he treats the learners as if they do not have any sexuality.

Audrey's narrative is displayed below.

Interviewer: *"Are you aware of learners in school who do not conform to conventional sexuality? How do you know this?"*

Audrey: *"I think that I am. I have noticed that some learners don't behave in a way that conforms to the norms. Like a boy used his mother's stockings under his pants on cold days and also another boy who grew his hair long and also used earrings"*

Interviewer: *"How did you interact with these learners?"*

Audrey: *"Well personally, I didn't do anything differently with the learners, I treated them the same as I did the other learners. They were actually model students and performed well in my lessons, always contributing and participating. But the form teacher confiscated the earrings and made the boy cut his hair as this went against the dress code."*

Audrey here admits to using the learner's physical appearance to identify them as sex, gender or sexuality diverse. In her opinion, a learner who does not conform to societal expectations regarding their physical appearance might be sex, gender or sexuality diverse. She also states that she does not engage with sex, gender and sexuality diversities. In her opinion, sex, gender or sexuality diversities are similar to their peers. Her narrative reveals that certain educators rely on the school rules to ensure that heteronormativity is enforced on learners. Moreover, there is a strict adherence to the dress code, which, as indicated previously, is an important source of heteronormativity (Dunne, 2007; Paechter, 2017).

Fatima has also attempted to enforce heteronormativity upon her learners. Her narrative is discussed below.

Interviewer: *"Are you aware of learners in school who do not conform to conventional sexuality? How do you know this?"*

Fatima: *"I think that I am. When I am on duty in the playground, I have noticed that some female learners in the playground are very close. Like they hold hands and sometimes they touch each other, not inappropriately but still the physical contact was not necessary."*

Interviewer: *"How did you react to this?"*

Fatima: *"I wasn't happy with this behaviour so I reprimanded the learners and told them that they should not behave like this in the school. I told them that this was unacceptable behaviour."*

Fatima believes that physical contact between the same sex indicates that the individual might identify with sex, gender or sexual diversities. Further, she sees touching or physical contact between members of the same sex as being implicitly sexual. She also indirectly reveals that she prefers heterosexuality. This is evidenced by her unhappiness at the female learners. Additionally, her preference for heterosexuality might have influenced her attempt to enforce heteronormative traits onto the learners.

The educators thus identify learners as sex, gender or sexually diverse based on their physical appearance or mannerisms. In essence, if a learner is non-conformist in their behaviour or appearance, the educators regard the learner as sex, gender or sexuality diverse. This was a consistent trend among both LO educators, such as Yasthi and educators who did not teach LO. An important observation from this analysis was that some educators have attempted to enforce heteronormative practices on their learners. The final theme that emerged from the

analysis was that the educators attempted to ensure that all learners felt included in the classroom.

5.10 Teachers' strategies to ensure diverse sexualities are comfortable in the class

Despite the limited training and experience in teaching about gender and sexual diversities in schools, some teachers positioned themselves as agents of change and developed strategies to improve their practices. The data revealed that the educators viewed inclusivity in schooling as an important goal. The educators mentioned that they utilised various strategies to ensure that all learners felt included in their lessons. They stressed that they do not differentiate between their learners and further stated that their classrooms were inclusive to all learners.This section begins with Simon's narrative, which emphasises the importance of ensuring the comfort of all learners.

Interviewer: *"How would you accommodate diverse sexualities in your class?"*

Simon: *"I would try and make the learners feel comfortable. I will make them feel free enough to express themselves, they should be comfortable enough to just be themselves. I am also very strict on bullying in the classroom. This ensures that they won't be bullied. I also try to build trusting relationships with my learners and hopefully this encourages them to take me into their confidence."*

Simon encourages communication among his learners. He wants his learners to have the freedom to express themselves without any repercussions. Simon has also attempted to foster trust between the learners and himself. It is positive to note that Simon has attempted to be inclusive and has further attempted to prevent bullying within his classroom. However, it is evident that Simon also avoids the topics of sexuality and sexual diversities and speaks about inclusivity in general terms.

Fatima chooses to be blind to sexual diversities. She states that sex, gender and sexually diverse learners are the same as any other learner.

Fatima: *"Personally, I think that they are the same as the other learners so I will treat them equally. If all learners are treated equally, it ensures that nobody is bullied. I will also ensure that there is open communication between my learners and myself so that they will feel comfortable enough to confide in me if the need arises."*

Fatima draws on a human rights approach to education and states that she is a firm believer in equality. She adopts communication as a strategy to ensure that learners who identify with sex, gender and sexuality diversities are not bullied or harassed in her classroom. She believes that she done enough to ensure that sex, gender and sexuality diversities are included in her classroom by treating all learners equally. As discussed previously (see section 5.7), Fatima has mentioned that she lacks knowledge of sex, gender and sexuality diversities. Perhaps this lack of knowledge has impeded Fatima in her endeavours to ensure sex, gender and sexuality diversities are accommodated in her classroom. Fatima's statement that learners with non-normative gender or sexual identities are the same as their heterosexual classmates is consistent with research that was conducted by Mostert et al. (2015). The authors of this study noted that this viewpoint assisted the educators in challenging heteronormativity and ensuring that sex, gender and sexuality diversities are accepted in the classroom (Mostert et al., 2015).

Peter also mentions that allowing freedom of expression is a key strategy to achieve inclusivity.

***Peter**: "Give them the freedom of speech and the freedom to express themselves. Because I mean sexuality is not about sex. It is about the way that talk, the clothes they wear, the things that they like and their interactions with other students. So preferably when it comes to interactions it shouldn't only be male-male or female-female we should promote them to hang out with everyone so they experience each other's differences, which makes them more understanding. Because the topic is so hard for young students to understand to teach them we have to break it down and make it simpler. Instead of being so complex, they must interact with each other and we should correct them when they do it wrong. This is better than explaining it to them"*

Peter expresses an admirable understanding of an individual's potential sexuality. He acknowledges that an individual's sexuality is not limited to sex. He states that sexuality is instead based on a varietyof factors such as their choice of clothes, their way of talking and their interactions (Meyer, 2007; Singh, 2013). In his narrative, it is evident that Peter does facilitate engagement amongst learners. An important consequence of this strategy is that the learners begin to understand and respect any differences that might occur between themselves. Peter has stated that sexuality is too complicated for younger learners to understand and that such issues must be simplified to enable better understanding. He believes that allowing learners to interact with each other would assist in substantively simplifying sexuality. He recognises that learners do have the capacity to learn from each other. Peter feels that this would increase the

probability that younger learners would be able to understand the concept.

Peter's actions are compatible with the findings that were obtained by South African researchers who noted that allowing learners to engage with each other might ensure that learners who identify with sex, gender and sexuality diversities gain acceptance by their peers (Mostert et al., 2015). Furthermore, fostering open and honest communication among learners increases the possibility that sex, gender and sexuality diversities are included and feel accepted in school(Brown & Buthelezi, 2020). Thus, educators must allow their learners to freely express themselves within the classroom (Brown & Buthelezi, 2020).

This section has discussed the mechanisms that educators have utilised to ensure inclusivity in their classrooms. Each educator has attempted to ensure that their classrooms are inclusive to all learners. The next section will conclude this chapter.

5.11 Conclusion

This chapter has presented an analysis of the data that was generated from the semi-structured interviews included in my study. The data was analysed and presented thematically. Overall, nine themes were identified. The subsequent chapter presents the conclusion, summary of the main findings and recommendations that arise from this study.

Chapter Six

Conclusion, summary of findings and recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This study has attempted to understand the perceptions that primary school teachers have of sex, gender and sexuality diversities. It has attempted to contribute to the growing literature on gender, sexual diversities and schooling by investigating the perceptions that a selected group of intermediate phase teachers in a South African primary school have of sex, gender and sexuality diversities. In this concluding chapter I begin with a summary of each chapter. Thereafter, I will highlight the main findings of the study and finally offer recommendations for further research opportunities.

A key focus in this chapter is to discuss how the research questions of the study were answered.

As stated before, the research questions for this study are:

1) What are primary school teachers' understandings of sex, gender and sexuality diversities?

2) How do teachers engage with sex, gender and sexuality diversities in the primary school?

6.2 Summary of the chapters

Chapter One served as the introduction to this study. In this chapter, I discussed why it was necessary to understand primary school teachers' perceptions of sex, gender, and sexuality diversities. I have also provided the reader with a background of the issue. This chapter has also provided the rationale and significance of the study. In this chapter, I have outlined how this study aimed to contribute to the literature. The location of the study, Rainbow Primary School, was also elaborated upon. This chapter mentioned the research aims and objectives before the research methodology was discussed.

Chapter Two reviewed literature that was pertinent to the engagements that primary teachers have with sex, gender and sexuality diversities. Additionally, literature that examined primary school teachers' understanding of sex, gender and sexuality diversities was also reviewed. In this chapter, scholarly works from both a South African and international perspective were reviewed. In South Africa, there have been studies that have focused on primary school teachers'

understanding of and engagements with sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Bhana et al., 2011; Francis, 2013; Francis & DePalma, 2015; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019). However, these studies have predominantly focused on LO teachers (Bhana et al., 2011; Francis, 2013; Francis & DePalma, 2015; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019). Thus, within this chapter it was noticed that there is a scarcity of research, from a South African perspective, based on non-LO teachers' understandings of and engagements with sex, gender and sexuality diversities. The literature that has been reviewed in this section was divided into the following sections: initially studies were synthesised to understand how sex, gender and sexuality diversities are conceptualised in the literature, thereafter scholarly works were synthesised to understand how sex, gender and sexuality diversities manifest within schools, and this was followed by a section that was devoted to understanding heteronormativity and schooling, thereafter studies were synthesised to determine teachers' understanding of and engagements with sex, gender and sexuality diversities in primary schools.

Chapter Three discussed the theoretical framework that the study used to interpret the data. This study utilised the social construction of gender, gender relations theory and queer theory to analyse and interpret the data. The importance and relevance of each theory was discussed throughly.

Chapter Four provided an explanation of the research design and methodology of the study. The data collection methods that were used to collect and analyse the data were also highlighted. This study adopted a qualitative approach to collect relevant and reliable data. The interpretive paradigm was also chosen. An explanation of the purposive sampling procedure that was utilised to select the 12 participants was also provided. Semi-structured interviews were used to elicit information from the participants. The chapter also highlighted the limitations of the study while a description of the research site and a brief summary of the participants was provided. This chapter discussed the thematic analysis procedure chosen to analyse the data that was collected in the study.

Chapter Five analysed and presented the data that was collected through the semi-structured interviews. The data was presented thematically. The findings that were obtained in this study were compared to other studies, both local and international, to highlight the similarities and differences between them. The themes that emerged from the data were:

- Dominance of biological essentialism

- Reinforcing a binary view of gender
- Children learn about gender from society and family
- Childhood sexuality does not exist
- Primary school learners are too young to get educated about sexuality and gender
- Sexuality and gender should be in the LO teachers' domain
- Teachers' discomfort in discussing diverse sexualities with their learners
- Sex, gender and sexuality diversities are easily identifiable
- Teachers' strategies to ensure diverse sexualities are comfortable in the class

This section has provided a summary of each chapter. The next section discusses the main findings that were obtained. The subsequent section is divided into two sub-themes, each addressing one of the research questions.

6.3 Main findings

What are primary school teachers' understandings of sex, gender and sexuality diversities?

This study found that educators have varying understandings of sex, gender and sexuality diversities, with the majority having a limited understanding with some contradictory explanations. It was noted that a substantial number of the educators conflated sex with gender. Furthermore, several educators stated that gender is a biological concept synonymous with an individual's sex. Overall, the educators seemed to reinforce notions of biological essentialism. It was also noted that the gender binary is perpetuated at Rainbow Primary School. This was evident as most of the educators predominantly discussed every individual's gender in binary terms. Indeed, these educators mentioned explicitly that gender consisted of two categories. According to the educators, an individual's gender revealed if they were either a male or a female.

It was also noted that the educators subscribed to an important characteristic of the social construction of gender. In this instance, the educators mentioned that children learn about their gender with their family or society's assistance. Certain educators also stated that children become sexualised through external influences such as the media. Butler (1990) and Connell (1995) have similarly described the influence that society has on the construction of gender and sexual identities. Thus, the educators' opinions on how gender and sexual identities are constructed resonate with these seminal researchers. Some of the educators have explicitly stated that they do not have a sufficient level of knowledge of sex, gender and sexuality

diversities. Their lack of knowledge has two significant consequences.

Firstly, gender stereotypes were recreated or reinforced in Rainbow Primary School by the educators whenever they allocated tasks based on the learners' sex. The second consequence was that a culture of heteronormativity prevailed in the school. Indeed, some educators indirectly perpetuated heteronormativity at the expense of sex, gender and sexuality diversities. According to Dunne (2007), gender stereotypes and heteronormativity are prevalent in schools when teachers lack knowledge of sexuality and gender.

It was noted that the teachers were aware of sexual identities that are commonly spoken of in the media, such as bisexual, gay and lesbian. However, they were unaware of various sexual identities that exist under the sexuality diversities umbrella. These observations resonate with the findings that were made by Francis & Monakali (2021) who noted that educators lack awareness of the various sexual identities. Furthermore, the educators felt that an individual's sexuality is restricted to either heterosexuality or homosexuality. Therefore, similar to other research findings (for example Francis, 2017; Francis, 2019), it was evident that the sexuality binary was reinforced at Rainbow Primary School, where the majority of educators also had the impression that heterosexual relationships are the norm.

An additional finding was that a substantial number of educators denied the existence of childhood sexuality. This observation is not new and is consistent with the findings that were made by other researchers (Bhana, 2015; Francis & DePalma, 2015). In Rainbow Primary School, the educators stated that children are not sexualised and instead begin to develop an awareness of their sexuality during puberty, with societal assistance. The educators' denial of childhood sexuality then had ancillary effects. This was evidenced by the educators who felt that sexuality did not warrant any discussion during their lessons. Some of the teachers explicitly stated that they were uncomfortable with discussing sex, gender and sexuality diversities at all. These educators' opinions were influenced by the belief that children are innocent and are too young to be exposed to such topics. Indeed, some educators stated that a discussion on sexuality would ensure that the learners would lose their innocence. As stated by others, educators who subscribe to this viewpoint hypothesise that learners are innocent (Bhana, 2015; MacNaughton, 2000).

In several studies, it was noted that a belief in childhood innocence prevents educators from recognising the impact that gender and sexuality have on the daily lives of primary school learners (Bhana, 2018). Blaise (2009) has mentioned that educators should enhance their understanding of sexuality, inclusive of sexuality diversities. Moreover, South African studies have suggested that developing an understanding of sexuality is necessary because children are sexual beings, while sexuality also has an effect on the daily activities of children (Bhana, 2016; Bhana et al., 2021).Thus, educators should play an integral role in assisting their learners to develop an understanding of sexuality (Bhana, 2016; Bhana et al., 2021). This process can be successful if the educators strive to enhance their knowledge of sexuality.

The educators also imposed judgement on their learner's physical appearance or mannerisms to characterise them as non-normative. Specifically, if a learner did not conform to societal expectations regarding their behaviour or appearance, the educators assumed that the learner was non-normative. Thus, the educators think that a non-normative individual is easily identifiable by their behaviour or physical characteristics. These findings are consistent with international and local research, where categorising individuals based on their physical appearance is a common occurrence in heteronormative societies (Dean, 2011; Mayeza, 2016). Mayeza (2016) has mentioned that once individuals are categorised as non-normative, they are often the victims of bullying.

It was noted that many educators at Rainbow Primary school did not understand that children are sexualised and gendered. Additionally, they did not realise that sexuality and gender permeate the entire school, including their classrooms (Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019; Swanepoel & Beyers, 2019). These factors might prevent the educators from discussing sexuality and gender during their lessons (Francis & DePalma, 2015; Preston, 2013). By discussing gender and sexuality in their lessons, the educators could enhance their learners' knowledge of sexuality and gender. Consequently, the educators might have a positive influence on their learners' attitudes towards sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Francis & DePalma, 2015). However, a few educators displayed a broader understanding of sex, gender and sexuality diversities in comparison to their colleagues. These educators mentioned that an individual's sex and gender are not synonymous and differentiated between sex and gender. Furthermore, these educators rejected a completely biological view and demonstrated some understanding of gender as non-binary. It was noted that certain educators also displayed an awareness of diverse sexualities. In this instance, the educators did display an understanding of a wide range of sexual identities

and discussed sexuality in non-binary terms. Indeed, the educators understood that an individual's sexuality is not limited to homosexuality or heterosexuality.

How do teachers engage with sex, gender and sexuality diversities in the primary school?

The findings of this study show that most of the educators did not specifically engage with sex, gender or sexuality diversities in their classrooms. Some educators chose to ignore sexuality diversities completely and instead preferred to talk about inclusivity in general terms. It was also noted that some of the educators stated that it was more suitable for the learners to engage with each other. This strategy was used to simplify discussions of sexuality. Certain educators' engagements with non-conforming learners were punctuated by attempts to enforce heteronormative ideals. This practice was explicitly observed when educators told their male learners to cut their hair and confiscated their jewellery. Occasionally, learners were reprimanded if they did not behave in a conventional manner, namely in a manner synonymous with heterosexuality. Some educators have also stated that they are of the opinion that topics which are based on sex, gender and sexuality diversities should only be discussed in the LO classroom. These educators have revealed a preference for LO teachers to discuss and perhaps engage with sex, gender or sexuality diversities.

Overall, the educators mentioned that they wanted to create an environment where all their learners were comfortable. They discussed strategies that they used to ensure that each learner was treated fairly and equally. The educators' attempts to attain equality in their classrooms for all learners was positive. Indeed, no participant explicitly stated that they would not engage with sex, gender or sexuality diversities. The educators also exhibited a willingness to be inclusive towards sex, gender or sexuality diverse learners. To ensure that their classrooms were inclusive, the educators stated that they had encouraged their learners to communicate their feelings. This strategy allowed the learners the ability to speak freely in the classroom. The strategy of encouraging communication between learners is prevalent in South African schools (Brown & Buthelezi, 2020). Brown & Buthelezi (2020) add that good communication in the classroom has the potential to assist non-normative learners in gaining acceptance from their peers.

However, in Rainbow Primary School, the main aim of fostering good communication was not to ensure that individuals who identified with sex, gender and sexuality diversities were accepted. Instead, the educators intended to prevent learners from becoming the victims of

harassment or bullying incidents.In one instance, an educator explicitly advocated for tolerating non-normative individuals. As depicted in the previous section, there was a general lack of knowledge and awareness of sex, gender and sexuality diversities among the educators at Rainbow Primary School. It was encouraging to note that despite the limited training and experience in teaching about gender and sexual diversities among the educators at Rainbow Primary School, certain teachers had positioned themselves as agents of change. These educators had developed strategies to improve their practices and ensure that their classrooms and lessons were inclusive. These educators viewed inclusivity in schooling as a crucial goal.

Indeed, some non-LO educators mentioned that they would be willing to discuss sexuality diversities in their lessons. They added that they did not differentiate between conformist and non-conformist learners. The educators stated that they regularly engaged with learners who were perceived as non-conformists and they encouraged inclusivity amongst learners. The educators' attitudes towards non-conformist learners contrasts with previous research which indicates that non-conformist learners are often silenced and marginalised in South African schools (Francis, 2019; Francis, 2021; Msibi, 2015).

This section has discussed the main findings of the study, which have made clear that the educators of Rainbow Primary School have a limited understanding of sex, gender and sexuality diversities. It was also noticed that the educators were uncomfortable with discussing sex, gender and sexuality diversities with their learners. It was also noted that the educators' educational background or years of experience had no impact on their understanding of sex, gender and sexuality diversities. The vague and sometimes contradictory understandings that the educators have of sex, gender and sexuality diversities have obviously led to gendered stereotypes becoming prevalent in the school. Additionally, this limited knowledge of sex, gender and sexuality diversities led to the creation of gender roles and gender stereotypes within the school. The educators' engagements with sex, gender and sexuality diversities are also impacted by their lack of knowledge of these concepts. The educators have attempted to be inclusive; however, some educators have indirectly enforced heteronormative practices onto their learners.

The next section will provide the recommendations that have arisen from this study.

6.4 Recommendations to improve the understanding of sex, gender and sexuality diversity among educators

Schools are social institutions that are highly gendered and sexualised (Bhana, 2015). Gender and sexuality impact the daily activities and interactions that occur at school (Meyer, 2007). Accordingly, gender and sexuality researchers have mentioned that learners and educators should have a more nuanced understanding of sexuality and gender (Bhana, 2016; Francis, 2021; Msibi, 2019). Through both the literature review and the main findings, this study has made the case that educators have a vague understanding of sex, gender, and sexuality diversities. This limited knowledge is not without consequences. Indeed, gender stereotypes are perpetuated while heteronormativity is enforced at the expense of sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Francis, 2019; Msibi, 2019). Thus, there is an urgent need for educators to enhance their knowledge of sex, gender and sexuality diversities. This section will provide recommendations that might enhance educators' knowledge of sexuality and gender.

6.4.1 Recommendations for practice

Since gender and sexuality permeate the entire school, all educators, should have the requisite knowledge of gender and sexuality regardless of the subjects they teach. Therefore, I suggest that all teachers undertake a compulsory module devoted to gender and sexuality during their undergraduate degree. This module would focus on enhancing knowledge and awareness of the various sexual identities. The module should aim to eradicate stereotypes and prejudice against sex, gender and sexuality diversities. With increased knowledge and awareness of gender and sexuality, educators might feel more comfortable in discussing gender and sexuality issues during their teaching careers. Moreover, after completing the module, the educators might realise the importance of incorporating sexuality and gender into their lessons. With an increased awareness of sex, gender and sexuality diversities, the educators might refrain from reinforcing and promoting heteronormativity in their classrooms. Additionally, with further knowledge of sex, gender and sexuality diversities, the educators might become agents of change (Msibi, 2019; Reygan & Francis, 2015).

It would be especially beneficial if experts in the field of gender and sexuality are utilised by the DoE to develop a comprehensive and fully inclusive curriculum that normalises and legitimises sex, gender and sexuality diversities. Teachers should use the inclusive curriculum to focus on educating learners about sex, gender and sexuality diversities (Reygan, 2016). If sex, gender and sexuality diversities are included in the curriculum, educators and learners might be encouraged to engage in proper discussions on these concepts (Ngabaza et al., 2016). A benefit of including sex, gender and sexualities in the curriculum is that learners might obtain correctand relevant information on sex, gender and sexuality diversities from their educators.

Consequently, they would not then rely on information from the media, which might be incorrect.

6.4.2 Recommendations for theory

I also recommend that educators obtain some knowledge of queer theory. Sex, gender and sexuality diversities might benefit if two important tenets of queer theory are adopted at Rainbow Primary School. First, since the fundamental aim of queer theory is to actively challenge the perception that there is a homosexual and heterosexual binary, individuals who identity with sex gender and sexuality diversities will eventually become more secure with their identities (Butler, 1990). Second, because queer theory further attempts to normalise sex, gender and sexuality diversities, there is a significant possibility that individuals who identify with sex, gender and sexuality diversities might gain acceptance within the school (Msibi, 2019). Consequently, queer theory might be a useful tool, which can be utilised to improve the schooling experience of learners who identify with sex,gender and sexuality diversities.

Furthermore, queer theorists acknowledge that heterosexuality, gender norms and the sex-sexuality-gender binary are reinforced within schools (Gamson & Moon, 2004; Msibi, 2019). However, they further postulate that schools provide the ideal site for learners to challenge heteronormativity and ensure that individuals who identity with sex, gender and sexuality diversities are accepted and included (Francis & Kuhl, 2020; Msibi, 2019). A feasible manner through which schools can be used to challenge the assumption of heteronormativity might be through the normalisation of sex, gender and sexuality diversities in the curriculum (Francis & Kuhl, 2020; Ngabaza et al., 2016). Learners will enhance their knowledge and understanding of sex, gender and sexuality diversities during their lessons and individuals who identify with sex, gender and sexuality diversities might become accepted as the crucial members of society they are (Francis & Kuhl, 2020).

Similarly, educators should enhance their knowledge of the social construction of gender. If this process occurs, they will understand that their actions in the classroom have a significant role to play in the construction of their learners' sexual and gender identities. They might also understand the importance of sexuality and gender and consequently refrain from engaging in heteronormative practices. Educators may additionally reduce the prevalence of gender stereotypes in their classrooms. Schools in conjunction with the DoE should implement gender and sexuality awareness programmes for the benefit of parents, community members and the unions. These programmes should be conducted by gender and sexuality experts. The aim of the awareness programmes should be to increase the knowledge that these stakeholders

have of sex, gender and sexuality diversities. Indeed, the literature that has been reviewed in this study has alluded that each of these stakeholders has opposed the idea that gender and sexuality should be discussed in South African schools (Francis, 2013, Francis & DePalma, 2015; Francis & Kuhl, 2020). With awareness programmes that are designed to increase knowledge of gender and sexuality, these key stakeholders might realise the importance of gender and sexuality. Open dialogue between the stakeholders and the gender and sexuality experts should be encouraged.This might reduce misinformation and correct misconceptions that the stakeholders have of sexuality and gender. Eventually, the stakeholders might remove their opposition towards the inclusion of gender and sexuality into the curriculum altogether.

6.4.3 Recommendations for policy

The DoE should additionally implement policies that ensure that all learners are comfortable and accepted, inclusive of sex, gender and sexuality diversities. An example of a policy that could be implemented is the removal of the requirement that sports teams have to consist of solely one sex. The principal of each school should then enforce these policies. Furthermore, the key decision-makers in each school - chiefly the principal, deputy principal and heads of department – should attend courses to obtain the requisite knowledge of gender and sexuality. It is imperative that these decision-makers enhance their knowledge of gender and sexuality because they implement and enforce the school rules. As mentioned previously, the rules and regulations within schools are important sources of heteronormativity (Paechter, 2017). Thus, if the decision makers can enhance their knowledge of gender and sexuality, school rules might be changed to ensure that heteronormative practices are challenged. Learners who identify as sex, gender or sexuality diverse might feel newly accepted and included in their schools.

In terms of further research possibilities, I recommend that studies which aim to understand the perceptions that foundation phase educators and high school educators have of sex, gender and sexuality diversities be conducted. I suggest that this is necessary since these educators also have an integral role in the construction of gender and sexuality identities. A key finding from this study revealed how educators attempted to enforce heteronormative practices on learners that were perceived as having a non-normative sex, gender or sexuality identity thus I recommend that further research should also be conducted to specifically understand the engagements that foundation phase educators and high school educators have with sex, gender and sexuality diversities. A study of this nature might reveal if educators in these phases enforce heteronormative practices, which should be challenged.

6.5 Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the perceptions that primary school teachers have of sex, gender and sexuality diversities. In South Africa, research has predominantly been conducted on the perception that LO educators have of sex, gender and sexuality diversities. Researchers have failed to focus on other staff members' perceptions of sex, gender, and sexuality diversities. Thus, this study has attempted to contribute to the literature by building the understanding of primary school teachers' perceptions of sex, gender, and sexuality diversities. The key findings from this study have inferred that the educators have a limited and contradictory understanding of sex, gender and sexuality diversities which has negative implications for their engagements with sex, gender and sexuality diversities in their practices. Since gender and sexuality permeate the entire school, all educators, regardless of the subjects that they teach, should ultimately have the requisite knowledge of gender and sexuality.

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Appendix 1 Informed Consent

Dear Participant

23 March 2021

I am a masters student specialising in Gender Education, at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I would like to invite you to participate in a study that I am undertaking. A brief description of the study follows:

Title: Teachers' perceptions of sex, gender and sexuality diversities: evidence from a Durban primary school

This study seeks to add to academic literature by investigating the understanding that primary school teachers have on sex, gender and sexuality diversities. Prior research has suggested that gender and sexuality diversities are socially constructed while schools have an important role in the social construction of these concepts. Within schools teachers have a crucial role in assisting learners to develop an understanding of gender and sexuality diversities. Additionally, the Department of Education has realised the important role that schools have in educating learners on sexuality diversities and gender. This is evidenced by the inclusion of these concepts in the Life Orientation (LO) and Life Skills (LS) curriculum. However, children spend a limited amount of time in LO or LS lessons each week and sexuality and gender are widespread in schools. These concepts are not limited to the LO or LS classroom. Therefore, a multi-stakeholder approach, which includes the entire staff, is required to ensure that sex, gender and sexuality diversities is successfully taught in schools. This study is qualitative and data will be collected through semi-structured interviews.

Please note that:

- You have not been purposively selected, but have volunteered to participate in this study. You have a choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research at any time that you feel you no longer want to continue. You will not be penalised for taking such an action.
- Your identity shall remain anonymous at all times and pseudonyms will be utilised in this study to protect your identity and the identity of the school
- There are no financial incentives or financial benefits involved in this study. Your involvement is purely for academic purposes only.

- The interviews will be 45 minutes to 60 minutes long. These times can be altered to suit your timetable and will be conducted telephonically or through online methods such as Zoom or WhatsApp video calls. It is necessary to conduct the interviews in this manner to respect the Covid-19 protocols.
- With your permission, interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed and made accessible to you to verify information obtained.
- After collection of data, all recordings and transcriptions will be validated with you by sending through both the transcripts and recordings of both the sessions.
- Data will be stored in secure storage and destroyed after 5 years
- A report on the findings will be emailed to you.

My supervisor, Professor Shakila Singh may be contacted via email. Her email address is singhs7@ukzn.ac.za.

If you require any further information, please contact the Higher Research Degrees Edgewood Office. The email address is hssrec@ukzn.ac.za

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Navisha Sewnath

[redacted]

Email: 208508419@stu.ukzn.ac.za

navisha.sewnath1@gmail.com

Appendix 2 Semi-structured interview schedule (individual interview)

1 How many years of teaching experience do you have?

2 What are your qualifications?

3 What is your age?

4 What subjects do you teach?

5 Do you believe that there is a difference between an individual's sex and their gender? Yes there is a difference

5.1 If yes, in your opinion, what is the difference?

5.2 What are the differences between girls and boys in terms of behaviour, capabilities etc?

6.1 At what age do you think children become aware of their sexuality? Why do you say so?

6.2 At what age do you think children become aware of their gender? Why do you say so?

7 Do you believe that primary school learners should be educated on gender and diverse sexualities? Please elaborate.

8 Which teachers should teach about gender and sexualities in school? Explain your answer?

9 Society believes that each gender should behave in a certain way and additionally perform specific roles. Do you agree with this? Please explain your answer in detail.

10 Did you encounter gender and diverse sexualities in the curriculum that you studied?

11 What do you understand by the term gender stereotype?

11.1 How do you think the school perpetuates gender stereotypes?

11.2 Do you think that this practice should change? Please elaborate?

12 Does the school prevent female/male learners from participating in certain activities?

12.1 Do you think that this practice should change?

13 What is your understanding of a diverse sexuality in primary school?

14 Do you feel comfortable discussing diverse sexualities with the learners?

14.1 If you do not feel comfortable, please elaborate

15 How would you accommodate diverse sexualities in your class?

15.1 How would you ensure that no bullying takes place?

16 What strategies have you used to promote inclusivity in the classroom?

16.1 Do you believe that these strategies are sufficient?

16.2 What has influenced your chosen strategies? Please elaborate further

17 Do you feel that you have done enough to ensure that learners with diverse sexualities feel accepted in the classroom?

17.1 Please explain if you have taken any measures?

18 What have you done to promote diverse sexualities when teaching?

19 Did you encounter an incident where non-conformist learners have been insulted or bullied (Perhaps a male learner who refuses to participate in a sport and instead preferred to play with female learners)? Please elaborate on your response to this incident

20 In your opinion, have you done enough to promote gender and diverse sexualities and furthermore ensure that learners are sensitive towards diverse sexualities? Please elaborate.

21 Are you aware of learners in school who do not conform to conventional sexuality? How do you know this? How did you interact with these learners?

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

18 June 2021

Miss Navisha Sewnath (208508419)
School Of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear Miss Sewnath,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00002933/2021
Project title: Teachers' perceptions of sex, gender and sexuality diversities: evidence from a Durban primary school.
Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 04 June 2021 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 18 June 2022.
To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

thesis

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13/06/2022

To Whom it May Concern,

This is just a short covering letter to confirm that every chapter of Ms. Navisha Sewnath's dissertation, submitted as a research study to achieve a Master of Education Degree under the supervision of Professor Shakila Singh, PhD, in the School of Education of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, was doubly and thoroughly proofed and edited by me (as a product of my accredited Academic Proofreading service) over the space of a month in May 2022.

Besides merely superficial adjustments and rewordings, the work is entirely the product of the collaboration between Masters candidate and supervisor.

Sincerely,

Cameron Luke Peters, MSt (Oxford).

[redacted]

Apt. 202, 7 St James Street, Vredehoek, Cape Town, 8001

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