

**Discipline and Punishment at the Nexus of Gender and Sexualities: The Voices
of Learners from a South African Township Secondary School**

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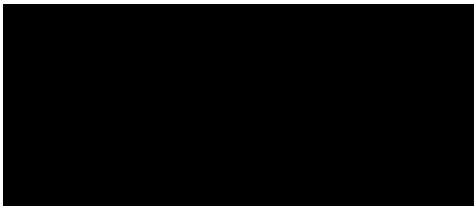
**A Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the academic requirements for the degree of Masters in
Education**

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DECLARATION

I, Melicia Bongekile Khasa, declare that:

- i. The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.
- ii. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
- iii. This thesis/ dissertation does not contain other person's data, pictures, graphs, or other information unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
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STATEMENT BY SUPERVISOR

This thesis is submitted with my approval.



Supervisor: Dr Ndumiso Daluxolo Ngidi

ABSTRACT

This study examined discipline and punishment at the intersection of gender and sexuality, focusing on narratives from learners in a South African township secondary school. Conducted in Umlazi Township, KwaZulu-Natal, the study used an interpretivist paradigm and purposive sampling to recruit 23 participants. Data were generated using participatory drawings and in-depth focus group discussions (FGDs) to explore learners' experiences of discipline. The analysis was informed by Karl Marx's conflict theory, queer theory, and Michel Foucault's ideas about discipline and punishment, using visual data analysis and thematic analysis. Findings reveal the complex mechanisms of power, control, and identity within the educational setting. Using Foucault's concepts of discipline and punishment, conflict theory, and queer theory, the study highlights the intricate layers of institutional control, gender norms, and sexual identity struggles that shape learners' experiences. The use of corporal punishment, regulation of gender and sexual identities, and reproduction of societal power structures through disciplinary practices underscore the pervasive influence of societal norms and power dynamics within the school environment. These findings advocate for a critical examination of disciplinary practices and their impact on marginalized learners, emphasizing the need for more equitable and inclusive approaches to school discipline.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to every learner who attends school at a South African township, especially the 23 learners in this study who trusted me with their experiences of school discipline. Without you this study would have not been possible. Remember to be bold. Be different. Be yourself.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- I would like to thank Qamatha the creator of all things. Thank you, Lord for giving me the strength and perseverance to complete this journey. I am grateful for the endless opportunities you have presented to me and for all the blessings you have bestowed upon me.
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CHAPTER ONE

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1.Introduction

This qualitative study examined the experiences of school discipline and punishment among learners in a township secondary school. Within this context, I engaged a group of boys and girls – some of whom self-identified as queer¹ while others self-identified as heterosexual (or straight in colloquial terms) – from a school in Umlazi Township to understand how their diverse gender identities, gender expressions and their sexual orientations shape how they experience discipline and punishment in school. Thus, I analyse learners’ experiences of school discipline and punishment from the nexus of their gender identities, gender expressions, and sexual orientations. In the African context, school discipline and punishment are old-age practices that date back as far as the colonial period (Adzahlie-Mensah & Dunne, 2018). In the post-colonial era, and particularly, in the post-apartheid South African context, the social ecology of public schools is still marked by discipline and punishment (Mahlangu et al., 2021). The International Human Rights Instrument (2007, p. 97) describes school-related discipline as:

A system of rules, punishments, and behavioural strategies appropriate for the regulation of [school] children’s [behaviour] and the maintenance of order in schools.

In other words, school-related discipline necessitates the effective control and maintenance of a conducive teaching and learning environment, both inside and outside the classroom (Segalo & Rambuda, 2018; Welsh & Little, 2018; Mahlangu, 2021). Approaches to school-related discipline and punishment range between those that are punitive (for example, corporal punishment, suspension, expulsion, etc) and those that are restorative (for example, improving the school social climate and using validating and non-violent/harmful practices). South African research in the post-apartheid period has largely examined the issue of school-related discipline and punishment from the punitive and persistent use of corporal punishment against learners (see, for example, Breen et al., 2015). Although corporal punishment has been banned in schools in the country,

¹ Queer is an umbrella term that is used to describe a wide range of gender identities and expressions and sexual orientations that do not conform to heterosexual and cisgender identities.

researchers still report on its continued widespread and everyday use (Mahlangu et al., 2021; Obadire & Sinthumule 2021; Mayisela 2018). I return to the issue of corporal punishment later in this dissertation. However, my aim here is to highlight how discipline and punishment are common encounters in South African schools (Pitsoe & Letseka, 2014; Mulaudzi & Mudzielwana, 2016; Welsh & Little, 2018; Mahlangu et al., 2021). What is missing from the literature is an analysis of school discipline and punishment from the nexus of learners' gender identities, expressions, and sexual orientations.

1.2. Study Background

International research has begun to explore school-related discipline and punishment from a gendered lens by highlighting patterns of gender inequalities in these practices (Gregory et al., 2020; Mittleman, 2018; Mittleman, 2023). For example, in the USA, scholars maintain that gender and discipline are intertwined in the schooling system (Kemp-Graham, 2018; Welsh & Little, 2018). Indeed, American scholarship points to the gendered ways in which discipline is meted out in schools (Gregory et al., 2021; Griffin, 2020). For example, schoolboys in the USA are more likely than girls to be suspended or expelled from school for similar transgressions (Fergus, 2021). Moreover, across the globe, learners' sexual orientations seem to play a significant role in their experience of school discipline and punishment. Indeed, researchers report that learners who identify as queer (i.e., lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersexed, questioning, etcetera) tend to face more punitive forms of discipline that border on discrimination and queerphobia (Elia & Eliason, 2010; Potgieter & Reygan, 2012; Warwick & Aggleton, 2014). For example, Chmielewski and Belmonte's (2016) multi-method collaborative research project, which examined the disproportionate rates and consequences of school discipline for queer learners in the public schools of New York, documented how queer learners experienced both physical and psychological victimisation through overt discrimination in school discipline practices. The authors also documented subtler, yet insidious, policing of queer learners' gender expressions and their sexual orientations.

Available scholarship has also been key in exposing the violent ways in which teachers treat certain children based on their gender identities and expressions and sexual orientations inside schools

(Gershoff, 2017; Henriksen, 2018; Mahlangu et al., 2021). For example, girls and learners who are queer identifying are counted among those who are vulnerable to victimisation and maltreatment at the hands of teachers (Chmielewski & Belmonte, 2016; Palmer & Greytak, 2017; Mittleman, 2018). While punitive acts do exist in schools and demonstrate a gross violation of children's rights (Gershoff & Font, 2016; Vogel & Morkel, 2017; Heekes et al., 2022), it is still not clear how, in South Africa, discipline is used to reinforce/reproduce acts of learner maltreatment and discrimination that intersect both gender and sexuality. Indeed, South African research has not given adequate attention to the gendered and queerphobic ways in which discipline is meted out in schools.

What is well-established from international research, as discussed above, is the fact that school discipline practices are often pervasive and harmful, and they reproduce gendered inequalities that create fertile ground for gender-based violence (Wun, 2017; Brown, 2017; Annamma et al., 2019; Griffin et al., 2020). Moreover, the use of corporal punishment, while outlawed, continues to be a daily feature of discipline practices in several schools across South Africa (Parks et al., 2016; Gershoff, 2017; Lokot et al., 2020; Morrell & Hunter, 2021). While discipline is arguably an essential part of maintaining order and safety in schools, the practice, nonetheless, accentuates gendered inequalities and queerphobia and demonstrates the outplay of power dynamics, including forced hegemonic masculinities and femininities within the schooling system (Mayeza, 2016; Mayeza & Bhana, 2021); factors, which according to Hunter and Morrell (2021) have been halting gender equality since the advent of democracy. It is within this broader scholarly background that this study was rooted.

1.3 Rationale for the study

My interest in school discipline from the vantage point of gender and sexuality emerged from my observations as a teacher. At the time of writing this dissertation, I had been teaching in the secondary school system for seven years. In my time as a professional teacher, I have observed with great concern how discipline is meted out based on a learner's gender identity or/and sexual orientation. For example, at the start of my teaching career, I taught in a school located in a rural area where teachers displayed ignorance and intolerance towards learners who openly identified

as queer. The queerphobic treatment of boys who identified as gay, for example, made me acknowledge some of the injustices that exist in the school environment. On several occasions, teachers asked these boys to ‘toughen up’ or to ‘act like a man’. Some of the teachers had a habit of administering harsher and more embarrassing forms of discipline against these learners. I also observed physical forms of discipline against boys who appeared more feminine. Both the South African and international scholarship reports on forms of forced masculinities that teachers impose on learners (Gilbert & Gilbert, 2017; Horton, 2019; Mayeza & Bhana, 2020; Bhana et al., 2021). In this way, discipline was used in this school as a so-called ‘corrective’ practice against boys who demonstrate femininity.

Another incident that caught my attention was when a girl who openly identified as lesbian was told to clean the school storage during her detention. Cleaning the storage room was a form of punishment that included the lifting of heavy boxes. When I enquired with the teacher who was instilling the punishment about why she demanded that the learner does such a challenging task, the response was that the girl displayed too much masculinity and ‘acted like a man’. Research has revealed that queer learners often experience discrimination, lack protection, and are often at the receiving end of both physical and psychological victimisation in the school (Russell, 2016; Chmielewski et al., 2016; Palmer & Greytak, 2017; Bellinger et al., 2016; Stoudt & Fine, 2016). In other words, given that cleaning is regarded as a feminine type of work, the teacher I write about here was rendering the girl into forced femininity and submission. Ironically, because the girl I write about here embodied a somewhat masculine gender representation, the teacher felt validated in making the learner lift heavy boxes. This contrasts the teachers’ beliefs that girls must be effeminate and domesticated.

In the high school I attended as a teenager, both boys and girls sometimes experienced similar disciplinary actions from teachers. However, I recall that boys occasionally received violent blows from teachers who sometimes used harmful materials such as sticks and waist belts to punish them into obedience. Indeed, during disciplinary procedures, both boys and girls received a beating of some sort; however, for boys, the beating was much more aggressive and repeated (i.e., while girls received a single beating on their hands, boys received several beatings across multiple body parts including their buttocks and backs), sometimes leaving bruises on the body parts. As I grew older

and entered the teaching profession, I began to question this unequal form of meting out punishment, with some colleagues defending their stance by suggesting that boys are more tolerant towards aggressive forms of beatings in comparison to girls (see, also, Ispa-Landa, 2017; Vogel & Morkel, 2017; Mahlangu et al., 2021; Hunter & Morrell, 2021). Moreover, boys were constructed as inherently stubborn, wild, and aggressive; thus, they needed taming in the form of punitive punishment. Likewise, for girls in my high school, discipline was often relegated to making them clean up their classrooms or the teacher staffroom after school. This included washing windows and polishing classroom floors. This was, for me, another form of forced femininity in that it reinforced the narrative of girls as domesticated and, therefore, relinquished to forms of domestic servitude (see, for example, Paechter, 2007). Even though both girls and boys received punishment for school-based transgressions, gender played an important role in terms of the form and length of discipline and punishment they experienced. In other words, as Bhana (2012) has long since observed, gender and sexuality form part of how discipline is enacted and managed in the school environment.

Chapter Two of the South African Constitution (1996) advocates for the right to freedom and dignity for all. It states that every person is entitled to human dignity; thus, children must be treated with respect and their dignity needs to be protected in the schooling environment. In this way, the law prohibits discrimination and any form of violence against learners, particularly based on their gender identities and/or sexual orientations. The South African Schools Act of 1996 also seeks to protect learners from any form of harm in the school environment. It advocates for schools that are free from any forms of violence and discrimination. Children are supposed to feel safe in schools and never have to endure any form of abuse from teachers and other learners. Likewise, the Department of Basic Education (2017) has made it clear that discipline should be used in a manner that respects the learner's human rights as transcribed in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. Globally, countries are encouraged to promote principles of equality and non-discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (Richardson & Monro, 2017; Kumar, 2023). The United Nations Convention on The Rights of The Child (1989) also stipulates that children should never lose their human rights by entering the school gates. Nonetheless, while these authoritative pieces of legislation prohibit any form of discrimination and violence in schools, not much attention has been given to the discriminatory ways that school discipline is

metered out against learners based on their diverse gender identities, expressions, and sexual orientations within the South African context.

1.4. Context of the Study

1.4.1. The Sociocultural and Political Context

This study was conducted in Umlazi, a township located about 25 kilometres south of the port city of Durban, in the greater eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality of the KwaZulu Natal (KZN) province, South Africa. Umlazi comprises informal housing settlements (i.e., shacks) and small low-income houses built by the then-apartheid government and further re-established by the democratic government in its Redistribution and Development Programme (RDP). The township was established in the 1960s for those people who were classified by the racist apartheid state as ‘Black’. These individuals were removed from the central parts of the city of Durban and housed in the outskirts to serve as labour reserves for the White capital (Hunter & Morrell, 2021).

In terms of geographic size, Umlazi is the second-largest township in South Africa (following Soweto in Gauteng), and the largest in the KZN province (Mpangase & Xaba, 2022). The township hosts a population of over half a million at the last census (Statistics South Africa, 2023). In 2022, while reporting on the country’s quarterly crime statistics, the then Minister of Police, Bheki Cele, declared Umlazi as the crime capital of the country (Phungula, 2022). The township records high and ever-increasing rates of gender-based violence and fatal assaults on children and women (Felix, 2022). Indeed, while reporting on crime statistics, Cele further declared Umlazi as the country’s epicentre for gender-based violence (GBV) and domestic violence. Umlazi is also considered the murder hotspot of South Africa, placing first for the highest documented murder rates in 2022. For example, in the period between January and March 2022, 103 murder cases were recorded in this township – signalling a 68% increase when compared to the same reporting period in 2021 – the highest rate of any community in South Africa (Yesufu, 2022).

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the township is also queerphobic. For example, in one study which explored the experiences of queer patients’ use of primary health care (PHC) services in Umlazi, researchers found that these patients experienced prejudice and queerphobic behaviour

from healthcare providers (Cele et al., 2015). Likewise, available media reports suggest that being openly queer and living in Umlazi can be fatal. The queerphobic and very public murders of Lindokuhle Cele in 2020 and Pinky Shongwe in 2022 are a demonstration of queer intolerance turned into murder in Umlazi. Cele, a 25-year-old queer activist and musician, was stabbed and left with a knife stuck in his eye in what the Durban High Court ruled as a hate crime. Shongwe, another queer activist, on the other hand, was stabbed to death, allegedly because she spurned a man who proclaimed his love for her. These cases present a snapshot of the gross violations and policing of gender and sexuality in Umlazi. In fact, discrimination, abuse, hate, and violence (including murder and the so-called act of ‘corrective rape’) against queer individuals in Umlazi continues relentlessly (see, for example, Madlala, 2019; Biyela, 2019; Phungula, 2022).

Umlazi reflects and extends negative attitudes and beliefs regarding gender and sexually diverse individuals. The township operates within the system of heteropatriarchy which continuously reinforces heterosexist and queerphobic masculinities that are rooted in hegemonic Zulu culture (Hunter, 2018). To demonstrate, the South African media has reported on spates of assaults on women for wearing pants (trousers) in public that continue to characterise Umlazi (see, for example, Padayachee, 2011). In extreme cases, victims have been physically man-handled and even chased out of their homes for wearing attire that is socially perceived as not matching their gender identities. Therefore, Umlazi emerges as a generative setting for examining issues of gender and sexuality. As research continues to show, schools in South Africa tend to reflect the sociocultural context of the communities they serve (Msibi, 2012; Francis, 2017; Francis, 2019; Daniels et al., 2019). Thus, I expected that schools in Umlazi would share in the townships’ rigid and normative attitudes and behaviours regarding gender and sexuality. As outlined above, gender and sexuality play a role in the ways and means with which learners experience school discipline. Therefore, locating this research in Umlazi township was hoped to provide rich data for analysis in this study.

1.4.2. The Policy Context

The post-apartheid context in South Africa is shaped by the recognition and protection of human rights. As argued above, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of (1996)

safeguards and protects the rights of all individuals and advocates for the protection of children in the school environment. The Constitution stipulates that “Everyone has the right not to be treated or punished in a cruel, inhuman or degrading way” (The Constitution of South Africa, 1996, p. 3). Moreover, and aligned with these Constitutional values, the South African Schools Act no. 84 of (1996) enshrines, guarantees, and protects human rights in general and children's rights in particular. Specifically, the preamble to the South African Schools Act states that:

Everyone has the right to freedom and security of the person, which includes the right not to be tortured in any way; and not to be treated or punished in a cruel, inhuman, or degrading way. No person may administer corporal punishment at a school to a learner. Any person who administers corporal punishment is guilty of an offense, and liable on conviction to a sentence which could be imposed for assault (South African Schools Act, 1996, p. 11).

Section 8(2) of the Schools Act states that a school environment must be disciplined and purposeful to ensure that the quality of education is improved and maintained. In other words, according to the South African Schools Act, the most authoritative piece of legislation governing public education and public schools, no learner may be physically abused or unfairly discriminated against. Thus, available legislation in South Africa guarantees the human rights of all people, including those learners who are gender and sexually-diverse. South African law further criminalises the use of any form of corporal punishment in schools, public spaces, or at home. The criminalisation of corporal punishment came as a response to counter the enduring legacy of violent and punitive means of punishment that was reinforced and approved by the apartheid state. In this regard, and within the context of corporal punishment, Parliament passed the Abolishing of Corporal Punishment Act (1997) through Act 33. The Act stipulates that:

Juvenile whipping is cruel, it is inhuman, and it is degrading and a culture of authority which legitimates the use of violence is inconsistent with the values for which the Constitution stands. There is no dignity in the act of corporal punishment itself; the recipient might struggle against himself to maintain a semblance of dignified suffering or even unconcern; there is no dignity even in the person delivering the punishment. It is a practice which debases everyone involved in it (The Abolishing of Corporal Punishment Act, 1997, p. 3).

Therefore, the Abolishing of Corporal Punishment Act prohibits the use of corporal punishment because it is considered to be maltreatment of children.

Within the African context, the African Charter on the Rights of the Child is recognised as the principal human rights instrument dealing with children's rights on the continent. It was developed in 1990 in the slipstream of the global treaty, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1986); a global instrument that seeks to protect the rights of the child globally. The UN Charter recognises children's rights and further sets up mechanisms to monitor the implementation of these rights by establishing the Committee on the Rights of the Child (Boezaart, 2021). It also requires African states to ensure that discipline practices both at home and at school respect a child's human dignity. The African Charter further calls on states to ensure that children are protected from all forms of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment by those caring for the child and that in the administration of juvenile justice, children in detention shall not be subjected to torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (Vohito, 2021).

In this regard, and within the context of corporal punishment in schools, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) through article 37 stipulates that:

State parties shall seek to promote the appropriate legislative, administrative, social, and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment, or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of any person who is entrusted with the wellbeing of the child. No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment (The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, p. 4).

Therefore, discipline that is administered at school should be consistent with the ideals stipulated in these key documents by ensuring that children's basic human dignity is protected and respected. In this regard, school managers and teachers should take appropriate legislative, administrative, and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment, or exploitation including sexual abuse within the school premises.

The post-apartheid period in South Africa has undergone transformation following the country's transition from apartheid to a constitutional democracy. South Africa's current curriculum, the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (2011), is consistent with the principles underlying the new democratic dispensation (Department of Basic Education, 2011). CAPS promote a democratic learning culture, which embraces the democratic values of equality, liberty, and human rights (Department of Education, 1996). It seeks to enhance equity, redress, social transformation, and social justice as a way of contributing to the development of individuals in South African public education system (Department of Education, 2011). As such, and within the context of discipline in schools, the CAPS (2011) maintain that

The learning environment must cover psychological and social factors that ensure the well-being of learners and their ability to perform effectively. Thus, teachers must ensure that the classroom and school culture protect learners against harassment, physical harm, and mental harm.

Therefore, CAPS promote a learning environment that is conducive to learning and is free from any form of mental and physical harm. The international and local policy context is rooted in progressive ideals that promote children's rights and the protection of those rights. As noted above, discipline is a common practice in schools, yet as the evidence shows, school discipline is steeped in inequalities that are sometimes experienced as discriminatory and violent (Bellinger et al. 2016; Mittleman, 2018). Schools are therefore fertile ground for understanding discipline and punishment. These institutions also have the potential for normative change and for addressing inequalities based on learners' gender identities and sexual orientations.

1.5. Purpose and Aim of the Study

As discussed above, discipline and punishment are a common and enduring part of the school system that necessitates the effective control and maintenance of a conducive teaching and learning environment (Segalo & Rambuda, 2018; Welsh & Little, 2018; Mahlangu et al., 2021). Indeed, several studies highlight the nature, scope and extent of school discipline and punishment against learners (Sadik, 2017; Ibrahim & Ojomo, 2021; Obadire & Sinthumule, 2021). In South Africa, for example, studies have tended to focus on learners' experiences with corporal punishment within a context where it persists against legislation which makes it a criminal offence (Ngubane et al.,

2019; Mayisela, 2021; Mahaye, 2023). Yet, despite the availability of this literature, South African studies have evaded analysing discipline and punishment in schools from the nexus of learners' gender and sexual identities. In fact, discussions about the discrepancies in how discipline and punishment are meted out against learners based on their gender and sexual identities are largely missing in South African scholarship. For example, questions that address why and how some learners are subjected to harsher or discriminatory forms of discipline and punishment when compared to other learners remain unanswered. Therefore, the purpose of the study reported in this dissertation was two-fold. First, it examined how learners in a South African township school experience discipline and punishment. Second, it investigated inequalities in school discipline from the nexus of gender and sexuality. In particular, the study engaged learners from a township secondary school to probe inequalities in school discipline within the context of their intersecting gender and sexual identities. To achieve this broad aim, the following critical research questions informed the study:

1. How do learners in a South African township school experience discipline and punishment?
2. Do learners report inequalities in how discipline is meted out based on their diverse gender and sexual identities, and if so, in what form or shape do these discrepancies manifest?

1.6. Overview of the Methodological Approach

This study was located within the interpretive paradigm, which seeks to understand a particular social issue within a specified context, with its core assumption being that reality is socially constructed (Putnum & Banghart, 2017). Interpretive researchers do not seek the answers for their studies in rigid ways. Instead, they approach reality from subjects, typically people who own their experiences and are of a particular group or culture (Theys, 2017). Aligned with this understanding this study aimed to understand how discipline in schools is shaped by gender and sexuality. Interpretivism uses qualitative research methods that focus on individuals' beliefs, motivations, experiences, perspectives, and reasoning over quantitative data to gain an understanding of social interactions. Interpretivism is, thus, understood as an approach to social science research that asserts that understanding the beliefs, motivations, and reasoning of individuals in a social situation is essential to decoding the meaning of the data that can be generated around a phenomenon (Thanh, 2015). From this perspective, in this study, I examined how learners from a secondary

school, individually and as a group, constructed narratives about discipline and punishment in their school (Leeming, 2018).

The study used participatory drawings and focus group discussions (FGD) to generate data with 23 learners who attend a high school in the resource-poor township of Umlazi. Participatory drawing serves as a powerful entry point for young people to communicate abstract, complex, and even contradictory feelings and experiences that might be difficult to share through more traditional means like interviews (Andrews, 2016). Thus, drawings are an effective tool for reflection, engagement, and representation by young people (Brown et al., 2020). On the other hand, FGD involves more than one participant per data collection session. It comprises one or more group discussions in which participants focus collectively on a topic of particular interest. This approach involves the interaction of a group of participants with each other and with the researcher (Wilkinson, 2015). To address the first and second research questions, I used data generated through both participatory drawings and FGD. Data generated using these approaches were analysed using a three-step approach that involved participatory visual analytical approaches and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Using these analytical methods, I identified, organised, and then categorised emerging themes within the dataset (Braun et al., 2019). In Chapter Four, I discuss the study methodology in full detail.

1.7. Overview of the Theoretical Framework

Data analysis in this study was informed by Karl Marx's conflict theory and queer theory. Conflict theory suggests that social groups, including those within schools, are in a perpetual state of conflict because of power inequality (Mishra, 2013). Within this context, conflict theorists maintain that social order in schools is maintained through domination and power, where teachers hold the power to enforce rules among learners, and where those rules are not followed, teachers use discipline and/or punishment to enforce them (Omer & Jabeen, 2016). According to this theory, those who have power (such as teachers in the context of this study) hold on to it by any means possible; mainly by suppressing those who are powerless (i.e., learners) (Hayes, 2022). In the context of gender and sexual orientation, the study draws on C. Wright Mills' (1964) conceptualisation of conflict theory. Mills (1964) draws on feminist thinking by pointing to the

reinforcement of hegemonic gender roles, attitudes, norms, and inequalities in school. Accordingly, the feminist perspective of conflict theory highlights gender inequalities that exist in schools (Ballantine & Spade, 2008). In this study, conflict theory was used to analyse power inequalities that warrant teachers' use of discipline and punishment against 'powerless' learners. Moreover, the theory was useful not only in analysing how learners in a South African township school experienced discipline and punishment, but it was also resourceful for analysing inequalities in school discipline from the nexus of gender and sexuality. However, given that the study also focused on queer-identifying learners, whose experiences are unique from those of their heterosexual-identifying peers, the analysis was located within queer theory.

Queer theory is primarily concerned with destabilising the binary oppositions between queer/straight and men/women (Ryan, 2020). It suggests that people should not necessarily define themselves according to binary norms since gender and sexuality are not fixed (Butler, 2020). Originally the term 'queer' was broadly used to refer to what was odd, strange, abnormal, or sick, and along these lines employed as a colloquial slur for homosexuality (Hall, 2017). According to this theory, the term 'queer' is often used as an umbrella term to designate resistant and non-normative sexuality, seemingly unburdened from the separatist strains that had emerged around gay and lesbian identities (McCann & Monaghan, 2019). Queer theory permits a more inclusive analysis of diverse identities, and further allows for fluidity and variance in the operationalisation of society; providing a more holistic picture for imagining multiplicative interactions of social positionalities and identities (Few-Demo et al., 2016). Within this context, the theory positions gay, lesbian, bisexual, intersexed, gender non-conforming, questioning, two-spirited, and transgender people under the 'category' of queer to escape labels of identification that tend to fix individuals (Butler, 2020). Queer theory acknowledges that research participants are sexual beings, whose sexuality is fluid and multiple depending on space, time, and context (Msibi, 2012). The theory critically interrogates the meanings of sexual identity, and it disrupts what is perceived to be a 'natural order' or 'normal' and celebrates the differences and multiplicity of sexualities and identities in society (Kumashiro, 2003). In the context of gender and sexuality, the study draws on Judith Butler's conceptualisation of the queer theory. Butler (1993) draws on feminist thinking by pointing to the reinforcement of the term 'queer' as a reclaimed term used to affirm lived experiences of queer learners in a township secondary school. For Butler (1993), reclaiming the

term has signified it and moved it from shaming to affirming. This process of resignification enables the queer individual to construct new meanings and understandings from that which was used to oppress (Worthen, 2023). In this regard, the term 'queer' is also used in this study to refer to gender-diverse identities and as a way to question and challenge the normalisation and legitimisation of heterosexuality (Marshall, 2018). Queer theory provided a suitable lens for analysing the experiences of discipline and punishment among queer-identifying learners – a group counted as vulnerable to victimisation and maltreatment at the hands of teachers (Koswic et al., 2020; Myers et al., 2020). Thus, queer theory provided a lens for analysing the various ways in which queer learners in a South African township school experience discipline and punishment.

The study was also located within Michel Foucault's ideas about discipline and punishment. Within this context, Foucault's framework of discipline and punishment highlights how schools use surveillance, normalisation, and punishment to regulate learner behaviour and enforce societal norms (Foucault, 1977). This framework elucidates the mechanisms through which gendered disciplinary practices are maintained. Foucault's ideas of discipline and punishment were integral to understanding the findings of this study. His concepts of the panopticon, power, and biopower provided a comprehensive framework for analysing how school discipline operates as a mechanism of social control. By contextualising the disciplinary practices at Qamatha Secondary School within these theoretical constructs, the study illuminates the ways in which power is exercised, internalised, and reproduced, highlighting the pervasive influence of societal norms and the enduring impact of institutional control on learners' experiences.

In the next chapter (Chapter Two), I discuss at length the theoretical framework that guided analysis in this study. I further provide a clarification of key concepts that were used in this study.

1.8. Overview of the Ethical Considerations in the Study

Since this study focused on a sensitive issue (i.e., learners' experiences of, and the inequalities inherent in how they experience, discipline and punishment at school) and the participants involved were high school children, several ethical issues had to be considered. First, before the commencement of the research, permission to conduct the study was obtained from relevant

institutions including the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education (KZN DoE), the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) Humanities Research Ethics Committee (Protocol number: HSSREC/00005817/2023), and the schools' management. The participants in this study were high school learners, which meant that they were minors their ages ranged from 16 to 17 years old. For this reason, written consent for their participation in the study was obtained from their parents/caregivers as per the South African Children's Act (Act 38 of 2005). Moreover, the participants themselves provided written assent for their own participation. Only those participants who provided written assent and whose parents/caregivers had fully consented to their participation were recruited to participate in the study. Likewise, participants provided written consent for recording data generation sessions, including consent to use their visual artefacts (drawings) for data analysis and publication purposes. In this thesis, I have included only those drawings that participants allowed me to use for research purposes. In Chapter Four, I discuss in detail all ethical issues and how they were addressed in this study.

1.9. Synthesis and Overview of the Dissertation

The purpose of this chapter was to introduce the study. This introduction presented the background of the study, accounting for discipline practices from a gender and sexuality lens. The second part of the chapter discussed the focus and purpose of this study. This was followed by the rationale for the study, the aims of the study and research questions, and an overview of the theoretical framework and methodology. The chapter concludes with an overview of the dissertation in the form of a synthesis of each of the following chapters in this dissertation.

Chapter Two provides a discussion that clarifies key concepts and their use in the study. In particular, the chapter distinguishes discipline from punishment to move away from a culture that treats them as similar concepts; rather, I argue that while these concepts are interrelated, they remain fundamentally different in terms of application within the schooling system. Within this context, I draw on Michel Foucault's complex analysis of discipline and punishment within the social context of the punitive system to unpack his understanding of discipline and punishment. As a theoretical lens, Foucault's ideas about discipline and punishment, I argue, are profoundly relevant to the study of school discipline. Next, the chapter discusses Karl Marx's conflict theory

of education to highlight schools as institutions embedded in social and power inequalities. The discussion then moves to focus on queer theory as a suitable lens for analysing the experiences of school discipline and punishment among queer-identifying learners. Finally, the chapter concludes with a set of propositions that guided analysis in this study.

Chapter Three critically examines the literature on school discipline and punishment, focusing on how these practices intersect with learners' gender identities and sexual orientations. The chapter situates the discussion within the broader issue of violence against learners, and especially how schools are implicated in the policing of learners' gender identities and their sexualities using the history and current South African context. The chapter then provides a scholarly overview of discipline against learners followed by a focused exploration of the inequalities in school discipline, focusing particularly on the gendered nature of school discipline and its disproportionate impact on boys and queer learners. It then moves to a detailed discussion of the South African context, identifies gaps in the literature. The chapter concludes with a conceptual framework that guides analysis in this study.

Chapter Four outlines the methodology used to examine secondary school learners' experiences of school discipline within the context of their gender identities and expressions, as well as their sexual orientations. The chapter discusses the research paradigm within which the study's methodology was located, the methodological approach employed, the methods used for generating data, and the analysis approach followed for data analysis. It concludes with a reflection on the study's trustworthiness and the ethical issues that were considered throughout the research.

Chapter Five present an analysis of the findings by discussing how the participants narrated their experiences of discipline and punishment within the context of their gender and sexual orientation. The findings presented in the chapter are organised around five main themes. The chapter concludes with a critical discussion of the key findings, employing the theoretical framework that guided the analysis.

Chapter Six reflects on the studies methodology and key findings. It also discusses the contributions the study makes, its implications and, finally, concludes the study.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORISING SCHOOL DISCIPLINE AND PUNISHMENT

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I first provide a discussion that clarifies key concepts and their use in the study. In particular, I distinguish discipline from punishment to move away from a culture that treats them as similar concepts. I emphasise the fact that, while these concepts are interrelated, they remain fundamentally different in terms of application within the schooling system. Within this context, I draw on Michel Foucault's complex analysis of discipline and punishment within the social context of the punitive system to unpack his understanding of discipline and punishment. As a theoretical lens, Foucault's ideas about discipline and punishment, I argue, are profoundly relevant to the study of school discipline. Second, I discuss the theoretical perspectives that informed the analysis in this study. I begin by highlighting Karl Marx's conflict theory of education to highlight schools as institutions embedded in social and power inequalities. Using conflict theory, I show how hegemonic and normative cultures that exist in schools reproduce and maintain social hierarchies in which teachers subordinate learners. Within this framework, I illustrate how institutions such as schools maintain power structures and social inequalities, where teachers emerge as the dominant group that uses their authority to control and exploit learners through discipline and punishment. In particular, I use Mills' (1964) extension of conflict theory, which draws from feminist thinking, to point to how school-related discipline and punishment reinforce and reproduce hegemonic gender norms, roles, and inequalities in school. Finally, given that conflict theory is limited in offering a comprehensive analysis of how diverse gender expressions and sexual orientations shape learners' experiences of discipline and punishment, I draw from the queer theory as a suitable lens for analysing the experiences of school discipline and punishment among queer-identifying learners (Butler, 1993; Butler, 2020). In doing so, I argue that queer-identifying learners face harsher forms of school discipline and punishment because of their sexual orientation. Finally, the chapter concludes with a set of propositions that guide analysis in this study. In the next section, I operationalise the key concepts used in this study.

2.2 Conceptualising School Discipline and Punishment Using Foucault's Framework

School discipline and punishment are practices that involve the exercising of authority by teachers over learners (Sadik, 2017). To conceptualise discipline and punishment within the context of schools, it is necessary to draw on the historical embeddedness of these concepts in the work of Michel Foucault, a theorist who is regarded as a pioneer in the field. In his book *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), Foucault provides a complex analysis of discipline and punishment within the social context of the punitive system (e.g., the prison). In doing so, he examines how relations of power affect punishment. For Foucault, discipline and punishment, at least in the 18th Century context in which his writing referred to, are understood as ceremonial practices that are directed at an individual's (i.e., a prisoner's) body. For example, in that particular era, public executions were standards used to establish and cement the authority and power of a ruling figure of authority, such as a monarch (Foucault, 1975). Noteworthy in Foucault's analysis of discipline and punishment from the lens of public executions is that these practices were conducted in public and in the presence of an audience (Gearity & Mills, 2012). Thus, an audience, which Foucault terms a 'theatre of punishment' (Driver, 1985, p. 427), is essential in the exercise of discipline and punishment. The presence of an audience works to consolidate the power of those doing the punishing (Foucault, 2008). In other words, power serves to reinforce the authority of those administering discipline and punishment. According to Foucault (1995), discipline is understood as the power exercised through surveillance, control, discrimination, spatial regulation, and classification of those deemed less powerful. He argues that "disciplinary power functions as tools for training, monitoring, and examining subordinated individuals about how to do things" (Foucault, 2014, p. 238). In other words, Foucault (1977) understands discipline as techniques used to control individuals by coercing and (re)arranging their behaviours, movements, and experiences across space and time.

To further unpack his understanding of discipline and punishment, Foucault (1995) refers to the use of surveillance as a disciplinary technique to rank, order, and normalise individuals (Foucault, 1995). According to him, there is a culture of disciplinary power through surveillance that he relates to a prison (i.e., where the prisoners are surveilled, controlled, and disciplined). Schools are deemed as one of the most generative contexts for applying traditional and modern technologies

of the art of surveillance, control, and discipline (Gallagher, 2010; Taylor, 2012; Hope, 2016). In these settings, disciplinary power is exercised by teachers through the surveillance of learners' behaviours, which eventually becomes routine and normalised (Foucault, 1995). In short, schools, just like the prisons that Foucault writes about, are designed as institutions where there are no rule gaps (i.e., there are clear rules and social hierarchies where teachers dominate, and learners are subordinated). In these spaces, strict discipline prevails, and no learner can escape surveillance and control (Dolgun, 2008). Thus, within the context of discipline, schools serve as sites where children are classified (by their gender and sexuality, among other forms of classification) and surveilled, and their behaviours are policed and, if there is any form of deviance from the social norm, they are punished. Thus, under these conditions, learners feel the need to alter their self-control abilities because they have normalised being monitored since they are socialised into a culture of surveillance (Taylor, 2012). In other words, through discipline, schools also enforce self-control among learners. If learners resist these forms of control and surveillance, they are “at risk of facing various modern techniques of punishment such as threat, reprimand, offending, isolation, suspension, and expulsion” (Ceven et al., 2021, p. 153). Drawing from Foucault, this study analyses unmarked forms of discipline and punishment employed by teachers against learners based on the latter group’s gender identities and sexual orientations.

2.2.1 The Guidance and Application of Foucault's Ideas about Discipline and Punishment

Foucault's ideas about discipline and punishment are profoundly relevant to the study of school discipline at the Secondary School under investigation in this dissertation. Foucault's theoretical framework, particularly as articulated in his seminal work *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), provide a robust lens through which the practices and implications of school discipline can be understood and contextualised. By applying Foucault's concepts of surveillance, power, and biopower, this study illuminates the mechanisms of control that pervade the educational environment and how they shape the experiences of learners.

Foucault's notion of the panopticon is particularly pertinent in analysing the persistence of corporal punishment in South African schools, including the one that is the focus of this study (see, for example, Chapter Five). The panopticon, originally conceptualised by Jeremy Bentham as a design

for prisons, is a powerful metaphor in Foucault's analysis of modern disciplinary societies (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2023). It describes a system of surveillance where individuals internalise the gaze of authority, leading them to regulate their own behaviour (Fiddler, 2022). This self-regulation is achieved through the constant possibility of being watched, even if actual surveillance is intermittent (Fiddler, 2022). In the context of South African schools, for example, the enduring threat of corporal punishment functions similarly (Hunter & Morrell, 2021). Despite legal prohibitions, the threat of corporal punishment looms large, compelling students to conform to expected behaviours to avoid punitive measures (Mahlangu et al., 2021). This internalisation of surveillance ensures that control is maintained with minimal direct intervention, thus perpetuating a culture of compliance and subjugation.

This study also draws on Foucault's (1975) broader conceptualisation of power, which he describes as pervasive and diffused throughout society, rather than centralised in a single authority. Power in Foucault's framework is exercised through various institutions and social practices, including the education system. In schools, teachers act as agents of this diffused power, enforcing disciplinary measures that align with institutional norms and societal expectations (Hirschfield & Celinska, 2011). The use of corporal punishment, despite its legal prohibition in South Africa (Morrell, 2001), highlights how institutional practices can sustain and reproduce power dynamics that favour certain groups while marginalising others (Mkhize & Moletsane, 2023)). This understanding of power helps contextualise the unequal application of discipline, where marginalised learners—whether by socio-economic status, race, gender, sexual orientations, or other factors—are more likely to face harsher punishments, thus reinforcing existing social hierarchies.

Foucault's concept of biopower – the regulation of populations through institutional practices (Koopman, 2014) – further contextualises the study's findings on gender and sexual identities. Biopower operates through the regulation of bodies and behaviours, particularly those that deviate from normative standards. In school, disciplinary practices are not merely responses to infractions but are deeply intertwined with efforts to regulate gender (Bhana, 2014). Boys are subjected to stricter control to conform to societal expectations of masculinity (Welsh & Little, 2018; Skiba et al., 2002). This regulation extends to LGBTQ+ learners, who face punitive measures and social

ostracism for deviating from heteronormative standards (Arguilar et al., 2024). Schools, as institutions of biopower, thus plays a critical role in maintaining and enforcing societal norms related to gender and sexuality.

The study employs Foucault's ideas to critically examine how discipline is used to maintain control and order within the school, reflecting broader societal structures of power and inequality. By locating the practices of discipline and punishment within Foucault's theoretical framework, the study reveals the complex interplay between institutional power and individual behaviour. Thus, Foucault's ideas of discipline and punishment are integral to understanding school discipline and punishment at the nexus of learner's gender and sexual identities.

2.3. Operational Concepts Used in the Study

To provide clarity, understanding, and meaning to the use of concepts in this study, I provide the following clarification of operational concepts.

2.3.1. Discipline and Punishment

Discipline and punishment are often used interchangeably, as though they mean the same thing. However, according to Foucault (2023), discipline and punishment, while related, are not synonymous (e.g., they do not mean the same thing). To illustrate, Vally (2005) maintains that discipline is different from punishment, and both impact the learner in distinct ways. Disciplined behaviour means ways of behaving that show respect and responsibility. The goal of discipline is for a learner to develop self-discipline through their efforts rather than through the efforts of another individual who uses surveillance, threats, fear, and force (Maphosa, 2011). Self-discipline is an individual's ability to regulate their behaviour with full awareness, without coercion either from within or from outside oneself (Hogger et al., 2019). Within the same context, punishment is external and does not promote or allow self-discipline to be achieved (Vally, 2005). Punishment generally only stops the behaviour for the moment but does not have positive long-term outcomes (Vally, 2005). Punishment condemns misbehaviour, while discipline encourages behaviours that

reinforce self-discipline, which is an essential feature of a learner's behaviour without external push (Maphosa, 2011).

Within the school context, discipline is described as a practice through which individuals are trained or coerced into behaving in a manner that is per socially determined and acceptable norms (Foucault, 1975). The word 'discipline' carries with it the connotation of training, which means to correct, mould, strengthen, or perfect (Newberger, 2000). Thus, discipline is a practice used to influence individuals to adopt socially desirable future behaviours (Ibrahim & Ojomo, 2021). Discipline originates from two Latin words *disciplina* (which means teaching, learning, or instruction) and *discipulus* (which means disciple or pupil) (Chettiparamb, 2007). Thus, based on this broad definition and the Latin origins of the concept, discipline is a means to teach or train individuals (for example, to show or explain how individuals need to behave or do certain things). Sanderson (2003) maintains that discipline is imperative in schools if children ought to become social, productive, and responsible adults. It is, therefore, imperative that effective ways are employed to ensure the development of appropriate character for children. Hence, disciplinary measures in schools should be designed as corrective measures aimed at making the learners responsible and not as retaliatory measures (Sanderson, 2003). Within the context of this study, discipline is understood as any method used to train and teach learners self-control and socially acceptable behaviour (Gungor, 2014).

Punishment, on the other hand, is generally defined as an aversive stimulus that follows an undesirable behaviour (Sadik, 2017). In other words, punishment intends to reduce or eliminate the occurrence of that behaviour (Cangelosi, 2000). Thus, punishment is a reaction to remove disruptive behaviour and often involves a sanction or a penalty because of a person's unacceptable behaviour (Maphosa, 2011). The penalty includes pain that is inflicted on the offender by a person who holds a position of authority or power (Fasin, 2019). Within the context of schools, punishment may take the form of informal arrangements such as additional homework, withdrawal of privileges, and detention after class to formal sanctions such as exclusion from school and corporal punishment (Maphosa, 2011). In terms of origin, punishment originates from law studies (Stearns, 1936). It is concerned with restraining punishment as vengeance *timōria* and punishment as justice *dike*; the primary purpose of punishment is to instruct the lawbreaker or to serve as an

object lesson (Lancaster, 2012). Thus, due to the elastic nature of the word ‘punishment’ it means different things to different people and professions (Ginneken & Hayes, 2016). Ibrahim and Ojomo (2021, p. 298) describe punishment as “the deliberate infliction of harm upon somebody or the withdrawal of some good from them, by an authority, in response to their being supposed to have committed some offence”. Accordingly, punishment is a pain or loss inflicted or a wilful disobedience or negligence of duty followed by a consequence, and the future frequency of that action is suppressed (Davis & Akers, 2023). Within the school context, Sekitoleko (2009) argues that physical punishment is ineffective in dealing with the issue of learner indiscipline. In physical consequences, learners can be physically harmed through the use of punishment. However, within the context of this study, punishment is understood as an inescapable feature of school life (Obadire & Sinthumule, 2021). School punishment is also understood as exclusions, detentions, time out, and loss of privileges as a penalty for unacceptable behaviour (Hands, 2020). Sometimes, school punishment inflicts pain on learners (Motseke, 2020).

2.3.2 Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sexual Orientation

Gender identity is not the same as gender expression or sexual orientation, though the terms may be correlated (Polderman, 2018). To illustrate, an individual may identify as a cisgender female but reject a stereotypical female gender role. On the other hand, transgender and cisgender people may identify as heterosexual, bisexual, homosexual, or other sexual orientations (Jenkins, 2018). When the concept of ‘gender’ entered the vocabulary of Western feminism, a significant strategy for challenging and transforming unequal social relations was inaugurated (McRobbie, 2008). As an analytic tool, gender has been deployed to a significant effect in dismantling perceived essential differences between men and women, differences conventionally used to explain and legitimate observed disparities in women’s access to social resources and rewards (Boerner, 2018). Thus, gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, expressions, and identities of girls, women, boys, men, and gender-diverse people (Schudson et al., 2019). According to Wood and Eagly (2015), the concept of ‘gender identity’ reflects people’s understanding of themselves in terms of cultural definitions of female and male. When people incorporate these cultural meanings into their psyches, then gender becomes part of their identities. Through these gender identities, individuals understand themselves in relation to the culturally feminine and masculine meanings

attached to men and women, and they may think and act according to these gendered aspects of their selves (Wood & Eagly, 2012; Jenkins, 2016).

Gender expression is the basis upon which an individual's gender identity and sexual orientation are perceived (Butler, 1990). It is the manifestation of an individual's sense of being masculine and/or feminine through the use of names, clothing, hairstyle, accessories, and body movements associated with gender groups (Wilchins, 2004). To clarify, gender expression is how one 'does' gender; thus, gender expression is not necessarily an identity but is, instead, how one's gendered understanding of self is embodied and communicated to others (Anderson, 2020; Dozier, 2017). For example, for a girl who is intensely interested in household chores, which is culturally constructed as a female presentation that aligns with societal expectations, this communication and its reception are often unremarkable in day-to-day interactions. Nevertheless, a girl who is interested in driving trucks and playing soccer (who defies social and cultural gender expectations and gender expression) may be required to constantly negotiate other people's evaluations (Levitt, 2019). Within the context of this study, gender expression is understood as how participants' external characteristics and behaviours are socially defined as either masculine or feminine, such as their social interactions, physical presentations, and mannerisms (Weatherby, 2015).

Finally, in this study, I draw on the plural notion of sexual orientations (rather than the singular form of sexual orientation) to signal the significance of encompassing the diverse and full range of individuals' desires and relationships. Thus, sexual orientations refer to the physical, spiritual, psychological, and/or romantic attraction that a person has to the male sex, the female sex, to neither, or to both (Ally & Phala, 2016). One of the earliest and most crucial sexual orientation classification schemes was proposed by Ulrichs (1994) in a series of pamphlets he published privately in the 1860s. For Ulrichs (1994), sexual orientation is an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to men, women, neither, or both, which can be divided into three categories, namely: *Dionings*, *Urnings*, and *Uranodionings*. These categories directly correspond with the scientific terms preferred today: heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual. Sexual orientations concern gender attraction (attraction to individuals with certain genders) or sex attraction (attraction to individuals with specific sexes), and appeal to the notion of "ideal conditions" for acting on one's sexual desires (Fausto-Sterling, 2019, p. 533). It is a process where

people discover what it means to be attracted to others and the types of relationships they want to form (Bailey et al., 2016). Therefore, sexual orientations encompass the broad spectrum of sexuality identification, which includes heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, and asexuality (Charlebois, 2016). Within the context of this study, sexual orientations are understood as the predominant focus of sexual attraction. To illustrate, the term ‘sexual orientations’ in this study is used to refer to the diverse physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, and/or romantic attractions of the participants to the same or opposite sex or both. Also, as homosexual, heterosexual, or bisexual, respectively (Cook, 2020).

2.3.3. Heterosexual-Identifying Learners

According to Butler (1990), heterosexuality is the shared beliefs and meanings attributed to what it means to be a man or a woman (masculinity and femininity). For Butler (1990), this is because the notion of opposite-sex relationships presumes, first, that there is a binary distinction between being a man and being a woman, and second, that these binary gender identities (masculinity/femininity) map neatly onto binary sexed bodies (man/woman). In terms of origin, heterosexuality is a socially constructed concept, originating in Euro-Western society and sciences, based on the idea of difference – hetero meaning different – and binary sex, gender, and sexuality (Poole, 2017). Heterosexuality is situated as the ‘normal’ sexuality, while homosexuality is situated as deviant but also as binary to heterosexuality (Antoinette & Royce, 2017). A learner who identifies as heterosexual is physically, spiritually, emotionally, psychologically and/or romantically attracted to other people of the opposite sex (Ally & Phala, 2017). Heterosexual-identifying learners are generally, and uncritically, perceived as the ‘norm, the normal, and the normative’ (Butler, 1993; Fischer, 2013; Babatunde & Ake, 2015). Thus, heterosexuality is the dominant sexuality in modern Western culture. However, it is not defined merely by sexual acts in private space, but it is a process of power relations that operates in most everyday environments (Valentine, 2016). Within the context of this study, the term heterosexual-identifying learner (or heterosexual learner) is understood as a learner who is physically, spiritually, emotionally, psychologically and/or romantically attracted to members of the opposite sex (Deacon, 2021).

2.3.4. Queer Learners

Initially, the term ‘homosexuality’ was coined in the 19th century to refer to same-sex relationships and to distinguish traits of homosexual-identifying people (Pickett, 2022). In an attempt to replace the term homosexuality, ‘queer’ was broadly used to refer to what was odd, strange, abnormal, or sick. Along these lines, it was employed as a colloquial slur for homosexuality (Amin & Somerville, 2020). In terms of origin, the term ‘queer’ originated in the 1990s from feminist thinking, and it was reinforced in the effort to avoid the different usages of terms such as ‘homosexual’, ‘gay,’ and ‘lesbian’ (Butler, 1993). Butler (1993) drew from feminist thinking to reinforce the term queer from shaming to affirming in an attempt to reclaim queer lived experiences. To clarify, queer refers to anyone who feels marginalised by mainstream visions of sexuality. For example, queer learners are those who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, questioning, asexual, etc. They fall under the ‘category’ of queer in an attempt to escape labels of identification that tend to fix individuals (Msibi, 2012). Within the context of this study, the term ‘queer’ is used to position gay, lesbian, bisexual, questioning, non-conforming, and transgender learners (participants) to escape labels of identification that tend to fix queer-identifying learners (Butler, 2020). Thus, in this study, the term ‘queer’ was used as an umbrella or all-inclusive term to describe expressions of gender identity and sexual orientations of queer-identifying learners (Ally & Phala, 2016). Within this context, the term ‘queer’ was used in an attempt to avoid the use of familiar derogatory terminology such as ²*‘isitabane’* (singular) or *‘izitabane’* (plural)², which are commonly used homophobic slurs in South Africa Black African townships (Bongmba, 2017; Davids et al., 2019).

2.4. The Theoretical Lenses Applied in the Study

This section outlines the theories that informed the study. A theory is a foundation from which all knowledge is constructed for a research study (Phasha et al., 2016). It provides a grounding base, or an anchor, for the literature review and, most importantly, the methods and analysis (Onsaloo & Grant, 2014). It also provides for the interpretation of research findings (Bless, 2022). In addition to Foucault’s analytical framework as presented in sections above, analysis in this study was also located within Karl Marx’s conflict theory of education (Wells, 1976) and Queer Theory

² *Isitabane* (singular) or *Izitabane* (plural) is the Zulu word most frequently used in communal spaces to discriminate against, undermine and shame LGBTI people (Van der Walt & Davids, 2022).

In the following section, I discuss conflict theory as the first theoretical lens for analysis in this study.

2.4.1. Conceptualisation of Conflict Theory

As argued above, the analysis in this study was located within Karl Marx's (1965) conflict theory. Marx developed conflict theory in the 19th Century to explain the relationship between the ruling and working classes in capitalist societies (Collins, 1986). Conflict theory posits that conflict is a fundamental part of the social order and that schools are critical sites in the reproduction of social inequality, particularly in terms of class, race, gender, sexual orientation, and other forms of social stratifications (Bartos, 2002). In other words, this perspective sees society, and schools by extension, as embedded by inequality and social difference (Hayes, 2022). Within this context, hegemonic and normative social forces reproduce unequal outcomes that favour those identities positioned at the top of the social hierarchy (Omer & Jabeen, 2016). These inequalities are then reinforced and maintained in social institutions, such as schools, through the reproduction of the status quo.

In this study, the analysis was conducted within the conflict theory of education, which is an ideology that focuses specifically on how conflict functions in educational settings such as schools (Collins, 1971). Conflict theorists use Karl Marx's conceptualisations to argue that education maintains existing social power structures and inequalities (Collins, 1986; Lachman, 2012; Chernoff, 2013; Hayes, 2022). These theorists do not believe that schools reduce social inequality by providing equal opportunities or experiences for learners. Instead, they believe that the schooling system reinforces, reproduces, preserves, and perpetuates social inequalities that arise from differences in class, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, etcetera (Collins, 2013; Omer & Jabeen, 2016). Conflict theory, therefore, presupposes that schools teach learners to passively obey authority and not question or challenge unequal treatments and practices (Omer & Jabeen, 2016).

The conflict theory of education further posits that education is a powerful instrument that preserves the power of those who dominate society. Those with power try to hold on to it by any means necessary, chiefly by suppressing those who are conceived as powerless (Mishra, 2013). A basic premise of conflict theory is that individuals and groups within society will work to try to maximise their power (Hayes, 2022), creating an environment where dominating groups use their power to exploit groups with lesser power. In schools, conflict theorists view the relationship between learners and teachers as unequal and favouring teachers who are constructed as the dominating social group within the schooling social hierarchy (Simon, 2016; Tittle, 2018; Dash et al., 2023). Indeed, because teachers occupy higher social positions, and sociocultural norms often inform their attitudes, power is generally unequally distributed; teachers in this regard hold more extraordinary power, which allows them to surveil and control learners.

Teachers use their power to set up systems of law, traditions, and other societal structures to support their dominance in schools (Wells, 1976). For example, teachers set up class rules to control learners and maintain order (Collins, 1993). They also pursue their interests by subordinating learners through disciplinary sanctions (Collins, 1986). Power allows teachers to enforce rules, while the learners are expected to accept the conditions enforced by the teachers (Wells, 1976). For example, teachers use their power to punish, control, and discipline learners. Thus, in schools, power is reproduced, and inequalities are maintained. Ultimately, conflict theorists view this dynamic as one of conflict where teachers use their power to control the learners.

2.4.1.2. Max Weber's Conceptualisation of Conflict Theory

While Karl Marx is regarded as the pioneering philosopher behind the origins of conflict theory, this study is also informed by the ideas of his successor, Marx Weber, whose extension of the theory suggests that in addition to economic inequalities, there are inequalities of political power and social structure that cause conflict. Weber (1987) notes that different groups are affected differently based on classifications such as education, race, sexual orientation, and gender and that people's reactions to inequality are moderated by socially stratified differences and rates of social mobility, as well as by perceptions about the legitimacy of those in power. Weber (1987) argues that power can be wielded by individuals and institutions to maintain their dominance over others,

leading to conflict over access to power and control. For Weber (1920), social divisions are based on two other factors: social status and political influence. Weber believes that a person who possesses a great deal of social status and yet is economically poor can still hold power in society. Additionally, Weber (1920) argues that social groups tend to identify themselves not merely according to wealth but more intensely by socially defined categories and shared lifestyles. Thus, Weber maintains that conflict underlies all social relations and determines power. The control of power is a critical element in conflict theory. The concept of power is a central aspect of Weber's work on the types of authority wielded by individuals.

2.4.1.3. C. Wright Mills' Conceptualisation of Conflict Theory

C. Wright Mills (1962) has been regarded as the founder of modern conflict theory. In Mills' view, social structures are created through conflict between people with differing interests and resources. Individuals and resources, in turn, are influenced by these structures and by the unequal distribution of power and resources in society (Mills, 1962). Mills argues that the interests of this 'powerful elite' are opposed to those of the people. He theorised that the policies of the powerful elite resulted in an increased escalation of conflict. Mills' (1962) extension of conflict theory suggests that social structures (i.e., social institutions and norms of society) are created because of conflict between differing interests. In Mills' (1962) view, individuals are impacted by the creation of social structures, and the usual result is a differential of power between those who dominate and those who are constructed as subordinate.

In the context of this study, teachers hold power and dominate the school's social context, while learners are (re)constructed as passive and subordinated. Mills further extends the conflict approach by drawing on feminist thinking to point to the reinforcement of hegemonic gender roles, attitudes, norms, and inequalities in social institutions (Mills, 1964). Drawing on feminism, Mills challenges the essentialist biological inclination, which tends to locate sex roles and gender norms in nature. Instead, he points to the social construction of sex roles and gender norms in society (Mills, 1964). Accordingly, in this regard, conflict theory departs from its Marxist focus on economic inequality and, instead, examines the reinforcement of gender inequalities (Bartos, 2002). In particular, the conflict perspective has recently drawn from so-called radical feminism

to interrogate the role of patriarchy in perpetuating gendered patterns of inequality (Ballantine & Spade, 2008). Thus, conflict theory sees patriarchy as a sociopolitical system of power that organises society into complex relationships based on the assertion of gendered dominance and subordination (Omer & Jabeen, 2016).

More recently, conflict theory has considered intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1990) to point to how various social and cultural categories – such as gender, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, etc – interact and contribute toward systemic social inequalities (Collins, 2013; Omer & Jabeen, 2016). It is beyond the scope of this study to fully unpack the theory of intersectionality. However, I highlight its recent influence on conflict theory to show that various forms of subordination, such as queerphobia and gendered oppression, are intersectional and interrelated. They form a complex system of oppression that reflects an intersection of multiple forms of discrimination. In light of the feminist perspective of the conflict theory of education, in this study, discipline and punishment in school are thus understood as shaped by factors such as the gender identities, gender expressions, and sexual orientations of learners.

2.4.1.4. The Guidance and Application of Conflict Theory in this Study

In this study, the conflict theory of education is significant for examining how school cultures that promote rigid norms of gender and sexuality collude with unequal power distributions to perpetuate the continuance of social inequality that teachers maintain through the practice of discipline and punishment against learners. As the conflict theory argues, schools play a significant role in the preservation of teachers' power. These institutions are also implicated in the reinforcement of hegemonic and heterocentric gender and sexual norms that deny the existence of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations (Simon, 2016). From this perspective, teachers use discipline to maintain their power but also to police the gender identities, expressions, and sexual orientations of learners (Tittle, 2018). Thus, learners' gender and sexualities characterise and shape the forms of treatment, including punitive forms of discipline and punishment, that learners experience in school. Analysis in this study was further informed by the queer theory (discussed below).

2.4.2 Conceptualisation of Queer Theory

Queer theory, as a theoretical approach, came about in part from gender and sexuality studies that, in turn, had their origins in lesbian and gay studies and feminist theory (Lauretis, 1991). It is a recent theory in the sense that it was established in the 1990s by challenging the notion of defined and finite identity categories, as well as the norms that create a binary of good versus deviant sexualities (Jagose, 2009). Thus, it is a theoretical model developed out of traditional lesbian and gay studies, and it is unaligned with any specific identity category, thus making it beneficial for use in several discussions that aim to destabilise what is considered the norm (Jagose, 1996). The term queer is historically bounded, coming into usage in the United States in its sexual connotation in the 1910s, lobbed as a slur and later appropriated by the queer community as a term of self-identification among some same-sex-desiring individuals (Amin & Somerville, 2020). In terms of its origins and evolution,

The queer theory emerged directly out of liberal ideas of equality, building on feminist and other liberatory political movements that pursued questions of identity categories and how power is distributed among and between them (Watson, 2005, p. 68).

Queer theorists recognise that the term queer is a pejorative designation for gays, lesbians, and those with other non-normative sexual identities (Drescher, 2007; Butler, 1993; Jagose, 1996). By adopting this description, queer theorists acknowledge its adverse history but further attempt to take that negativity and turn it on its head, reworking the term into something that could change the way we think about sexualities (Calafell & Nakayama, 2016). For Butler (1993, p. 226), initially, the term ‘queer’ was used to shame gay and lesbian individuals and groups as it was “linked to accusation and insult”. However, queer people have since reclaimed the term to construct their identities. According to Butler (1993), reclaiming the term ‘queer’ has signified it and moved it from humiliating to approving. Thus, for Butler (1993), this process of resignification enables those who identify as queer to construct new meanings and understandings from that which was used to insult them. In this regard, the use of the term ‘queer’ to refer to a gender-diverse identity and as a way to question and challenge the normalisation and legitimisation of heterosexuality (Halberstam, 1998).

Butler (1993) argues that binary oppositions such as gay/straight need to be destabilised. Thus, she introduced the critical concept of performativity. Butler (1993) collapsed the sex/gender distinction to argue that sex is not always already gender because all bodies are gendered from the beginning of their social existence (and no existence is not social). Therefore, for Butler (1993), performativity is gender that proves to be performance, consequently constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed (Salih, 2002). Thus, within the past decades, the term has been used in increasing frequency as a substitute for the terms 'gay' and 'lesbian' and to include others whose sexuality and/or gender does not fit within the gender binary (Warner, 1993; Rhoads, 1994; Perm, 1995). Schneider (2000) notes that as a term, queer refers to something that is not normal. So, with heterosexuality as a norm, queer then, 'naturally' refers to those who are not heterosexual. Thus, 'queer' is referred to as something that people do not want to be, and if it is impossible to change, then people have to keep it undisclosed (Hall, 1993).

Ahmed (2016) argues that queer was never meant to become an identity but ought to describe the uncapturable or unpredictable trajectory of sexual life and gender identity. For Ahmed (2016), 'queer' sought to provide an umbrella term for nonconforming genders and various sexualities, ones that did not readily submit to categorisation. Thus, it represents a change from how and why the experiences of non-heterosexual people are studied and "shifting theory away from its present grounding in identity concepts to a cultural or epistemological centering" (Seidman, 1995, p. 130). Schneider (2000, p.210) argues that queer theory, generally, aims to "disrupt" modernist fixed ideas concerning sexuality and gender by taking post-structuralist critiques of "natural" identities. To the queer theorist, heterosexuality and homosexuality are binary social constructs that hold saliency only in specific historical moments rather than descriptors of innate sexual types (Seidman, 1994).

The queer theory aims to disrupt the inflexibility of identity, providing a non-minoritising view of sexual and gender subjectivity that destabilises the heteronormative order because the theory normalises' queerness as an acceptable way of life (Matebeni & Msibi, 2015). From this perspective, rather than studying the homosexual or heterosexual individual, the queer theorist studies the webs of power and discourses that create and uphold the idea that such individuals exist

and that defining individuals by sexual object choice is somehow natural (Henderson, 2003; Seidman, 2006; Steinman, 2001). Queer theory also destabilises and denaturalises genders (masculine/feminine) and biological sex (male/female), questioning the assumed connectivity between sex and gender or the legitimacy of presumed scientific classification (Drescher, 2007; Jagose, 1996). Hall (2017, p. 55) argues that queer “works not at the site of gender, but at the site of ontology, to shift the ground of being itself.” She suggests, “queer rebels constitute a kind of activism that attacks the dominant notion of the natural. The queer is the taboo-breaker, the monstrous, the uncanny”. Queer theory was, therefore, helpful in engaging learners with diverse gender identities, expressions, and sexualities within a South African township school. I adopted this theoretical lens to centre the school discipline and punishment experiences of queer-identifying learners.

2.4.2.1 The Guidance and Application of Queer Theory in this Study

The queer theory acknowledges that research participants are sexual beings whose sexuality is fluid and multiple depending on space, time, and context (Msibi, 2012). In this regard, applying queer theory in research enables a more inclusive knowledge about identity, away from the binary of only just ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ (Ingrey, 2018). The theory also acknowledges the unique and often punitive experiences of queer learners within schooling contexts (Msibi, 2012). Thus, in this study, the queer theory was helpful in examining discrepancies in how heterosexual-identifying and queer-identifying learners experienced discipline and punishment in a South African township school. Moreover, the theory was helpful in examining how queer-identifying learners experienced severe and harsher forms of school discipline and punishment because of their sexual orientations.

3.1. Towards a Theoretical Framework

This study engaged a group of learners from a township secondary school to examine their experiences of school discipline and punishment. Moreover, data analysis in the study was located within both the conflict theory of education and the queer theory. Using these theories to frame my analysis, in addition to developing a deeper understanding of the experiences of learners from their perspectives, the study examined how gender and sexual orientation played a role in the types and

forms of discipline and punishment experienced by the township secondary school learners in this study. Therefore, the study focused in particular on how these learners' gender identities, gender expressions, and sexual orientations shaped their experience of discipline and punishment in school. Thus, the study examined school discipline and punishment from the nexus of township learners intersecting gender identities, expressions and sexual orientations.

Informed by the research questions posed in the study, three theoretical positions informed the study's data analysis. First, Foucault's ideas of discipline and punishment provided a framework to critically examine how discipline and punishment are used by teachers to maintain control and order within the school; thus, reflecting broader societal structures of power and inequality. Second, the conflict theory of education provided a framework for analysing school-based power dynamics and inequalities that warrant teachers' use of discipline and punishment against subordinated learners. The theory also provided a framework for analysing learners' experiences of discipline and punishment and the gendered inequalities in their experiences. Thirdly, queer theory provided a framework for analysing the experiences of discipline and punishment among those learners who identified as queer in the study reported in this dissertation. In other words, queer theory provided a framework for analysing the various ways in which queer learners in a South African township secondary school experience discipline and punishment.

To analyse data responding to the two research questions posed in the study, three propositions for data analysis were formulated in this dissertation. The first research question that I sought to address was: *How do learners in a South African township school experience discipline and punishment?* Informed by Michel Foucault's idea of discipline and punishment and the conflict theory of education, this study's analysis was premised on the assumption that teachers use discipline and punishment to reinforce notions of power, domination and subjugation against learners in school. The second research question in this study was: *Do learners report inequalities in how discipline is meted out based on their diverse gender identities and sexual orientations, and if so, in what form or shape do these discrepancies manifest?* First, linked to Foucault's idea of discipline and punishment and the conflict theory, the study's analysis was premised on the assumption that teachers use discipline and punishment practices as tools for policing and reinforcing normative gender identities, gender expressions, and sexual orientations among

learners. Second, linked to queer theory, the assumption in this study was that teachers are informed by normative queerphobic attitudes, beliefs and practices to use discipline and punishment as tools that reinforce heterosexuality among queer-identifying learners.

Guided by these propositions, my analysis of the data focused on power inequalities in school discipline and punishment practices. That is, how teachers use their power through discipline and punishment against learners. Likewise, my analysis of the data focused on inequalities in how school discipline is meted out based on learners' intersecting gender identities and sexual orientations. In particular, I examined how boys, girls and queer-identifying learners communicated about the discrepancies they experienced during discipline and punishment in school.

3.2. Synthesis

This study examined how learners from a South African township school experience discipline at the nexus of their diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. In this chapter, I presented the theoretical framework which formed the basis for data analysis in the study. I opened the chapter with a section that clarified the key concepts and their use in the study. The chapter also outlined the theoretical lenses that informed analysis in the study. Emerging from this chapter are two propositions that were used to guide data analysis in the study. In the next chapter, I outline the literature review, which provides a broad overview of the scholarship on the topic under study.

CHAPTER THREE

THE NEXUS OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY ON SCHOOL DISCIPLINE AND PUNISHMENT: A LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Introduction

Violence in schools is a global issue that manifests in various forms, including physical punishment by teachers against learners. This violence reflects broader societal inequalities and power dynamics, often exacerbating existing social tensions within educational settings (Cornell & Mayer, 2010). In many countries, corporal punishment remains a common disciplinary method despite evidence of its harmful effects on learners' well-being and academic performance (Milligan et al., 2024; Akyina., 2024). As discussed in the previous chapter, Karl Marx's conflict theory of education posits that educational institutions perpetuate social inequalities by enforcing power structures that benefit dominant groups (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). In this context, school violence can be seen as a mechanism through which dominant groups (i.e., teachers) maintain control and reinforce societal hierarchies. Moreover, Michel Foucault's concept of discipline and punishment further elucidates how disciplinary practices in schools are designed to produce docile bodies (i.e., those of learners) that conform to societal norms (Foucault, 1977). These practices, according to Foucault, often involve surveillance, normalisation, and punishment (discussed broadly in Chapter Two), contributing to a culture of control and compliance. Within this context, the nexus of school discipline and punishment with learners' gender and sexual identities presents a complex and multifaceted issue. While the previous chapter (Chapter Two) discussed key concepts and theories that drive analysis in the study reported in this dissertation, this chapter (Chapter Three) critically examines the literature on school discipline and punishment, focusing on how these practices intersect with learners' gender identities and sexual orientations. As highlighted above, I have situated my discussion within the broader issue of violence against learners, especially how schools are implicated in the policing of learners' gender identities and their sexualities using the history and current South African context. I then provide a short overview of discipline against learners followed by a focused exploration of the inequalities in school discipline, focusing particularly on the gendered nature of school discipline and its disproportionate impact on boys and queer learners. The chapter concludes with a detailed discussion of the South African context.

It further identifies gaps in the literature regarding the experiences of South African learners based on their gender and sexual orientation. The review presented in this chapter draws on international and South African studies, using Karl Marx's conflict theory of education, Foucault's concept of discipline and punishment, and queer theory as critical lenses for situating and critiquing the literature. The chapter concludes with a conceptual framework that guides analysis in this study.

3.2 The Intersection of School Discipline with Gender and Sexuality in South Africa

South Africa's complex and turbulent past of colonialism and apartheid, and the legacies of ongoing socioeconomic challenges have produced unique trends for examining and understanding the intersection (Crenshaw, 1991) of school discipline with gender and sexual orientation (Msibi, 2012; Hunter and Morrell, 2021). In this section, I delve into how these elements mobilise and interact within schools to produce specific trends based on learners' gender and sexual identities (Msibi, 2012; Mayeza & Vincent, 2019; Reygan, 2019; Reygan, 2021; Francis & Monakali, 2021; Bhana, 2022; Mayeza, 2023). During the apartheid period, the government institutionalised racial segregation and inequality, which negatively impacted the education system in the country (Morrell, 1998; Thobejane, 2013). The apartheid regime used education as a weapon for perpetuating racial hierarchies and social control that left the majority of the population on the margins of social and political life (Morrell, 2001). A pivotal moment for education during the apartheid era came with the passing of the Bantu Education Act of 1953; a legislation which ensured that Black South Africans received inferior education that was designed to prepare them for low-skills, low-wage and subservient roles (Christie, 1991). With it came repressive practices that further legitimised corporal punishment and other harsh forms of school discipline (Morrell, 1998; 2001). It is important to reflect on this historical context given that its legacy continues to shape contemporary issues in South African schools. In other words, the legacies and practices of apartheid still influence many aspects of the educational system in the country.

While apartheid ended with the advent of democracy in 1994, the country still battles with profound educational disparities. For example, the country continues to operate within what Spaul (2013) terms a 'bimodal system' of education. That is, a dual system of education where "schools which served predominantly White learners under apartheid remain functional, while those which served Black learners remain dysfunctional and unable to impart the necessary numeracy and

literacy skills students should be acquiring” (Spaull, 2013, p. 2). Within this context, South African schools remain, to a large extent, segregated with Black learners predominantly attending under-resourced rural and township schools (Spaull, 2013). These socioeconomic challenges are intertwined with issues of school discipline, as resource-strapped schools may resort to more punitive measures due to a lack of alternative approaches (Mestry & Khumalo, 2012; Segalo & Rambuda, 2018).

Likewise, gender continues to play a significant role in shaping disciplinary practices in the country’s schools (Moyo et al., 2014; Hunter & Morrell, 2021). The limited available research on this topic reports that boys are more likely to face physical punishment and other harsh disciplinary measures compared to girls (Morrell, 2001; Hlatshwayo, 2024). This difference is rooted in societal norms that construct boys as inherently more disruptive and in need of stricter control (Human-Vogel & Morkel, 2017). However, as Hunter and Morrell (2021) argue, this dominant narrative fails to consider the broader structural and socioeconomic conditions that influence boys’ behaviours.

Moreover, schools are reportedly sites of victimisation, bullying and discrimination against queer learners (Msibi, 2012; Bhana, 2012; Francis, 2017). Consequently, for these learners, the intersection of sexual orientation and school discipline practices is fraught. These experiences are made complex by schools' lack of comprehensive support and policies to support queer learners and promote a safe and enabling schooling environment (Reygan, 2016). Teachers, influenced by prevailing heteronormative and cisnormative attitudes, may either directly participate in discriminatory practices or fail to intervene adequately (Johnson, 2014).

Other factors that complicate the landscape of discipline practices in South African schools include enduring socioeconomic challenges such as high rates of poverty and unemployment (Ngidi, et al., 2021); both of which create a fertile environment for violence and crime to prevail. Within this context, schools reflect the broader socioeconomic issues of the communities they serve (Ngidi & Moletsane, 2023). In these contexts, discipline becomes a tool to exert power and control, and for maintaining order instead of fostering a safer and inclusive school environment (Morrell, 1998). Finally, sociocultural practices and norms are also implicated in disciplinary practices in South African schools (Moletsane, 2014). For example, gender inequality and heteropatriarchal attitudes

shape the policing of gender and sexuality in schools, with Bhana (2005) highlighting how traditional gender roles are reinforced through disciplinary practices where girls are subjected to moralistic judgments and boys experience punitive measures that are designed to curb their aggression (See, also Mncube & Netshitangani, 2014). These studies present a snapshot of how gender and sexuality intersect with other social, economic, and political elements to produce risk for learners in South African schools.

3.3 Policing Learners' Gender and Sexuality in School

Globally, schools are regarded as areas where gender and sexualities are policed (Mittleman, 2018; Davies et al., 2019; Bhana & Mayeza, 2019; Bhana & Mayeza, 2020). The concept of gender policing processes conversations about discrimination against gender and sexually diverse individuals by drawing attention to the heteronormative sociocultural norms used to reproduce the lines between normal, different, and unacceptable (Payne & Smith, 2016). Therefore, according to Payne and Smith (2016), gender policing is a social process of enforcing cultural expectations for normative masculine and feminine expressions. In several societies across the globe, gender and sexualities are controlled and policed, thus resulting in harassment, discrimination, and violence against individuals who identify as gender and sexually diverse (Robinson, 2020; Mittleman, 2018; Rawlings, 2021; Francis, 2023).

Gender policing is used to assign or gain power and privilege among those who do the policing (i.e., teachers in schools), while regulating the behaviours and even punishing those who do not 'fit' within sociocultural scripts and norms (Msibi, 2013; Preston, 2014; Payne and Smith, 2016; Bhana et al., 2021). Research shows that the use of queerphobic and heterosexist rhetoric rooted in heteropatriarchal discourses are often used to police gender and sexually diverse identities, and to a large extent, girls and queer learners (Ngipadulwa, 2015; Parkes, 2015; Morris, 2016; Morris and Perry, 2017). For example, studies have documented the use of queerphobic and sexist language in school settings to belittle learners who defy socially expected sexual and gender norms. Bhana and Mayeza's (2016) study, which explored the experiences of queer learners in schools documented how boys who deviate from perceived normative masculinity were policed using sexist, derogatory, and queerphobic language. For example, those learners who identified

within the heteronormative spectrum used derogatory words such as calling queer-identifying learners '*moffie*' and '*isitabane*' which, in Western terms, can be comparable to the word '*faggot*' (see, also Msibi, 2012). Similarly, Mittleman's (2023) study documented the dynamics of gender policing in contemporary American high schools. Boys who reported being perceived as 'very feminine' were four times more likely to be bullied than their so-called 'very masculine' peers. Narratives of learners included discrimination and bullying which were used to discipline queer learners into their 'proper' places within the gender binary. Through policing, gender and sexually diverse students learn to self-police and discipline themselves and others into fitting within normative gender and sexual identities.

Indeed, there are reports that sexual and physical bullying in schools are common practices used to police the gender and sexual identities of learners who are 'othered', such as girls and those who identify as queer (Greytak et al, 2016; Kowic et al, 2016; Morris and Perry, 2017; Kostas, 2022). In this way, school cultures rely on hegemonic heteronormative discourses to regulate what are considered divergent expressions of gender and sexuality. Gendered violence in school settings is underpinned by heteropatriarchal norms and ideas about hegemonic masculinity and compulsory femininity (Bhana, 2012; Bhana, 2014; Bellinger, 2016; Morris and Perry, 2017). For instance, in South Africa, research has shown how heterosexual-identifying boys police gender and sexualities in school by using queerphobic violence as a means of exerting and yielding power over other boys who are labelled as 'gay'; a term that is associated with physical and emotional fragility which is associated with femininity (Bhana and Mayeza, 2017).

School geographies facilitate the policing of gender and sexuality. For example, Ngidi, Mkhize, and Sibeko (2021) argue that school toilets are areas for the (re)construction of hegemonic, dominating, and violent heterosexual masculinity, and the further legitimisation of heteropatriarchal systems that govern and police gender and sexuality. Those who represent outside dominant constructions of gender and sexual orientation are cast aside as the 'other' (Mayeza & Bhana, 2021). As such, school toilets emerge in the literature as sites where 'othered' gender norms are policed, and where non-conforming learners experience discrimination and marginalisation (Bender-Baird, 2016; King and Vipond, 2019; Kowic et al, 2020; Brown and Buthelezi, 2020). Playgrounds are also some of the school geographies where gender policing

occurs. Indeed, Mayeza's (2017) work has found that school children use play, and the playground by extension, to police gender and sexualities. Mayeza goes on to argue that learners construct gender 'boundaries' and police gender 'transgressions' on the school playground during break time. Therefore, as the author notes, the playground operates as a site for learning gender through forms of policing that involve boys bullying girls and 'other' boys who do not conform to gender norms. What is further worrying is that teachers collude in the policing of gender and sexualities; with some American studies revealing that teachers use the classroom to reinforce hostility toward gender non-conforming learners (Bradshaw and Johnson, 2011; Asher et al, 2018).

Missing in local scholarly discussions is how discipline practices might also be used to police gender and sexualities in schools. Research from abroad shows that queer learners are three times more likely than their heterosexual-identifying and gender-conforming peers to experience punitive discipline at school (Horn and Scriber, 2020). For example, Horn and Scriber, report, based on their study in the USA, that one in two learners reported being punished severely in a way that is directly linked to their gender identities and sexual orientation. The narratives of learners included teachers policing gender through physical punishment, threats, intimidation, and social exclusion from extracurricular activities. In South Africa, literature remains sparse about how gender policing influences how teachers collude in the discipline and punishment of learners. This gap in the literature is unfortunate given that global north studies note how teachers hold a gendered view of discipline which constructs boys as 'naturally' resilient, strong, and hard, and girls as timid and domesticated while constructing queer learners as 'unnatural'; thus, justifying discrepancies in how disciplinary processes are conducted in schools (Ispa-Landa, 2017; Vogel and Morkel, 2017; Mahlangu et al, 2021).

3.4 School Discipline: A Gendered Issue

School discipline encompasses a range of practices aimed at regulating student behaviour and maintaining order. However, these practices often disproportionately impact marginalised groups, including those who face marginalisation based on their gender identities, gender expressions, and sexual orientations. Disciplinary measures such as suspensions, expulsions, and corporal punishment are frequently employed, sometimes leading to adverse academic and psychological

outcomes for learners (Mediratta & Rausch, 2016; Greene, 2018). International studies highlight the variability in disciplinary practices across different educational contexts (Koswic, 2020; Snapp et al., 2015, Graytak & Palmer, 2018, Mittleman, 2018). In the USA, punitive measures are prevalent, particularly among minority and marginalised learners (including Black and Latina learners and those who identify as queer), perpetuating the school-to-prison pipeline³ (Mallet, 2016; Morgan, 2021). In Australia, aggressive disciplinary methods have been shown to create environments of fear and oppression among learners (Montuoro & Lewis, 2018). Similarly, in Mauritius, a lack of effective classroom management skills among teachers has resulted in persistent disciplinary challenges (Jinot, 2018). In South Africa, the legacy of apartheid-era corporal punishment continues to influence current disciplinary practices. Despite the South African Schools Act (1996) outlawing corporal punishment, it remains widely practised, reflecting deeply entrenched cultural and systemic violence (Porteus et al., 2001; Mahlangu et al., 2021). These punitive measures not only harm learners but also undermine efforts to create inclusive and supportive educational environments.

What is more, studies have revealed that school discipline is a gendered phenomenon with significant gender disparities in how teachers administer it (Oplatka & Atias, 2007). Early work (see, Rodriguez, 2002) has long since argued that male teachers are more likely to select more aggressive disciplinary approaches towards boys compared to girls. Likewise, both female and male teachers are more likely to not acknowledge boys' behaviours when it is not aggressive compared to girls (Rodriguez, 2002). Finally, female teachers seem slightly more consistent in their disciplinary responses for both boys and girls. Even principals have been implicated in 'gendering' school discipline, with Oplatka and Atias (2007) finding gendered differences in how they view discipline management.

Other studies have been useful in illustrating the gendered ways in which learners experience school discipline. For example, a study by Lehmann et al. (2021) used the 2012-2018 Monitoring the Future Survey to examine racial, ethnic and gendered disparities in school discipline among

³ In the USA, the 'school-to-prison pipeline' are policies and practices that push schoolchildren, especially children most at-risk such as those from resource-poor contexts, out of the classroom and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems (Sissoko, Baker & Caron, 2023). As a policy, the pipeline reflects a prioritisation of incarceration over education for children.

53 986 Grade eight to 10 students in the USA and found that minority students were more likely than their white counterparts to experience punitive discipline. Of relevance to the study reported in this dissertation was the finding that these punitive practices were much more punitive for female minority students, suggesting gendered patterns in the experience of punitive discipline. Likewise, Andrews and Gutwein (2020) used focus group discussions to explore students' experiences with inequitable and culturally biased school discipline practices across 40 middle schools in one midwestern school district in the USA. The students perceived their school discipline practices as both culturally biased and inequitable, with gender playing a significant role in how discipline was experienced by students. Still, Morris (2017) analysed a longitudinal dataset of detailed school discipline records by focusing on the interactions between race and gender in relation to school referrals. The author reports that African American girls were three times more likely than their white peers to receive office referrals, including for common infractions such as dress code violations and disruptive behaviour. While race also played a role in these disparate experiences, Morris argues that African American girls were disproportionately punished for subjective infractions that were influenced by teachers' gendered interpretations.

Indeed, a significant number of studies on gendered inequalities in school discipline come from the USA and are based on large quantitative surveys (as the studies discussed above show). Still, there are pockets of studies hailing outside the USA. For example, in Antigua and Barbuda, Younger (2014) used a qualitative case study methodology to explore the gender dynamics and inequalities involved in learner discipline in four secondary schools. The scholar reports that teachers' gendered assumptions led to boys receiving more negative attention. Younger further states that there were hidden gender inequalities in the school which pressured learners to conform to gender norms. In Botswana, Humphreys' (2008) early ethnographic exploration, that investigated corporal punishment as a gendered practice in four junior secondary schools, found that female and male students and teachers understood and experienced the 'giving' and 'receiving' of corporal punishment differently. For example, boys experienced more severe punishment than girls, with male teachers exercising the most coercive forms of punishment on learners. Within this context, Humphrey argued that gender interacted with and often took precedence over age and authority relations in how corporal punishment was understood and experienced. Finally, in South Africa, Msani's (2007) qualitative work with grade 11 learners in

KwaZulu-Natal found that corporal punishment was gendered. For example, teachers used more force and violence on boys and made girls engage in hard labour as a form of corporal punishment. These studies show that school discipline is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, with gender playing an active role

3.5 Gendered Discrepancies in School Discipline Practices

Disciplinary measures are often a response to learners' misdemeanours and their violation of school rules. Yet, schools continue to administer discipline on gendered terms. For example, Cheruvalath and Tripathi, (2015) report, based on their study in India, that boys and girls are subjected to corporal punishment. However, this corporal punishment is experienced in gendered and discriminatory ways. These scholars documented how boys were likely to get more punishment and were beaten more often than girls. Other studies that have investigated discipline inequalities in schools located in Mississippi, Arkansas, and Alabama in the USA report that boys are three times more likely than girls to be subjected to corporal punishment in more than three-quarters of the school districts (Gershoff and Font, 2016; Gershoff, 2017). Thus, these researchers agree that boys are grossly overrepresented among students who receive punitive, often physical forms of corporal punishment. Lokot et al's (2020) study, which collected data from 59 countries, examined how children's experiences of corporal punishment can also be influenced by gender norms. The study found corresponding evidence which suggested that boys experienced higher severity and frequency of physical punishment than their female comparators in schools.

Younger and Cobbette's (2014) Caribbean study, which investigated boys' underachievement, documented how boys received more than twice as many reprimands from their teachers when compared to girls. Boys also received more severe punishment because of their innate "tough maleness" (Younger and Cobbette, 2014, p. 9). Teachers' narratives in Younger and Cobbette's study included the normative belief that girls are easier to teach, more compliant, and less challenging in classroom management terms, while boys' behaviour necessitates a more authoritarian approach. Likewise, Vogel and Morkel's (2017) work that investigated the gendered experiences of learners during disciplinary processes in South African schools found that teachers administered discipline based on each learner's gender identity. For example, these researchers

report that extreme punishment was administered against boys because they were perceived as temperamental with teachers associating them with ill-discipline. In the same study, learners who were interviewed reported how girls received less frequent and less extreme forms of physical punishment. The construction of girls as “soft” by teachers led to discipline inequalities in the schools studied (Vogel and Morkel, 2017, p. 8).

Mungoo (2017) argues that boys are disproportionately represented in discipline practices when compared to girls. For example, boys are more likely to receive violent blows and beatings, and their experiences are more strident than those experienced by their female peers. Therefore, Mungoo (2017); Rafique and Ahmed (2019) suggests that significant discipline disparities exist in schools. Learners report that teachers are hostile towards boys and target them for physical and often punitive forms of corporal punishment. Thus, as the author points out, for example, teachers’ attitudes towards learners are influenced by gender; in this instance, boys are expected to endure physical forms of punishment and verbal abuse. Luti-Mallei and Gakunga (2016), in their study that investigated school discipline practices against learners in the public secondary schools of Kenya, found corresponding evidence which suggests that boys are affected more by disciplinary issues when compared to girls across all categories of schools. Based on their findings, the authors concluded that boys experience higher severity and frequency of physical punishment.

Available scholarship has also found significant patterns of disproportionate discipline practices that are meted out against learners based on their sexual orientations in schools. For example, Snapp and Russell’s (2016) study which explored factors that contribute to discipline disparities towards LGBTQ learners in the USA found disciplinary inequalities where queer learners experienced harsher and more severe forms of punishment than their non-queer comparators. Queer learners identified biases in terms of the sort of discipline they experienced. Greytak and Palmer’s (2017) work similarly examined queer learners’ experiences with school discipline and found a trend that discriminated against these learners, including more disciplinary referrals to school administration, frequent experiences of school detention, longer suspension periods, and even expulsion from school based on minor transgression. Research by Chmielewski and colleagues (2016) found similar trends. For example, in their work that examined the experiences of learners in school, the authors report that queer learners were three times more likely than their

heterosexual comparators to be expelled from school for similar behaviours. The authors further point to school policies as reinforcers of the inequalities observed in disciplinary practices that discriminate against queer learners.

Queer learners face unique challenges in school environments, including homophobic discrimination and violence. These students often experience higher levels of bullying, victimization, and punitive disciplinary measures compared to their heterosexual peers (Quinn, 2017; Smith, 2019; Safir, 2022). Such discriminatory practices contribute to a hostile school climate, adversely affecting queer students' academic achievement and mental health (Kosciw et al., 2016; Ullman, 2018). In South Africa, the experiences of queer learners are particularly concerning. Studies indicate that these students frequently encounter queerphobic violence and a lack of institutional support, exacerbating their marginalization (Francis, 2017; Francis, 2021; Ngubane et al., 2019). Schools often lack comprehensive policies and resources to address the specific needs of queer learners, further entrenching inequalities (Masiyela, 2017; Mayisela, 2021). Queer theory provides a critical lens for understanding these issues, emphasizing the fluidity of gender and sexual identities and challenging normative assumptions about these categories (Butler, 1990). By applying queer theory, we can better understand how disciplinary practices in schools reinforce heteronormative and cisnormative standards, thereby marginalizing queer students.

These patterns of using discipline to discriminate against gender and sexually diverse learners have also been reported in other studies (see, for example, Poteat et al, 2016; Bellinger, 2016). Together, these studies give a snapshot of how schools are constructed as sites of gender normativity and where gender regulating practices are masked and presented as discipline practices. Missing in the scholarship are the narratives of learners from South African schools, particularly those attending township schools where violence and stringent gender norms are entrenched.

3.6 Gaps in the Literature

In South Africa, the intersection of school discipline with gender and sexual orientation is particularly complex due to the country's history of apartheid and ongoing socio-economic challenges. The persistence of corporal punishment and other punitive disciplinary measures reflects broader issues of violence and inequality within South African society (Morrell, 2001;

Maphosa & Shumba, 2010). Research indicates that South African schools often lack the resources and support needed to implement non-punitive disciplinary approaches effectively (Ngubane et al., 2019; Masakhane & Chikoko, 2016). Additionally, the experiences of Queer learners are frequently overlooked, with schools failing to address queerphobic violence and discrimination adequately (Masiyela, 2017; Mayisela, 2021). Despite these challenges, there are ongoing efforts to promote restorative justice and positive behavioural interventions in South African schools. These approaches emphasise respect for learners' rights and the development of social and emotional skills, providing a more inclusive and supportive framework for discipline (Ngubane et al., 2019; Masiyela, 2017). While significant research has been conducted on school discipline and punishment, there is a notable gap in the literature concerning the experiences of South African learners based on their gender identities, gender expressions and sexual orientations. Specifically, there is a need for more comprehensive studies that explore how disciplinary practices intersect with these identities and the broader implications for educational equity and inclusion. It is this scholarly gap that the study reported in this dissertation seeks to bridge.

3.7 Discussion

This chapter has presented a review of the literature which drew on an array of international and local studies. The chapter provided a comprehensive overview of the issue of school discipline and punishment across different cultural and geographical contexts and situated the South African context within a broader scholarly framework. The review has shed light on five overlapping themes for understanding the nexus of school discipline and punishment with gender and sexuality. First, the literature points to gender policing in schools. Within this context, schools are understood as areas where gender and sexual norms are reinforced, often through punitive and discriminatory practices. Effectively, learners who do not conform to heteronormative expectations are subjected to various forms of policing that include physical punishment, verbal harassment, and social exclusion. Second, the review suggests that there are disparities in school-based disciplinary practices. For example, several studies reported significant gendered discrepancies in how discipline is administered, with boys and queer-identifying learners often subjected to more severe, harsher, and punitive measures compared to girls and heterosexual-identifying learners. These disparities, as the literature suggested, are embedded in societal norms that view boys as inherently more resilient and girls more compliant, evoking the 'bad boys' and 'good girls' discourse. Third,

the review has situated the impact of punitive discipline on learners. In this regard, teachers' use of corporal punishment and other punitive disciplinary approaches leads to detrimental effects on learners' well-being and academic performance. These disciplinary practices are especially harmful to those learners who are marginalised; thus, fuelling their vulnerability and reinforcing social inequalities. Fourth, the review has highlighted the role played by teachers in gender policing. Teachers are implicated in the act of enforcing gender norms. They further hold gendered views that influence how they administer discipline and punishment; thus, perpetuating a cycle of discrimination and marginalisation. Finally, the literature has revealed a lack of school-level support for queer-identifying learners. Instead of receiving support and protection, queer learners are targeted in unique ways that include higher levels of victimisation and bullying. Moreover, the review reveals that queer learners operate within a schooling system without comprehensive policies for addressing their needs, which further entrenches their marginalisation.

This chapter was grounded in robust theoretical lenses (e.g., Karl Marx's conflict theory of education, Michel Foucault's concept of discipline and punishment, and queer theory), that provided an analytical framework through which the issue of school discipline and its intersections with gender and sexuality is understood. By integrating these theoretical frames, this chapter has offered a multifaceted understanding of school discipline. Firstly, conflict theory has helped in highlighting how schools are implicated in the perpetuation of social inequalities that create fertile environments for teachers to wield unwarranted power over learners. Secondly, Foucault's concept of discipline and punishment illuminated the mechanisms of control and the normalisation of punitive disciplinary practices against learners in schools. Finally, the queer theory has offered a tool for challenging normative assumptions about gender and sexuality. Thus, the literature review in this chapter has effectively used these theories to analyse the power dynamics at play in school disciplinary practices. In doing so, the review has highlighted how school discipline and punishment not only maintain order but further reinforce existing social norms and hierarchies, particularly as they relate to gender and sexuality. Indeed, the literature review is comprehensive in its theoretical analysis. However, there is a noticeable lack of empirical qualitative data that captures learners' lived experiences. The study I report in this dissertation, thus, addresses this methodological gap and provides a rich and nuanced understanding of how learners experience disciplinary practices in school.

3.7.1 Conceptual Framework

The study reported in this dissertation examined school discipline from the nexus of gender and sexuality. In particular, the study engaged learners from one township secondary school to probe school discipline in the context of their intersecting gender identities and sexual orientations. Emerging from the literature review is a conceptual framework for understanding learners' experiences of school discipline and punishment. Figure 2.1 presents the conceptual framework which guides the analysis in this study.

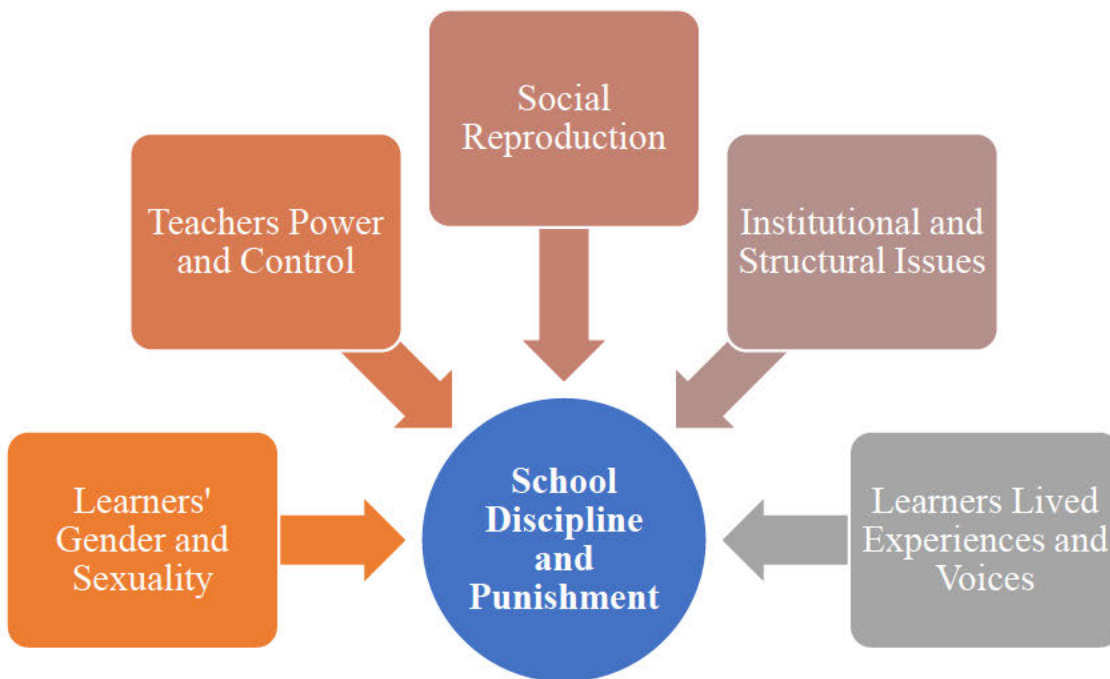


Figure 2.1: Framework for understanding learners' experiences of school discipline and punishment.

The framework prioritises an intersectional approach by recognising that learners' experiences of discipline and punishment are shaped by multiple and overlapping social identities that include gender and sexuality. This highlights the complex ways that different forms of discrimination and privilege interact within the school environment. Likewise, drawing on Foucault, the framework suggests that disciplinary practices in school function as mechanisms of power and control wielded by teachers. In this regard, schools enforce conformity and compliance through surveillance and punishment, largely targeting learners who deviate from normative gender and sexual identities. Moreover, located within Karl Marx's conflict theory, the framework suggests that school

discipline and punishment contribute to the reproduction of social inequalities. Within this context, disciplinary measures in school serve the interest of teachers (the dominant group inside the school) and maintain existing power structures. Additionally, located within queer theory, the conceptual framework suggests that disciplinary practices reinforce are based on normative assumptions about gender and sexuality which subsequently reinforce heteronormative and cisnormative standards in school. Furthermore, the framework suggests that institutional (i.e., school policies and the role of teachers) and structural factors (i.e., socio-political context) in which schools operate influence disciplinary practices. Finally, the framework suggests that the learners' lived experiences and their voices should be at the centre of understanding disciplinary practices in school. The centring of learners' experiences and voices provides a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the impact of discriminatory school discipline and punishment practices.

Integrating these elements, the conceptual framework provides a comprehensive understanding of why gender and sexual orientation are significant for understanding the experience of school discipline and punishment. This approach not only highlights the mechanisms of discrimination but also identifies pathways for creating more inclusive and equitable educational environments.

3.8 Chapter Conclusion

The literature on school discipline and punishment reveals significant gender and sexual orientation disparities, reflecting broader societal inequalities and power dynamics. By integrating conflict theory, Foucault's concept of discipline, and queer theory, we can develop a more comprehensive understanding of these issues and advocate for more inclusive and equitable disciplinary practices. This approach is particularly relevant in the South African context, where ongoing efforts to address violence and discrimination in schools must consider the diverse identities and experiences of all learners.

The next chapter outlines the study's methodology.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

As noted in Chapter One, this study examined school discipline from the nexus of learners' gender and sexualities. In particular, the study engaged learners from a township secondary school to probe for experiences of school discipline in the context of their intersecting gender and sexual identities. The previous chapter was a review of global and local studies that focus on school discipline. In this chapter, I outline the methodology I used to examine secondary school learners' experiences of school discipline within the context of their gender identities and expressions, as well as their sexual orientations. The chapter discusses the research paradigm within which the study's methodology was located, the methodological approach employed in the study, the methods used for generating data, and the analysis approach followed for data analysis. I conclude the chapter with a reflection on the study's trustworthiness and the ethical issues that were considered throughout the research.

4.2 Research Paradigm

A paradigm is a set of ideas and beliefs that provide a framework or model a researcher can follow (Park et al., 2020; Khatri, 2020; Gannon et al., 2022). It defines existing knowledge, the nature of the problem to be investigated, appropriate methods of investigation, and how data should be analysed and interpreted (Munar & Jamal, 2016; Davis & Fisher, 2018; Nickerson, 2022). This study was located within the interpretivist paradigm, which seeks to understand a particular social issue within a specified context, with its core assumption being that reality is socially constructed (Putnum & Banghart, 2017; Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). Interpretive researchers do not seek the answers for their studies in rigid ways. Instead, they approach reality from the 'subjects' under study, typically people who own their experiences and are of a particular group or culture (Theys, 2017; Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022; Kouam & William, 2024). Aligned with this knowledge, this study aimed to understand how gender and sexuality shape learners' experiences with practices related to discipline and punishment in school. Interpretivism uses qualitative research methods that focus on individuals' beliefs, motivations, experiences, perspectives, and reasoning to gain an

understanding of social interactions. This paradigm is, thus, understood as an approach in social science research that asserts that the beliefs, motivations, and reasoning of individuals in a social situation are essential for decoding the meaning of the data that can be collected around a phenomenon (Thanh & Thanh, 2015; Bonache & Festing, 2020). From this perspective, in this study, I was interested in how learners from a secondary school in Umlazi township, individually and together as a group, used participatory drawings to construct and attach subjective meaning to their experiences of school discipline and punishment within the context of their gender identities and expressions, and their sexual orientations (Leeming, 2018).

4.3 Research Design

A research design is a comprehensive planning process used to collect and analyse data to enhance understanding of a topic (Sileyew, 2019; Asenahabi, 2019). It begins with the researcher having a purpose for conducting research and formulating a research question. Therefore, at a general level, the research process consists of three primary stages: 1) posing a question for examination, 2) collecting and analysing data to answer the question, and 3) presenting an answer to the question (Abutabenjeh & Jaradat, 2018). Qualitative research involves a vast and complex methodology used to describe phenomena from the participants’ viewpoints, with rich descriptive details of the human context, and it does so by studying individuals in their natural settings (Groenland & Dana, 2020; Nassaji, 2020). Table 4.1, below, presents an outline of the research design, which, heeding Groenland and Dana (2020), has been my guide for the study. The table illustrates the research paradigm, the data generation approaches, the sampling method, and the analysis employed in the study.

Table 4.1: Outline of the Research Design

Research Design	
<i>Qualitative Study</i>	- Qualitative Approach - Interpretivist Perspective
<i>Sampling Method</i>	- Purposive
<i>Data Generation Methods</i>	- Participatory Drawing - Focus Group Discussions
<i>Data Analysis</i>	- Visual Data Analysis - Thematic Analysis

4.3.1. Qualitative Approach

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to generate data. The qualitative approach was chosen because I envisioned it would allow me to understand how learners make sense of their school's social ecologies, including the everyday school practices around discipline and punishment, and how they (learners) interpret and experience such practices. In this case, I aimed to understand, from the perspectives and narratives of learners, how discipline practices that teachers in their township secondary school enforce are shaped by the learners' gender identities, expressions and sexual orientations.

In this research, I was more interested in listening to the participants' voices and 'subjectivities' rather than quantifying their experiences of school discipline. I understand that qualitative research represents the world in terms of rich descriptive details of the human context rather than numbers (Salvador, 2016; Hennink, 2020; Groenland & Dana, 2020). Thus, it tends to follow an idiographic mode of inquiry that focuses on individuals rather than representative and quantifiable populations (Husbands et al., 2017; Busetto et al., 2020). In qualitative research, sociocultural issues are located within the participants' perspectives, understandings, and experiences (McDermott, 2014; Collins & Stockton, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thus, a qualitative approach was most appropriate for this study since I wanted to learn about discipline and punishment from the perspectives of learners attending a township secondary school.

4.4 Research Site: Qamatha Secondary School

In Chapter One, I described the context of the study – the resource-poor township of Umlazi, located about 25 kilometres south of the port city of Durban, within the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa – within which the learners who participated in this study lived and attended school. In this section, I focus on Qamatha Secondary School (not its real name) as the primary research site where the participants were selected and where the data was generated. Qamatha is a mixed-sex high school that enrolls learners from the greater Umlazi Township and nearby townships. Since Umlazi Township is populated mainly by the Black African racial group (Mkhize et al., 2023), Qamatha Secondary School has a population made up of only Black African learners. At the time of data generation, the school had an enrolment figure of over

2,500 learners from surrounding communities. The school had overcrowded classrooms, which resulted from high learner enrolments in very few classrooms. It was also characterised by a shortage of teachers and a debilitated physical infrastructure, including broken windows and doors, peeling painting on the walls, broken or unmaintained toilet facilities, etcetera (West & Meier, 2020).

Its staff consisted of a principal, two deputy principals, four heads of departments, and sixty-nine teachers. On average, the teacher-to-learner ratio was 1:36, which is higher than that stipulated in the Department of Basic Education's National Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure (2020) for large schools. According to the document, large schools require a 1:23 classroom teacher-to-learner ratio. Due to staff shortages and class overcrowding, the school employed contract teachers from the School's Governing Body (SGB) budget to support teaching and learning activities.

Qamatha enrolls learners from Grade Eight to Grade 12. The South African public education system (within which the participants were recruited) consists of compulsory education from Grade One to Grade Nine, and it spans 12 Grades in total (Department of Basic Education, 2021). The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education (KZN DoE) classifies Qamatha Secondary School as a Quintile Two school because of its location in a resource-poor and low-income community. South African public schools are categorised into five quintiles based on the resource base of the communities they service. For example, Quintile One to Three schools serve the poorest communities, while quintile Four to Five schools serve communities with relatively more resources. Thus, because of their resource-poor base, Quintiles One to Three schools are declared 'no-fee paying', while upper quintiles are 'fee-paying' (Maistry & Africa, 2020).

Since the school attracted learners from low-income households and communities, it offered some social support programmes for learners who needed such support. This included meals and uniforms. While the school was located in a low-income community, it was relatively better equipped than other neighbouring schools. For example, Qamatha had a computer and science laboratory (although not fully equipped or functional) and sports fields, donated mainly by the school's alumni, businesses, and not-for-profit organisations. Given that Umlazi is a violent

township and crime is ubiquitous (Phungula, 2022; Khuzwayo, 2023), the school had a security system with security guards at the gate. An informal housing settlement was located adjacent to the school, and a security fence separated the community from the school. However, as the study participants informed me, the community created some illegal openings on the school's perimeter fence and accessed the school from time to time, which compromised the safety of teachers and learners. Therefore, safety and security were a concern for the learners who participated in this study.

Qamatha Secondary School was selected on the basis that it is located in a township that is steeped in heteropatriarchal, heterosexist and queerphobic general attitudes (Hunter, 2010; Francis, 2023). One study (Azwiangwisi & Mudzui, 2023) that examined the impact of cultural beliefs on queer-identifying men's access to healthcare services in Umlazi found that homophobia, stigma, and discrimination are rampant, with the authors concluding that culture and tradition are used as a negative tool for demeaning, stigmatising, and discriminating against gender non-conforming individuals. Moletsane (2014) notes how schools are critical social spaces for researching with young people. Therefore, Qamatha Secondary School was an essential site for conducting the research described in this dissertation.

4.4.1 Gaining Access to the School

Gaining access to a research site has implications for data generation and the quality of the research. Thus, specific steps were taken to gain access to Qamatha Secondary School. First, before gaining access to the school, I contacted Mrs Ndlovu (not her real name), a Life Orientation teacher for the Further Education and Training (FET) phase at Qamatha Secondary School. The teacher later assisted me in purposively selecting learners interested in participating in the study. At my initial meeting with Mrs Ndlovu, I first explained the nature of the research I wanted to undertake and subsequently asked her to assist me in identifying heterosexual and queer-identifying learners who would participate in the study. Together, we identified Grade 10 learners as suitable for the research because they had been at the school for at least two years and were well-placed to provide the knowledge I sought to unearth for my research. These learners were also selected from Grade 10 in a deliberate attempt to not interfere with the National Senior Certificate examination

preparations among learners in Grade 12. Thus, we both agreed that learners in Grade 10 had been in the schooling system long enough to provide answers to the research questions I posed.

4.5 Sampling Technique

In this study, I employed purposive sampling to recruit 23 participants from Qamatha secondary school. Purposive sampling is a non-probability strategy that deliberately selects specific informants because of the qualities they possess, and because of those qualities, the informants are considered as better placed to provide relevant and contextual information for the research (Ames et al., 2019; Campbell et al., 2020; Andrade, 2021). It uses techniques that rely on the researcher's judgment when selecting participants (Tongco, 2007; Palinkas, 2013; Berndt, 2020). This sampling strategy, thus, allows the researcher to select only those participants that satisfy the objectives of a study based on the research questions (Devault, 2019; Obilor, 2023; Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024). Using a purposive sampling technique, I identified and recruited participants who could satisfy this particular study's objectives (i.e., to examine school discipline and punishment at the nexus of learners' gender and sexualities in the Grade 10 classes of a township secondary school).

The purposive sampling criteria that I used to recruit participants included girls and boys between 15 and 17 years old, attending Grade 10 in a secondary school in Umlazi Township. In setting the sampling criteria and examining how learners experienced discipline at the nexus of their gender and sexualities, I recruited participants with diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. These learners were recruited because I believed they were well-positioned to answer questions related to experiences based on their gender identities and expressions as well as their sexual orientations.

4.5.1 Participant Recruitment

After receiving the relevant gatekeeper's permission (I will discuss these in a section below), Mrs Ndlovu a Life Orientation teacher scheduled a meeting to introduce me to the Grade 10 learners who showed interest in participating in the study. The L.O. teacher pointed me to a selected classroom after school hours where a group of learners were waiting for my arrival, and she then

introduced me to the learners. The rationale for this meeting was to explain my research objectives to the learners and ensure their confidentiality and anonymity. Inside the classroom, I introduced myself, the research I aimed to conduct, and the institution I was registered under. Some of the queer-identifying learners approached me in private later to express their unwillingness to participate in the study because of fear of victimisation. This was a request I respected and, for me, a sign that those learners were exercising their agency in not wanting to participate in the study. However, some queer-identifying learners expressed keen interest in participating in the study.

4.5.2 The Participants

Heeding Tracy’s (2020) calls for recruiting small purposeful samples in qualitative studies to maintain the richness of data and analysis. In this study, I recruited 23 learners from Qamatha Secondary School. This number included nine queer-identifying boys (n=4 gay) and girls (n=5 lesbian), as well as 14 heterosexual-identifying (or straight-identifying) boys (n=6) and girls (n=8), who all came from communities in Umlazi township. Twenty-two participants attended Grade 10, and only one was recruited from a Grade 11 class. The latter participant from Grade 11 was included in the study because his friends, who were recruited, informed him about the research. He approached me and showed a keen interest in the study. Therefore, I welcomed him to the research project. The participants were between 15-17 years old. Table 4.2, below, is a snapshot of the participant’s biographical information.

Table 4.2 Participants Biographical Information

Pseudonyms	Age	Grade	Gender Identity	Sexual orientation
1. JoyBoy	16	10	Boy	Heterosexual (Straight)
2. Eric	16	10	Boy	Heterosexual (Straight)
3. Jay	15	10	Boy	Heterosexual (Straight)
4. King	15	10	Boy	Heterosexual (Straight)
5. Tony	17	10	Boy	Heterosexual (Straight)

6. Goldiroger	16	10	Boy	Heterosexual (Straight)
7. Athaylo	19	11	Boy	Queer (Gay)
8. Andile	17	10	Boy	Queer (Gay)
9. Zamo	17	10	Boy	Queer (Gay)
10. Chommie	14	10	Boy	Queer (Gay)
11. Nature	15	10	Girl	Queer (Lesbian)
12. Jordan	16	10	Girl	Queer (Lesbian)
13. Daisy	15	10	Girl	Queer (Lesbian)
14. Melly	15	10	Girl	Queer (Lesbian)
15. Shakira	17	10	Girl	Queer (Lesbian)
16. Sibongile	15	10	Girl	Heterosexual (Straight)
17. Nomlando	15	10	Girl	Heterosexual (Straight)
18. Alicia	15	10	Girl	Heterosexual (Straight)
19. Nicholet	15	10	Girl	Heterosexual (Straight)
20. Pretty girl	15	10	Girl	Heterosexual (Straight)
21. JoyLove	16	10	Girl	Heterosexual (Straight)
22. Morgan	16	10	Girl	Heterosexual (Straight)
23. Mickayla	16	10	Girl	Heterosexual (Straight)

4.5.3 Getting to know the participants

Once the participants were recruited, I got to know them. This was done in response to scholars advising researchers to engage with participants before the research process to negotiate inclusive safe research spaces (Largent et al., 2018; George et al., 2020; George et al., 2023). The school's management had allocated us one classroom to use for all research activities. At the first engagement with all the participants, I re-introduced myself, including supplying them with

relevant details such as the institution of higher learning that I was registered in (i.e., The University of KwaZulu-Natal – UKZN), and the nature of the research I intended to conduct. Further, I re-emphasised the purpose of the research and the nature of the data generation process. I further explained why they were recruited to participate in the study and how I would use and protect the data that would be generated. I emphasised their protection, including protecting their identities. Moreover, I emphasised the idea of a safe space where they could participate freely without fear of intimidation and discrimination. Finally, I assured the participants that their participation was voluntary, that there was no monetary benefit for their participation in the study, and that they had the right to pull out of the study whenever they wanted to. No educator was present or involved throughout the data generation processes. This was done to protect the participants further and ensure the free flow of information. To avoid miscommunication and the possibility of my words being lost in translation, all our engagements, including the data generation processes, were conducted in IsiZulu (the local language of Umlazi Township). After I had introduced myself as a researcher, I took the opportunity to ask the participants about their well-being and school experiences in general. This interaction was lengthy and exciting because the participants were fully engaged and asked me several pertinent questions about my interest in research on gender and sexuality and the reasons behind my pursuit of a post-graduate degree.

4.6 Data Generation

To generate data for this study, I followed a workshop approach (Mitchell, 2011) and used two methodological approaches: participatory drawing and focus group discussions (FGDs). Drawings and FGDs provided a window into the participants' experiences, feelings, and perceptions related to their experiences of discipline (Bazzato et al., 2021; Kallitsoglou et al., 2022). Therefore, through drawings, participants generated metaphoric representations of their experiences with school discipline and punishment (Quaglia et al., 2015). Through the FGDs, they provided rich contextual meaning to their drawings, an exercise that offered in-depth insights into their school discipline experiences. In the study reported in this dissertation, over two months, I engaged the participants in a series of participatory drawing workshops and FGDs to generate data. Table 4.3 below provides a summary of the phases involved during data generation.

Table 4.3: Phases of Data Generation

Data Generation Phase	Data Generation Method	Data Source
PHASE ONE	Participatory drawings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Drawings (44 drawings were produced)• Captions from the drawings (the meanings embedded in the drawings).
PHASE TWO	FGDs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Three FGD sessions were held with three groups.• Transcripts from the focus group discussions.

As noted above, all data-generating processes were conducted in IsiZulu to produce rich and contextual data. Using the participants' home language allowed them to freely express their perspectives in their own words and from their contextual understandings. I am also a first-language IsiZulu speaker, which made it easy to engage with the participants. Both the participatory drawing and FGD engagements were digitally recorded using a voice recorder, transcribed verbatim, and later translated into English for analysis. I discuss each of the approaches in the sections below.

4.6.1 Participatory Drawing

Participatory drawing is used in the overall body of participatory visual methodologies (PVM). Researchers use them to gain deeper insights into participants' experiences, sense of identity, relationships, needs, strengths, aspirations, etcetera (Brown et al., 2020; Hammer et al., 2012; Mitchell, 2011). PVM, thus, includes the production of visual material, often by the participants, such as photographs, drawings, video-making, emoticons, embroidery, board game creation, paintings, maps, etcetera (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008; Lomax, 2012; Clark, 2010; Barley & Russell, 2019). PVM is, therefore, an umbrella term used to refer to a broad range of research approaches, including participatory drawing (the approach employed in this study) (Richards, 2011). Researchers continue to use these methodologies in work with children and other marginalised populations because of their resourcefulness in engaging participants in meaningful and empowering ways (Lerat, 2013; Hayball & Pawlowski, 2018; Mitchell et al., 2017). PVM is

also resourceful in helping young people to voice their views and experiences in non-threatening ways that do not rely heavily on modes of verbal communication (Noonan et al., 2016; Driessnack & Furukawa, 2012; Strokes, 2020). Therefore, I employed participatory drawings as one approach in the broader PVM because they engage young people on sensitive topics (See, for example, Ngidi and Moletsane, 2018).

Participatory drawing is a resourceful method when working with vulnerable populations, such as children, because it allows expressions of experiences that differ from verbal communication (Ozden, 2009; Hammer et al., 2012; Alerby, 2015). Alerby and Elíðóttir (2003) argue that different non-verbal languages in the form of drawings evoke reflections connected to individuals' lived experiences. By introducing participatory drawing as an activity in qualitative research, participants can escape the linearity of spoken or written words (Theron, 2012). Thus, it becomes easier for participants to explain relationships and processes, remember all their experiences, and explain reasons for certain actions when they use participatory drawings (Mair & Kierans, 2007; Zweifela & Wezemaël, 2012; Tay-Lim & Lim, 2013). Makela et al. (2007) argue that researchers should value participatory drawings not only for what may finally be encrypted in the drawing but more significantly for the access provided through drawing to thinking close to the participants' unconscious mind.

In social research, drawings originated in the discipline of child psychology and anthropology as a response to the neglect of meaningful participation among young people in research towards the end of the nineteenth century (Haper, 1998). As several scholars note, children have largely been overlooked as research participants in social research until about 30 years ago (Collier & Collier, 1986; Scherer, 1992). Over time, in visual anthropology, researchers promoted child-centred research methods instead of using them; in visual anthropology, researchers promoted child-centred research methods instead of using the researcher's personal observations and interpretations (Johnson et al., 2012). In recent years, visual methods have been proposed as both alternative and complementary to traditional modes of inquiry to allow young people to describe their lives through approaches that are more consistent with their way of seeing and relating to the world (Jones, 2004; Montgomery, 2009; Roberts, 2000; Thomas & O'Kane, 1998). Therefore, in recent years, social science researchers have begun to use drawings in more participatory ways to

enrich the researcher's understanding of the position of the research participants and to explore complex human situations (Zweifela & Van Wezemaela, 2012; Bland, 2018).

In the last 20 years, studies employing participatory drawing have proliferated, suggesting a significant shift from a de-contextualised focus on drawings to a more participatory focus emphasising people's subjectivities, realities and lived experiences (Hall, 2008; Mayaba, 2015). For example, in the field of psychology, researchers have used participatory drawing to enrich evidence for specific kinds of mental activity (Merriman & Guerin, 2006; Handler & Thomas, 2014; Oster, 2016), thus privileging children's meaning-making (Anning, 2003; Hall, 2008; Matelova, 2020; Carmela et al., 2021).

In South Africa, Ngidi and Moletsane (2018) used participatory drawing to examine the vulnerability and agency of a group of adolescent orphans in the context of sexual violence in and around a township secondary school. Specifically, their study wanted to understand how adolescent orphans identify, understand, and communicate their vulnerability to sexual violence in and around a township secondary school. Through the use of drawing, the authors report that participants fully engaged with the study and shared their views and experiences regarding sexual violence. A conclusion drawn from the study was how drawings were an important tool in unearthing the silences surrounding sexual violence against orphaned adolescents in and around the school. Likewise, Woollett et al. (2023) study in one rural community in South Africa explored the feasibility and acceptability of using participatory drawings of young people in preparation for a longitudinal multi-generational cohort study on the mechanisms that underlie the intergenerational transmission of violence. The researchers asked the participants to draw all the good and bad things that had happened in their lives. The participants used their drawings to illustrate the everyday production of violence, making visible an issue often hidden in plain sight. The authors concluded that participatory drawing offered a comfortable and fun way to engage in weighty and sensitive conversations. A trend that ties these studies together is the agreement that participatory drawing is a valuable resource and tool for engaging young people on sensitive topics. This methodological approach is also hailed for its ability to produce significant representations of children's lives from the subjectivities of the participants themselves while also creating a space for the participants to have fun during the research process (Ngidi & Moletsane,

2018; Mitchelle, 2008; de Langa, 2012; Benninger & Savahl, 2016). Armed with this information, I used participatory drawing in this study to examine township learners' experiences of school discipline within the context of gender and sexuality.

4.6.4 Creating the Drawings

The first set of drawing workshops in this study commenced two weeks after the recruitment of the participants. At these workshops, I introduced drawing as a tool for generating information. I highlighted the significance of each drawing in representing a person's way of viewing and experiencing the world, emphasizing that the aesthetics of the drawing do not matter; rather, what is significant is the embodied meaning attached to the drawing. Once I had provided this explanation, I moved on to answer any questions and concerns of the participants. I also provided examples of drawings from previous research with young people. In particular, I showed participants some of the drawings produced by participants in Ngidi and Moletsane's (2018) research.

After this process, I offered basic training on creating drawings for research purposes. In the training sessions, I used a blank A4 page to demonstrate how one can express their feelings and experiences through a drawing. I presented my drawing to the participants, showcasing how they would be expected to present their drawings on the whiteboard. After completing this process, I provided participants with blank A4 pages, pencils, and crayons to create their drawings.

Participants had desks and chairs in each workshop with sufficient space to create their drawings. In the first session, I asked participants to think about how discipline is meted out at their school. Specifically, how they have experienced discipline and punishment. I invited the participants to create drawings responding to the following prompt: *Draw how learners in your school experience discipline and punishment.*

A second session was constituted where I asked the participants to think about whether or not there are any discrepancies in how discipline is meted out at school. During this phase, I asked the participants to think of any discrepancies around discipline based on learners' gender and sexual

identities. To create their drawings, I invited them to *draw how learners experience school discipline based on their gendered and sexual identities*. I gave the participants sufficient time to think about and eventually create their drawings. Once they had completed this process, we gathered and sat in a circle to engage in FGDs. Participants were allowed to present their drawing on the whiteboard and explain it to the whole group. These presentations allowed us to explore further the differences in how heterosexual-identifying and queer-identifying learners experience discipline. In total, 46 drawings were produced in the drawing workshops I have detailed above.

4.7 Focus Group Discussions

The second set of data was generated using FGDs. Stewart (2018) regards FGDs as the formalised type of group-orientated discussions about a topic under the guidance of a facilitator. FGDs are an imperative part of data generation because they reveal the participant's collective perspectives, beliefs, and values about a particular topic (Mishra, 2016; Akyidiz & Ahmed, 2021; Yayeh, 2021). In an FGD, the researcher assembles a group of individuals to discuss a specific topic, aiming to draw from the complex personal experiences, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes of the participants through a moderated interaction (Simpson & Wood, 2004; Gammie et al., 2017; Muijeen et al., 2020). During FGDs, the researcher raises open-ended questions to achieve answers and stimulate a discussion among the participants (Hennink, 2017; Eriksson-Backa et al., 2023). The main goal of the researcher in an FGD is to probe for collective, albeit various, perspectives (Prasad & Garcia, 2017; Mallya et al., 2019). FGDs are frequently used in qualitative research to gain an in-depth understanding of social issues (Nyumba et al., 2018; Akyıldız & Ahmed, 2021). Therefore, this approach aims to obtain data from a purposely selected group of individuals rather than from a statistically representative sample of a broader population (Gammie, 2017; Robinson, 2019).

Historically, FGDs were first documented in the 1920s by a prominent American sociologist, Bogardus, who described using group discussions to develop social distance scales (Wilkinson, 2004). The method was further refined by social scientists Lazarfield and Merton in the 1940s (Barbour, 2007). However, it was not until the 1930s that the method gained momentum and prominence in the commercial environment, where it was used as a tool for market research, eliciting the views of the general public about products, brands, packaging and marketing strategies

(Kroll et al., 2007; Hennink & Leavy, 2014; Cowton & Downs, 2015). A decade later, sociologists and researchers in health sciences used FGDs as a data collection method (Merton & Kendall, 1946; Merton et al., 1956). For example, Wong (2008) notes that FGDs have been used in health sciences to assess public experiences and understandings of illnesses, identifying ideas concerning health-risk behaviours and danger. Focus groups are also exceptionally effective for the study of sensitive issues as well as issues that are difficult to access, such as acute mental distress, HIV/AIDS, or sexual health issues (Austin - Evelyn, 2017; Reisner, 2018; Rivaz et al., 2019). However, its popularity and application have grown across a wide range of disciplines, including education, communication and media studies, sociology, feminist research, health research, and marketing research (Flores & Alonso, 1995; Lunt & Livingstone, 1996; Morgan, 1996; Wilkinson, 1998; Morgan et al., 1998).

As a research method, FGDs involve more than one participant per data collection session (Cowton & Downs, 2015; Sim & Waterfield, 2019). It consists of more than one group session of four to ten participants focusing collectively on a topic of particular interest (Hennink & Leavy, 2014; Wilkinson, 2015; Robinson, 2020). Gammie et al. (2017) argue that FGDs are an essential data collection method because they expose underlying attitudes and beliefs about a topic in cases where existing knowledge is insufficient for analysis. FGDs allow the researcher to explore participants' knowledge and experiences and how they relate their experiences and reactions among presumed peers with whom they are likely to share some common experiences and realities (Connelly, 2015; Greenwood et al., 2014; Gill & Baillie, 2018). Therefore, my decision to engage the participants in FGD was influenced by the literature, which suggests that FGDs offer an opportunity to explore issues that are not well understood or where there is little prior research on the topic (Taylor & Blake, 2015; Nyumba et al., 2017; Petersen, 2021).

4.7.1 Generating Data through FGD

This study held FGDs two weeks after the participatory drawing engagements. The aim was to provide a platform for the participants to provide deeper meaning about their drawings and probe for collective perspectives. To do this, I first introduced FGDs to the participants by explaining what this approach entails, and after that, I answered any questions and concerns. Before the FGDs

commenced, I re-read the assent forms the participants had signed as an agreement for their study participation. In particular, I emphasised values such as respect, empathy, and non-judgmental attitudes. This ensured that they remembered all ethical considerations that guided the research. Moreover, to ensure safety and that the discussion remained protected, before the commencement of FGDs, I provided the participants with non-disclosure forms that I asked them to sign. The forms made it clear that anything discussed during the FGD had to remain confidential and must never be discussed with persons not participating in the FGD.

I also explained how we would have a ‘mini’ art exhibition where they would display their drawings on a whiteboard before the FGDs commenced. The mini-exhibition comprised participants pasting their drawings on the whiteboard, which I then used to elicit the discussions. Every morning, I arrived early at the venue to set up in preparation for each group. Once all the participants had arrived and settled into the venue, we sat on chairs in a horseshoe arrangement and discussed the drawings pasted on the whiteboard. The FGDs were conducted in one of the classrooms and lasted approximately one hour and 30 minutes for each FGD. During the FGDs, the participants presented their drawings by sharing the meanings they wanted to convey. In total, I facilitated three FGDs (divided into two sessions each) comprising two groups of mixed-sex participants (i.e., both girls and boys in the group) who identified as heterosexual and one FGD comprised of learners who identified as queer. Each session was audio recorded, providing me with six recordings. Table 4.4, below, is an illustration of the FGD sessions and how each was constituted.

Table 4.4: Focus Group Discussion Constitution

Focus Group	Participants	Session	Time
1	Six boys and girls who identified as heterosexual and queer	1. Drawings exhibition and FGD addressing research question one	06:30-08:00 (One-Hour and 30 minutes)
		2. Drawings exhibition and FGD addressing research question two	06:30-08:00 (One-Hour and 30 minutes)
2	Six boys and girls who identified as heterosexual	1. Drawings exhibition and FGD addressing research question one	06:30-08:00 (One-Hour and 30 minutes)

		2. Drawings exhibition and FGD addressing research question two	06:30-08:00 (One-Hour and 30 minutes)
3	Six boys and girls who identified as heterosexual and queer	1. Drawings exhibition and FGD addressing research question one	06:30-08:00 (One-Hour and 30 minutes)
		2. Drawings exhibition and FGD addressing research question two	06:30-08:00 (One-Hour and 30 minutes)
4	Five boys and a girl who identified as queer	1. Drawings exhibition and FGD addressing research question one	06:30-08:00 (One-Hour and 30 minutes)
		2. Drawings exhibition and FGD addressing research question two	06:30-08:00 (One-Hour and 30 minutes)

Specifically, I separated the participants according to their sexual orientations because queer learners are a compromised population group whose schooling experiences are marked by homophobic violence, bullying, and discrimination (see, for example, Francis et al., 2019; Francis, 2017; Msibi, 2012; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019). Each group had between six and nine participants, and I found the discussions engaging, with each participant openly sharing their perspectives without fear or feeling intimidated.

The first session of the first FGD was dedicated to generating data that addressed the first research question. To facilitate the discussion, I first gave the participants a prompt to *present their drawings and explain how discipline is meted out and experienced in this school*. Each participant first displayed their drawing on the whiteboard inside the classroom. I invited them to describe their drawing, paying particular attention to the messages they wanted to convey in the context of their experiences with school discipline. I also opened the platform for other participants in the group to ask questions or add their perspectives where they felt a need. Moreover, I probed for collective perspectives and experiences, leading to a rich and contextual discussion that ran one hour and 30 minutes each.

The second session of each FGD was dedicated to generating data that addresses the second research question. I prompted the participants to *present their drawings and explain how gendered inequalities mark discipline practices at school*. Each participant presented their drawing that addressed the second research question, and all other participants in the group either asked questions or shared their perspectives. I then facilitated a group discussion to probe for in-depth perspectives on how learners experience discipline and punishment within the context of their gender identities, expressions, and sexual orientations.

To reiterate, all the discussions were facilitated in isiZulu, the participants' first language and a widely spoken language in Umlazi Township. The FGDs were recorded digitally and later translated into English for analysis. Since I am a first-language isiZulu speaker, the analysis of transcripts relied heavily on my translation. At the end of each FGD session, I thanked the participants for participating in the research.

4.8 Data Analysis

Data analysis creates meaning from the voluminous amount of data research participants generate (Thorne, 2000; Ezzy, 2013; Larose & Larose, 2014). It is one of the most important steps in the qualitative research process because it assists researchers in making sense of the data produced in a study (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Therefore, data analysis helps researchers to unpack information through an analytical technique (Cui, 2019). Data analysis also includes techniques such as triangulation, which includes checking results with respondents and addressing objective and validity concerns (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lemon & Hayes, 2020).

In this study, as discussed above, I employed a qualitative approach to generate both visual (i.e., the participants' drawings) and textual data (i.e., the descriptions of the participants' drawings and the transcripts of the FGDs). The study generated a complete data set comprising 46 drawings (and their descriptions) and six transcripts from each session of the FGDs. Thus, the data set comprised a visual component (e.g., drawings created by the participants), a written component (e.g., captions describing the drawings), and a verbal component (e.g., the audio recorded and transcribed FGDs). To manage this voluminous data, I organised it into smaller chunks to allow for easier access by

creating folders and labelling them according to each research method used in the study. Before the commencement of the analysis, I digitised and stored all the data electronically.

4.8.1 Visual Data Analysis

I employed visual participatory analytical procedures to analyse the visual component of the data (i.e., the participants' drawings and descriptions) (Mitchell et al., 2017). I was aware that the participants created and provided their data analysis. Thus, I was informed by John Fiske's (1992; 1994) idea of three sites of visual data analysis. Therefore, this study's visual data analysis process involved three layers (Fiske, 1992). First, Fiske argues that the visual artefact produced by a participant is the primary text of analysis. In this study, the participants' drawings were considered the primary text of analysis. Second, Fiske describes the production text as the second layer of analysis. The production text involves what the producer of the drawing says about their productions (written or spoken descriptions), including the meaning they wish to convey with their visual product. Finally, the audience text is the third layer and describes what the audience (those who come to see the drawings) say about the visual product. In this study, together with my supervisor, I became the audience. Therefore, through these processes, data was analysed in three layers. The first two layers entailed an analysis and interpretation done by the participants. This involved the descriptions they provided for their drawings and their explanations about their drawings during the FGDs in each workshop. Finally, I did the third layer of analysis through a thematic analysis approach, where I tried to stay as close as possible to the original meaning-making as averred by the participants.

4.8.2 Thematic Data Analysis

Thematic analysis identifies and reports emerging patterns from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Raskind et al., 2019). Specifically, thematic analysis is useful for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning in qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). When conducting a thematic analysis, the researcher becomes the instrument for analysis, making judgments about the coding, theming, decontextualising, and recontextualising the data (Terry et al., 2017). This process assigns data to different codes, thus grouping those codes into themes and then identifying patterns and interconnections between the themes (Jowsey et al., 2021). It further provides a

flexible and valuable research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed yet complex account of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In this study, I used thematic analysis to search for common themes that emerged from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Since I was the primary researcher in the study, I was present in all the data generation processes (e.g., all the drawings and FGD workshops). I also transcribed and translated all the data from the recorded audio. All these phases helped me to become well acquainted with the data. In applying thematic analysis for data analysis in this study, I was guided by Braun and Clark's (2006) six phases of analysis, which I outline in the following sections.

Phase one: Becoming familiar with data

I was the facilitator and present in every data-generating session with the participants. Therefore, I collected and organised the data after each session. I recorded all the sessions and transcribed all the data from FGDs and drawings. Thus, I was responsible for organising all the visual and audio datasets into folders. Phase one of data analysis involves the researcher's immersion in the data (Braun & Clark, 2006). I immersed myself in the data to become familiar with its content depth and breadth. I listened to the audio recordings several times to become acquainted with the data. I also reviewed and read all the transcripts several times until I was satisfied that I understood and was familiar with the data. While reading all the responses repeatedly, I highlighted keywords and phrases that kept emerging and assigned codes and descriptions to the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Phase two: Generating initial codes

Coding is the process of naming a piece of the textual data that has been generated (Cohen et al., 2018). I systematically analysed the transcribed textual data through codes. I wrote codes for the information I had gathered and marked the associated texts. After generating the first code, I kept reading the transcripts until I identified the next potentially relevant excerpts. Each code represented an idea from the data, and similar codes emerged to form a theme (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Phase three: Searching for themes

After identifying the codes, I actively searched for themes. I read the coded data several times to identify areas of similarity. I identified codes that focused on participants' experiences of discipline and generated themes that relate to those narratives according to the research questions posed. I also explored the relationship between themes and considered how the themes would work together to address the research questions.

Phase four: Reviewing themes

I checked the developing themes against the entire data set to explore whether the themes work in relation to the data. Firstly, I checked the themes against the transcribed data. Secondly, I reviewed the themes against the entire data set. Therefore, I re-read all the data to determine whether the themes capture the entire data set meaningfully. Once I had a distinctive and coherent set of themes that worked with the coded data extracts, I reviewed the themes in relation to the two research questions. (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Phase five: Defining and naming themes

I defined the themes by elaborating on what each theme consists of and summarised them into sub-themes. I selected extracts from the data to best represent a theme for analysis and then set out a story of each theme around those extracts. The extracts that I selected provided a structure for the analysis. (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Phase six: Producing the report

Finally, I analysed learners' narratives on how discipline and punishment are meted out in their secondary school and produced a finalised report of my findings. I used available literature, the conceptual framework developed in Chapter Three, and the theoretical framework developed in Chapter Two to guide my analysis in this study. I discuss the study findings in the following two chapters (Chapters Five and Six).

4.9. Trustworthiness of the Study

Trustworthiness refers to the confidence that the findings are plausible and reliable (Gunawan, 2015). It is a set of standards demonstrating that a research study has been conducted competently and ethically (Rallis & Rossman, 2009). In qualitative studies, trustworthiness is an important practice for measuring the value of research and its effects, and it leads the way by providing rigour in the research process (Morse et al., 2002; Rolfe, 2006). Therefore, trustworthiness convinces the reader that the study has merit and worth and that the results are credible and potentially useful to guide future research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To achieve trustworthiness, I was present when the data was generated. Time spent in the research site (i.e., inside the school premises) is considered good practice in qualitative research because it improves the study's trustworthiness (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). I also created a safe environment for participants to share their experiences of school discipline during FGDs and the drawing workshops. I further ensured mutual respect between the participants regardless of their gender identities and sexual orientations. To ensure trustworthiness, I used Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for establishing the trustworthiness of a qualitative study, which includes credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability.

4.9.1 Credibility

Credibility is the confidence that research findings are true and reflect the participants' perspectives, narratives, and lived realities (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To achieve credibility, Shenton (2004) states that the researcher must ensure that they use research methods that are well established. This study included a participatory visual component (drawings) and FGDs. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that ensuring credibility is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness. Therefore, to ensure credibility, this study applied data triangulation and triangulation methods (Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021). Triangulation "involves using multiple and different methods, investigators, sources, and theories to obtain corroborating evidence" (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007, p. 239). The latter combines theories, methods, or observers in a research study to help overcome fundamental biases from using a single method (Noble & Heale, 2019). Johnson (1997) argues that triangulation may include using multiple data sources to help understand a phenomenon. In this study, triangulation involved using different sources of data such

as participatory visual methods (drawings), participants' interpretations of drawings, FGDs and my fieldnotes, which were used to enhance the quality of the data from different sources (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002; Phillimore & Goodson, 2004).

4.9.2 Dependability

Dependability is one of the four criteria for rigour and trustworthiness in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1982; Chowdhury, 2015; Janis, 2022). It refers to the stability of findings over time (Shenton, 2004; Janis, 2022). Dependability involves participants' evaluation of the findings, interpretation, and recommendations of the study such that all are supported by the data received from participants (Korstjen & Moser, 2018; Johnson, 2020). Dependability, thus, is a process whereby one researcher can follow the decision trail taken by another researcher in a way that a similar study can be implemented in another similar context (Stahl & King, 2020). Patton (2002) maintains that dependability is a systematic process that needs to be followed by one researcher who wishes to duplicate a study. Therefore, the processes involved in a study should be reported in detail, enabling a future researcher to repeat the work, but not necessarily to gain the same results (Shenton, 2003). In this instance, the research design may be viewed as a prototype that allows the reader to assess the extent to which research practices have been followed (Shenton, 2004). Specifically, the researcher must provide a detailed research design, data collection procedures, and a thorough reflection of the research. In this dissertation, I have provided comprehensive details about my research design, the sampling and recruitment procedure, and data collection methods. Therefore, similar studies that will be conducted in the future can follow the same processes I applied in this research.

4.9.3 Transferability

Transferability concerns the applicability to which findings from one study can be applied in another context (Bitsch, 2005; Tobin & Begley, 2004). The researcher's responsibility is to provide a detailed description of the participants and the research process to guide the reader in assessing whether or not the findings are transferable to their setting (Ghafouri & Ofoghi, 2016). Therefore, the reader, not the researcher, makes the transferability judgment (Shenton, 2004). Transferability

implies that if there are enough similarities in the findings in the present research, the findings of that particular study can be suitable for future studies (Shenton, 2003). In this dissertation, I thoroughly described all the research processes. Specifically, I provided a detailed methodology, data generation, and analysis process and presented my analysis. Thus, the findings of this study can be transferable to another study.

4.9.4 Confirmability

Conformability is the degree of neutrality or the extent to which the respondents shape the findings of a study and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014; Hadi, 2016). Thus, it refers to the degree to which other researchers could confirm or corroborate the research findings (Baxter & Eyles, 1997). In a conformable study, the findings reflect participants' responses, not the researcher's motivations, interests, or perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study embedded conformability to ensure data quality (Tadesse et al., 2021). I used a fixed structure for all FGDs and drawing sessions to ensure conformability. Field notes and audio recordings were collected for all FGDs to overcome biases (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014; Hadi & Closs, 2016; Mol et al., 2021). Therefore, throughout the study, there was an upfront and accurate representation of the participants' experiences and understandings of school-based discipline and punishment (Simamane, 2023).

4.10 Ethical Considerations

Considering the sensitive nature of the topic under study and the participants involved (teenage boys and girls), ethical issues emerged that had to be mitigated. To conduct ethically sound research and protect the rights of the participants, there were ethical steps I followed. First, ethical approval to conduct this research was granted by the University of KwaZulu-Natal's (UKZN) Humanities Research Ethics Committee (Protocol number: HSSREC/00005817/2023) (Appendix A). Second, I sought gatekeeper approval and informed consent from all the research stakeholders. To obtain gatekeeper approval, I approached the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education (KZN DoE) (Appendix B) and the schools' management team (Appendix C), who permitted me to pursue the research. The participants in the study were minors between 15 and 17 years old, which meant

that full written consent for their participation was requested and obtained from their caregivers (Appendix D). Following this, the participants gave written assent for participating in the study (Appendix E).

To ensure that the research was ethically sound, the participants and all gatekeepers, including the participants' caregivers, received sufficient information about the study's objectives. I further informed the participants that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Furthermore, I have used pseudonyms throughout this dissertation to protect their identities. To further ensure the participants' safety and that no one experienced distress, we engaged in a debriefing session immediately after each research engagement. In these engagements, the participants were reassured that they could contact me if triggered. A referral to psychosocial support would have been negotiated with a local social worker. None of the participants reported any feelings of distress or anxiety.

When working with participatory visual methods, keeping the school and the participants anonymous is essential to protect their identities (de Lange & Geldenhuys, 2012). Researchers must ensure that participants are fully aware of the research objectives so that they can give informed consent before participating. To ensure ethically sound research, I was guided by Gubrium et al. (2014), who highlighted the importance of ensuring reciprocity, trust, anonymity, transparency, and minimising potential risks when engaging young people in participatory visual research. In the section above, I discussed how consent was negotiated and received from the participants' caregivers and relevant gatekeepers. During each drawing workshop, I constantly negotiated consent with the participants by making them aware that the drawings belonged to them and that they were free not to share their drawings if they felt uncomfortable. Fortunately, all the participants showed keen interest in sharing and presenting their drawings. Once the process of generating and presenting the drawings was concluded, I asked for permission from the participants to scan their drawings and keep them as a copy in my research file. This was, for me, another step towards respecting the participants' agency.

4.11 Synthesis

In this chapter, I outlined the study's methodology and research approaches for generating data. I also provided details of the study site and context, the participants, their recruitment procedure, data generation processes, and the data analysis strategy I employed. Finally, I addressed questions about trustworthiness and ethical considerations in the study. In the next chapter, I present findings in response to the first and second research questions.

CHAPTER FIVE

POWER, GENDER, AND SCHOOL DISCIPLINE: THE EXPERIENCES OF TOWNSHIP SECONDARY SCHOOL LEARNERS

5.1 Introduction

The study reported in this dissertation examined learners' experiences of school discipline, with a particular focus on their gender and sexual identities. The research was conducted at Qamatha Secondary School in Umlazi Township, located in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), South Africa. In the previous chapter, I provided a detailed account of the research design, methodology, and approach used for data generation in this study. In this chapter, I present an analysis of the first and second sets of findings, focusing on how the participants narrated their experiences of discipline and punishment within the context of their gender and sexual orientation. The primary data sources analysed for this chapter were participatory drawings and focus group discussions (FGDs). The analysis is framed using Foucault's concepts of discipline and punishment, conflict theory of education, and queer theory, providing a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play. The findings are organised around four main themes: 1) Corporal Punishment and Power Inequalities; 2) Gender Inequality in the Context of School Discipline; 3) Queerphobia Masked as School Discipline; and 4) The Intersectionality of Gender and Sexuality in School Discipline. By analysing these themes, the chapter provides a nuanced understanding of how disciplinary practices at Qamatha Secondary School are experienced and interpreted by learners through the lenses of gender and sexual identity. The findings offer valuable insights into how school discipline perpetuates or challenges existing power structures and social norms.

5.2. 'angry teachers and severe beatings': Corporal Punishment and Power Inequalities

In South Africa, national legislation prohibits the use of corporal punishment because it inflicts pain on the child and can have serious and enduring physical and psychological impacts, including injury and mental health challenges for learners (South African Schools Act, 1996). Scholars argue that corporal punishment is a form of violence that is institutionally outlawed in several countries, yet it persists with some teachers favouring it over less punitive methods (Gershoff, 2017; Gershoff et al., 2019). In this section, I draw on the data to show that corporal punishment at Qamatha

Secondary School continues unabated even though it is outlawed in South Africa (Morrell, 2001). Moreover, I present findings on how learners experience this punitive form of discipline and punishment.

A central narrative emerging from the data is that corporal punishment is normalised in the school. Within this context, learners experience it as violent, harmful, and triggering physical and emotional pain. The data presents personal accounts from learners in a South African township secondary school, illustrating the prevalence and severity of corporal punishment. Using conflict theory and comparative literature, the analysis explores how teachers' power structures influence discipline and punishment in school. In particular, in this section of the analysis, I draw on the conflict perspective to show, as the theory suggests, how social order is maintained by power and coercion.

As I will show below, the data points to how those in power – teachers, in this case – use discipline to maintain control and perpetuate social inequalities within the school environment. To illustrate, 16-year-old JoyBoy produced an image (Figure 5.1) of a teacher using corporal punishment against a learner. In the drawing, the teacher is using a stick as a tool to punish and inflict pain on the learner. What is striking about this particular drawing, and in how JoyBoy explained it, is that the learner in the image is visibly sad and in pain, yet the teacher continues to use violence as a form of discipline.

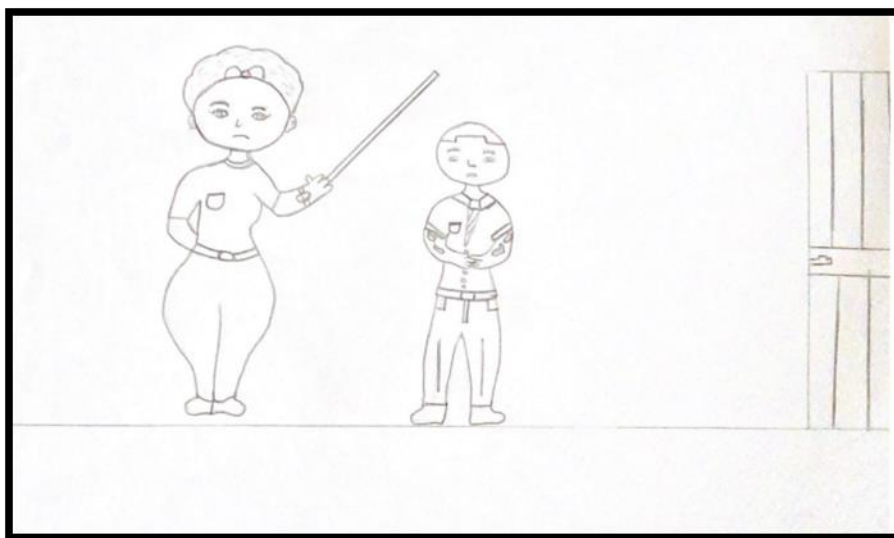


Figure 5.1: A teacher using a stick to punish a learner (16-year-old JoyBoy, straight)

Describing his drawing to me during an FGD, the following discussion ensued:

Melicia: JoyBoy, can you please tell us the meaning of your drawing?

JoyBoy: I have illustrated an angry teacher and an upset schoolboy. The teacher is holding a long and thick stick. The reason I illustrated the teacher holding a huge stick is because discipline at our schools tends to be violent and injurious.

Melicia: Have you ever received severe beatings from teachers?

JoyBoy: Yes, ma'am. In Grade Nine, a certain teacher used to beat us up so severely we would have bruises on our hands and bodies from the beatings. He would not stop beating us even when we were in pain. The bruises would last for a while. I still have scars from the beatings.

JoyBoy's drawing and testimony highlight the extreme physical violence used during learner discipline. This punitive act reflects a clear power dynamic where the teacher exercises control through fear and physical punishment. This aligns with Foucault's concept of disciplinary power (discussed in Chapter Two), where authority is maintained through surveillance and punishment (Foucault, 1977). In relation to Joyboy's image above, during the FGDs, 15-year-old King shared a similar image to share his experiences of school discipline. To illustrate, King produced an image (Figure 5.2) of a teacher using corporal punishment against a learner while his peers are laughing in the background. In the drawing, the teacher is using a tree branch to punish and inflict pain on the learner.

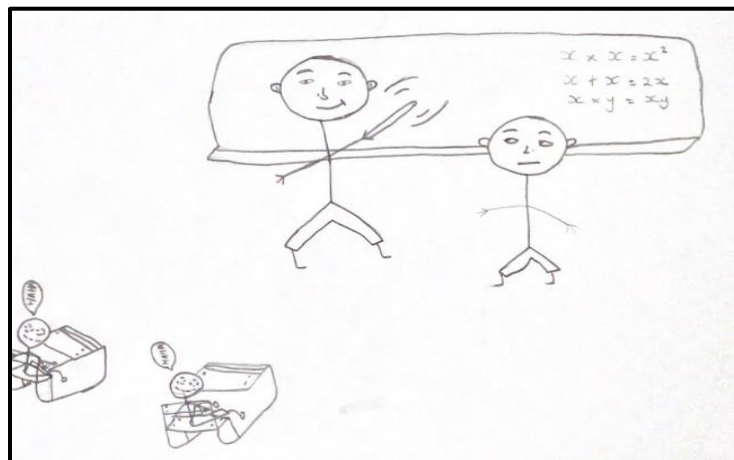


Figure 5.2: A teacher using a tree branch to discipline a learner (15-year-old King)

Describing his picture, the following discussion succeeded,

King: In my drawing, I have illustrated a teacher severely beating up a boy. The boy in the picture is a representation of how I experience discipline. I personally feel that teachers target me for discipline not only because I am a boy but also because I am fat and ugly. During discipline, teachers always insult me and call me ugly and fat. I think the beatings that I receive are more severe than the ones received by other boys, but maybe teachers just dislike me.

Melicia: I am sorry about that, King. Can you briefly share with me your view on how other boys experience discipline?

King: I think boys are always targeted for discipline because they are considered to be troublesome. They also receive frequent and severe beatings because teachers view boys as tough and masculine. Teachers are generally more aggressive towards us because we do not cry when we receive beatings, but beatings are less severe on girls because girls are seen as weak and timid. Girls also tend to cry during discipline, so teachers pity them. There are so many injustices in how discipline is meted out, and what bothers me the most is the fact that boys receive severe beatings on their buttocks while girls receive beatings on their hands. My buttocks have been bruised several times, and it hurts when I sit down, but I cannot show the others that I feel pain because I must toughen up. Real men do not show any weaknesses.

King reported experiencing discipline that is often injurious, harmful, and pervasive. To illustrate, King depicted how teachers use tree branches, pipes, and other tools to discipline learners. The above data points to how discipline at Qamatha Secondary School is often violent, harmful, and pervasive. This aligns with literature that suggests that discipline and punishment are often harmful, pervasive, and gendered, and they have negative effects on school children (Heekes et al., 2022; Kutwayo et al., 2023; Cramm et al., 2023; Havighurst et al., 2023).

Another participant, 17-year-old Tony, detailed his experience with corporal punishment where he reported that he "*often receives 10 strokes*" from his teachers who use a pipe to beat him during discipline. Tony narrated his experiences as follows:

Tony: "I often receive 10 strokes of the pipe during discipline because I am a boy. When I receive beatings, I usually try to show the teachers that I am in pain, yet they always

continue to beat me up regardless of how much pain I feel or how much I cry. Teachers do not care how much pain we endure during discipline; they tend to treat us like robots who can take any amount of pain."

Likewise, 16-year-old Goldiroger affirmed Tony's experiences, sharing how he has received "10 strokes of the pipe" on his buttocks; an experience that has left him with scars.

Goldiroger: "Sometimes we receive 10 strokes of the pipe on our buttocks, and teachers continue to beat us up even when we are crying because of pain. My friends and I still have scars on our buttocks from beatings."

Tony's and Goldiroger's accounts emphasise the dehumanisation and gendered aspect of corporal punishment, where boys are often subjected to harsher discipline (a point I return to in the next section). This reflects broader societal norms that associate masculinity with endurance and toughness. The lack of empathy from teachers highlights the power imbalance and the use of punishment as a tool for maintaining authority (Skiba et al., 2002). Moreover, Goldiroger's experience, in particular, illustrates the physical and emotional scars left by corporal punishment, reinforcing the idea that such disciplinary methods are excessive and traumatic. The persistence of this practice despite its legal prohibition in South Africa (South African Schools Act, 1996) highlights a significant gap between policy and practice (Morrell, 2001).

Fifteen-year-old Sibongile, a schoolgirl, provided a somewhat critical account of her experiences with corporal punishment. In her account, Sibongile avers teachers as "*too aggressive and violent*," invoking teachers' misuse of power to harm learners in the name of discipline.

Sibongile: "All I can say is that during discipline, our teachers tend to be too aggressive and violent. They overdo it with corporal punishment, and I think corporal punishment is overrated."

Sibongile's critique of corporal punishment underscores the excessive nature of these practices and calls into question their effectiveness. Her perspective aligns with global research that shows corporal punishment is not only ineffective but also harmful to learners' psychological and emotional well-being (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016). In contrast to schools in the United States and the United Kingdom, where there has been a significant shift towards more restorative

justice practices and positive behavioural interventions (see, for example, Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010), Qamatha Secondary School in a South African township continues to apply unjust and punitive discipline practices that cause injury and pain to learners.

The findings from Qamatha Secondary School point to several critical points as they relate to township schools in South Africa. First, and consistent with the conflict theory, teachers' reliance on corporal punishment reflects a power structure where authority is maintained through fear and coercion. Second, teachers treat learners as objects rather than individuals. Teachers' use of corporal punishment, as the data reveals, leads to physical and emotional scars. Finally, what is revealed at Qamatha is the persistent use of corporal punishment despite legal prohibitions. This indicates systematic issues in policy enforcement and teacher training. I reflect on this latter point in Chapter Six. Overall, using Qamatha as an example, the data and the analysis in this section reveal the harsh reality of discipline and punishment in South African township secondary schools, highlighting significant power disparities where teachers wield violence on learners. In comparison to international contexts (see, Kiilakoski & Kivijärvi, 2015), it is evident that punitive practices, in the form of corporal punishment, structure power relations between teachers and learners. According to Dangor (2005), such practices in South African schools are remnants of colonial and apartheid-era educational systems where corporal punishment was institutionalised as a means of maintaining control and order (Dangor, 2005).

5.3. 'tough boys and fragile girls': Gender Inequality in the Context of School Discipline

As alluded to in the section above, analysis in this research affirms the notion that gender plays a role in how school discipline is meted out (Mahlangu et al., 2021; Allen et al., 2018; Gershoff, 2017; Mungoo, 2017). The data reveals that, at Qamatha Secondary School, schoolboys receive severe and frequent discipline characterised by violent beatings, blows, and injuries. The drawings produced by the participants provide a vivid depiction of the gendered and violent nature of disciplinary practices at Qamatha Secondary School; practices that disproportionately affect boys more than girls. In this section, I draw on the participants' drawings and employ their narratives to paint a stark picture of a school environment where punitive discipline (especially corporal punishment) is not only present but also gendered and discriminatory.

In my analysis in this section, I draw on Marx Weber's (1987) extension of conflict theory to critically examine the power dynamics, gender biases, and the implications of punitive disciplinary methods. As discussed in Chapter Two, outside of Marx's conceptualization of conflict as emanating from economic inequality, Weber points to other forms of social inequalities and argues that different groups are affected differently based on such classifications as gender and sexual orientation. In the context of Qamatha Secondary School, teachers exercise their authority and control over learners through punitive discipline, reinforcing both power hierarchies and social inequalities.

In the data, 15-year-old Alicia's drawing (Figure 5.3) and description (as was the case with those of the other participants) highlight how teachers use physical violence, often with implements like thick rulers, pipes, and *sjamboks*⁴, to maintain discipline. This reflects a power structure where teachers exert control over learners' bodies, reinforcing their authority through fear and physical pain.



Figure 5.3: A teacher hitting a boy with a thick ruler (Alicia, female, 15 years old)

⁴ A form of a whip made of thick rubber or animal hide. It gained prominence during the apartheid era as a favoured disciplinary tool used by the (mostly) white police against black victims who were largely engaged in peaceful protests (See, for example, Glaser, 2005).

Describing her picture, the following exchange between me and Alicia ensued:

Melicia: Alicia, please explain your drawing to us.

Alicia: In my drawing, I have illustrated a teacher who uses a thick ruler to hit a boy on his buttocks. The boy is in a tremendous amount of pain. I illustrated this because teachers at my school often use violence to regulate our behaviour. Boys receive beatings frequently and more severely because boys are considered to be troublesome. Therefore, teachers use severe methods of discipline to regulate boys' behaviour. Teachers often use a pipe (a pipe used for plumbing), a stick (a tree branch), and a *sjambok*. However, sometimes they use a hard and thick ruler to hit boys on the buttocks.

Melicia: So, how often do teachers use violence to regulate boys' behaviour at your school?

Alicia: All the time! All the discipline methods teachers use are violent and harmful to us. However, teachers tend to beat up boys more frequently and more severely. As a result, boys are usually injured and scarred during beatings because they receive beatings on the buttocks and all over their bodies while we receive beatings on our hands.

In the data above, Alicia presented the first elaborate insight into how teachers' authority intersects with learners' gender identities to structure discipline practices, including frequency and severity, at the school. Alicia's drawing and explanation shed light on the pervasive use of violence as a disciplinary measure in the school. The depiction of a teacher using a thick ruler to hit a boy on his buttocks emphasises the physicality and severity of the punishment. Alicia's statement that "*teachers at my school often use violence to regulate our behaviour*" underscores the normalisation of corporal punishment as a means of control. Moreover, she points to the embeddedness of gender inequalities in how discipline is experienced. According to her, while all learners experience corporal punishment, it is boys who fare worse and seem to be targeted based on dominant discourses that construct boys as invulnerable, and thereby able to withstand physical pain (Lokot et al., 2020; Luti-Mallei & Gakunga, 2016; Proctor, 2015).

In relation to Alicia's drawing above, during the FGDs, 16-year-old Eric shared a similar image to show how the discrepancies in how discipline is meted out manifest. To illustrate, Eric produced an image (Figure 5.4) of a teacher using a thick stick as a tool to discipline a boy while a thin stick is used to discipline a girl.

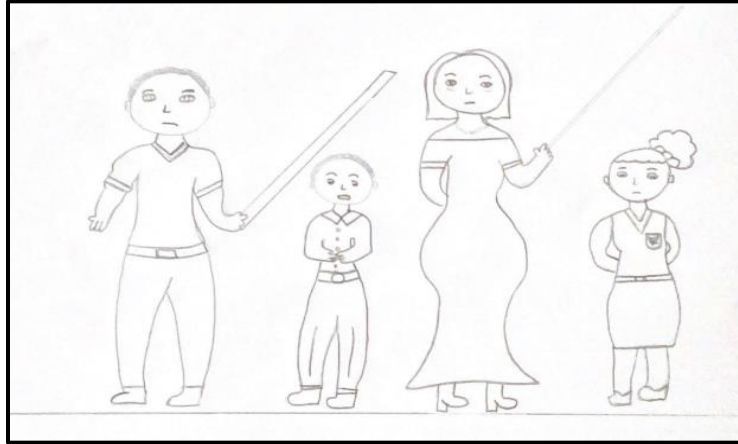


Figure 5.4: Teachers administering corporal punishment (16-year-old Eric)

Describing his picture, Eric said:

Eric: I have illustrated a picture that is divided into two parts. In the first part, the teacher is holding a long, thick, and hard pipe and he is about to give the boy severe strokes using the pipe. In the second part of the picture, the teacher is holding a thin and short pipe, and she is about to give the girl less severe strokes using the pipe. The reason why I illustrated different sizes of the pipe is because boys receive severe beatings because they are seen as masculine and tough while girls receive less severe beatings because they are seen as weak and timid.

Melicia: Can you tell me more about your experiences of discipline?

Eric: I receive severe beatings because I am a boy, and boys are perceived as troublesome. On the other hand, girls receive less severe beatings because they are seen as weak and fragile. Teachers often use thick pipes, sticks, or a *sjambok* on boys during discipline while they use thin pipes on girls.

A central narrative emerging from the above data is that learners' experiences of corporal punishment are influenced by their gender identity. Eric's drawing and testimony highlight the extreme experiences of boys during discipline. To illustrate, teachers use thick tree branches, *sjamboks*, and pipes to discipline boys while they use thin sticks to discipline girls.

Jordan, a 16-year-old participant, provides a poignant critique of the school discipline system, highlighting its violent and harmful nature and its differential impact based on gender and

sexuality. She reported that boys receive severe beatings because teachers believe that "*real men don't cry*." Jordan narrated her views as follows:

Jordan: I think school discipline is often violent and harmful and everyone is at the receiving end of the violence regardless of their gender and sexuality, but the severity differs. For example, boys are frequently targeted for violent beatings because they are considered to be troublesome, and teachers always tell them to toughen up because 'real men don't cry'. However, girls receive beatings that are less severe because they are soft and fragile. Nonetheless, when it comes to queer learners, feminine gay boys are beaten less severely because they are soft and feminine, while masculine lesbians are beaten more severely because they are considered to be masculine and strong.

Jordan provides a critical perspective on school discipline, describing it as "*often violent and harmful*." She emphasises that all learners are subjected to this violence, but the severity varies based on gender and sexuality. Jordan notes that boys are frequently targeted for more violent beatings because they are perceived as troublesome. Teachers reinforce harmful gender stereotypes by telling boys to "*toughen up*" and suggesting that "*real men don't cry*." This expectation perpetuates toxic masculinity and the notion that boys must endure pain without showing vulnerability. In contrast, girls receive beatings that are less severe because they are seen as "*soft and fragile*." This treatment highlights the gendered assumptions that girls are weaker and need to be protected, even within a disciplinary context. However, the experiences of queer learners add another layer of complexity. Jordan points out that feminine gay boys are beaten less severely due to their perceived softness and femininity, which aligns with the stereotypical view of girls. On the other hand, masculine lesbian girls face harsher beatings because they are considered "*masculine and strong*," challenging traditional gender norms and thus receiving more severe punishment. Jordan's insights reveal how school discipline not only perpetuates physical violence but also reinforces damaging stereotypes about gender and sexuality. The differential treatment based on these identities reflects broader societal biases and underscores the need for a more equitable and respectful approach to discipline that does not rely on harmful and discriminatory practices.

Another participant, 16-year-old JoyBoy, affirmed Jordan's experiences, sharing how he receives more severe strokes of the pipe because he is considered tough and masculine. JoyBoy narrated his experiences as follows:

JoyBoy: At [...] school, discipline has never been equal. Boys are beaten more severely, and they are always targeted for discipline even for minor transgressions. On several occasions, I have been called to the staffroom to receive a beating with girls, and the beatings are never equal. Boys receive more strokes on the buttocks while girls receive fewer strokes on their hands.

This narrative highlights significant issues regarding school discipline and the inherent gender inequality within these practices. The differential treatment of boys and girls is evident, with boys being subjected to harsher physical punishment. This disparity suggests a deeply rooted bias that views boys as more deserving of severe discipline, reinforcing gender stereotypes about toughness and the capacity to endure pain. The inconsistency in the number of strokes and the areas targeted (buttocks for boys and hands for girls) reflects an arbitrary and biased approach to discipline, causing physical harm and perpetuating a culture of inequality and unfairness. Moreover, the knowledge that boys are always targeted more harshly can lead to feelings of resentment and injustice among male learners. As noted above, it also reinforces harmful notions of masculinity, where boys are expected to endure more pain and show less vulnerability. By giving girls fewer strokes and targeting their hands, the disciplinary practices imply that girls are weaker and need to be treated more gently. This approach reinforces traditional gender roles and fails to address the underlying behaviours that necessitate discipline. Thus, the described disciplinary practices at [...] school reflect a broader issue of gender-based discrimination and the reinforcement of harmful stereotypes. Addressing these disparities requires a re-evaluation of disciplinary policies to ensure fairness, equality, and the psychological well-being of all learners. This inequity in discipline not only undermines the principles of justice and equality but also negatively impacts the educational environment, hindering the development of a respectful and inclusive school culture.

Likewise, 17-year-old Tony and 15-year-old King detailed their experiences with corporal punishment. They narrated their experiences as follows:

Tony: We receive severe beatings because we are perceived as troublesome. For example, boys' disciplinary cases often involve theft, fighting over drug territories, and physical fights which usually involve stabbing. On the other hand, girls have petty and useless cases where they receive beatings because they were gossiping or fighting over lipstick.

King: Teachers are generally more aggressive towards us because we do not cry when we receive beatings, but beatings are less severe on girls because girls are seen as weak and timid. Girls also tend to cry during discipline, so teachers pity them. There are so many injustices in how discipline is meted out, and what bothers me the most is the fact that boys receive severe beatings on their buttocks while girls receive beatings on their hands. My buttocks have been bruised several times, and it really hurts when I sit down, but I cannot show the others that I feel pain because I have to toughen up. Real men do not show any weaknesses.

The data reveals a clear gender bias in the administration of corporal punishment. Boys, perceived as "*troublesome*" and "*masculine*," are subjected to more severe beatings compared to girls, who are seen as "*soft and fragile*." This is evident in Alicia's and Goldiroger's accounts, where boys receive harsher punishment due to societal expectations of masculinity. Jordan's observation that feminine gay boys and masculine lesbians are disciplined based on their perceived gender roles further underscores the intersection of gender and sexuality in these disciplinary practices. Similar findings are observed in other contexts. For instance, in Nigeria, Salami (2016) notes that boys are more likely to be beaten than girls, reflecting broader societal norms that associate masculinity with toughness and aggression. This gendered approach to discipline reinforces harmful stereotypes and perpetuates gender inequality.

School discipline practices are often gruesome, punitive, and pervasive, and they reproduce gendered inequalities where boys are vulnerable to mistreatment because of their perceived masculinities (Griffin et al., 2020). Scholars argue that boys in particular experience frequent and severe physical punishments associated with boys being perceived as troublesome, masculine, and resilient to physical punishment (Proctor, 2015; Mungoo, 2017; Mahlangu et al., 2021). Therefore, the literature suggests that schools are constructed as sites of gender normativity and where gender-regulating practices are masked and presented as discipline (Bell, 2020; Lokot et al., 2020; Mungoo, 2017).

A central narrative emerging from the data is that girls receive less severe beatings because they are considered weak and timid, while boys receive severe beatings because they are perceived as troublesome and masculine. The data presents personal experiences from learners at Qamatha Secondary School, illustrating how discipline is gendered and rooted in gender-regulating procedures that are presented as discipline. Using conflict theory and international literature, this analysis explores how gender influences how discipline and punishment are meted out in school. Specifically, I draw on the conflict perspective to show, as the theory suggests, how teachers use their power to violently punish, control, and discipline learners (Weber, 1976).

As I show below, the data points to how discipline at Qamatha Secondary School reproduces gendered inequalities, stemming from the gendered assumptions of teachers who perceive girls as timid and obedient while boys are perceived as tough and troublesome (Younger & Cobbett, 2014). To illustrate, as other drawings produced by several participants, 16-year-old Goldiroger produced an image (Figure 5.5) of a teacher using severe strokes of the pipe on a boy, yet she uses less severe strokes on the girl.

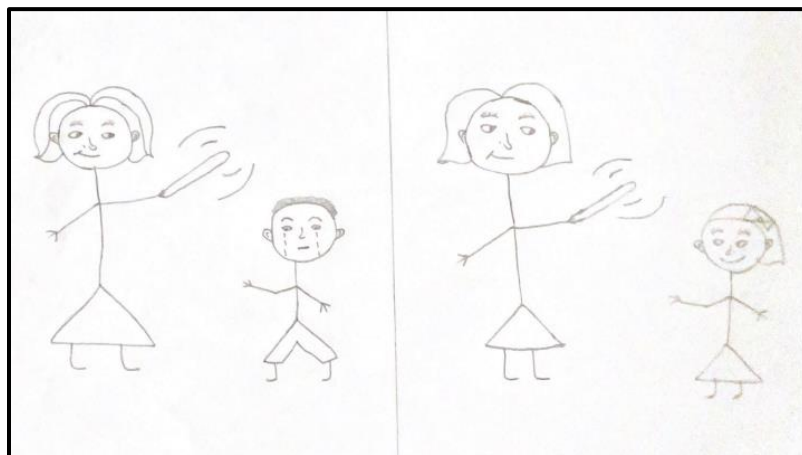


Figure 5.5: A teacher using a pipe to punish learners (16-years-old Goldiroger)

Describing his drawing, just like Eric's description above, Goldiroger said,

Goldiroger: To demonstrate my experiences of discipline, I have divided my drawing into two parts. In the first part, the teacher is holding a long, thick, and hard pipe, and she is about to give the boy severe strokes of the pipe. In the second part of the picture, the teacher is holding a thin and short pipe, and she is about to give the girl less severe strokes of the

pipe. The reason why I illustrated different sizes of the pipe is because discipline is unfair and unequal. Boys receive severe and harsh beatings while girls receive less severe strokes of the pipe. Teachers also tend to be more aggressive when they discipline boys, which is unfair because we are all kids.

Goldiroger's drawing and testimony highlight the discrepancies in school discipline. To illustrate, the boy in Goldiroger's image is crying and in anguish while the girl is smiling while receiving beatings. The violent and injurious experience of the boy reflects a gendered bias in how discipline is meted out at Qamatha Secondary School. The exchange between myself and Goldiroger continued as follows:

Melicia: Okay, do boys often receive discipline that is harmful and painful?

Goldiroger: Yes, teachers view boys as strong and masculine, so they receive severe beatings. Personally, I also receive severe beatings because I am regarded as a slow learner because I struggle to answer very simple recall questions. My concentration span is very short, and my memory sucks, so I often receive beatings because I cannot respond to questions. The fact that I am a slow learner and a boy makes me vulnerable to severe beatings.

Goldiroger's account provides a stark illustration of how gender and academic performance intersect to exacerbate the severity of discipline administered in schools. The perception of boys as inherently strong and masculine leads teachers to administer more severe beatings, based on the assumption that boys can and should endure more physical pain. This gendered expectation not only inflicts physical harm but also perpetuates toxic masculinity, reinforcing the harmful stereotype that boys must be tough and stoic, regardless of their personal struggles or vulnerabilities. Goldiroger's personal experience further complicates this issue, as he faces additional punishment due to his academic challenges. Being labelled a slow learner makes him particularly susceptible to harsh disciplinary measures, highlighting a critical flaw in the education system's approach to learners with learning difficulties. Instead of receiving support and understanding, Goldiroger is met with violence, which likely exacerbates his learning challenges and diminishes his self-esteem. This punitive approach fails to address the underlying issues affecting his academic performance and instead perpetuates a cycle of failure and punishment. The

combination of being a boy and a slow learner places Goldiroger in a particularly vulnerable position, illustrating how multiple factors can intersect to amplify the severity of disciplinary actions. His narrative underscores the need for a more compassionate and individualized approach to discipline, one that considers the unique circumstances and needs of each student. Rather than relying on outdated and harmful stereotypes, educators should focus on creating a supportive learning environment that fosters growth and understanding, thereby breaking the cycle of violence and underachievement.

In line with Goldiroger's drawing above, during the FGDs, 15-year-old Alicia shared a similar image to show the severity of the beatings boys receive during discipline. To illustrate, Alicia produced an image (Figure 5.6) of a teacher using a thick tree branch as a tool to discipline a boy on his buttocks.

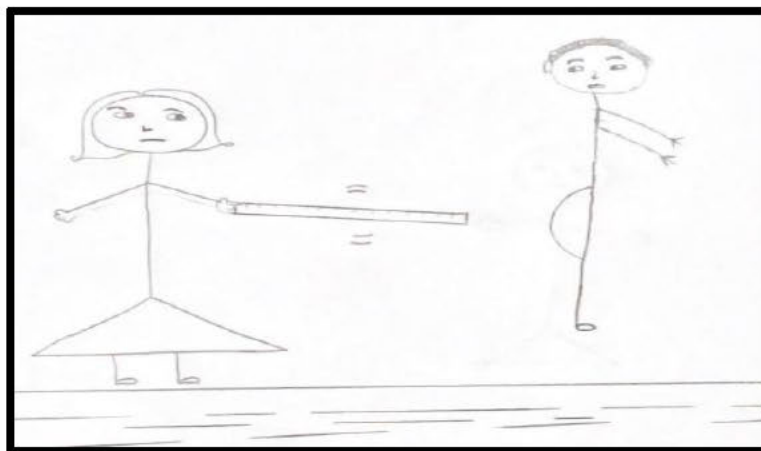


Figure 5.6: A boy receiving beating on his buttocks (15-year-old Alicia).

Describing her drawing Alicia said,

Alicia: To demonstrate the gendered view of discipline, I have illustrated a teacher holding a thick and hard tree branch. I illustrated this image because I often pity boys when they receive severe strokes while we receive minor strokes. After receiving beatings, boys can barely sit on their chairs, and I think they often have bruising from beatings on their buttocks. Sometimes they receive beatings for minor transgressions. The pipe is brutal, I feel sorry for boys.

Melicia: So, you think boys receive severe beatings compared to girls?

Alicia: Yes, boys do receive severe beatings. They also receive more insults from teachers, but the insults are usually based on their physical appearance. The teachers hardly insult girls, and when they do insult us, it is usually related to how we act promiscuous.

Alicia's account provides a vivid depiction of the gendered nature of school discipline, highlighting the stark differences in the treatment of boys and girls. Her illustration of a teacher holding a thick and hard tree branch underscores the brutality of the punishment boys endure. Alicia's empathy for the boys is evident as she recounts how they can barely sit after receiving severe strokes and often have bruising on their buttocks. This imagery conveys not only the physical pain inflicted on boys but also the lasting impact of such harsh disciplinary measures. Moreover, Alicia's observation that boys sometimes receive beatings for minor transgressions suggests a disproportionate response from teachers, rooted in gendered expectations. The use of a "*brutal*" pipe for discipline reflects a deeply ingrained belief that boys must be tough and resilient, which perpetuates toxic masculinity and disregards the physical and emotional well-being of the boys.

My follow-up question prompted Alicia to elaborate on the differences in disciplinary practices. She confirms that boys receive more severe beatings and also face more frequent and harsh verbal insults. These insults are typically based on their physical appearance, which can further damage their self-esteem and reinforce harmful stereotypes about masculinity. In contrast, when girls are insulted, it is usually related to accusations of promiscuity, reflecting societal judgments about female behaviour and sexuality. My exchange with Alicia further highlights the pervasive gender biases in school discipline, where boys are subjected to more severe physical punishment and verbal abuse, while girls face different forms of judgment and shaming. The unequal treatment not only perpetuates harmful gender stereotypes but also creates an environment of fear and inequality. Alicia's empathy and detailed observations call attention to the urgent need for more equitable and compassionate disciplinary practices that respect the dignity and well-being of all learners, regardless of gender.

The data reveals inequalities in how discipline is meted out. Boys, perceived as "strong" and "masculine," are subjected to severe beatings while girls receive less severe beatings because they are perceived as weak, timid, and obedient. This is evident in Alicia's and Goldiroger's

discussions, where boys are targeted for punitive discipline for minor transgressions. Joyboy and King narrate the fact that boys are misunderstood, stereotyped, and relegated by their teachers during discipline. Similar findings are observed in other contexts. For example, Gershoff (2017) notes that boys are frequently targeted for corporal punishment because they are considered to be troublesome and strong while girls are perceived as timid and obedient. The above findings affirm the conflict theorist perspective, which suggests that schools perpetuate social inequalities that arise from gender differences (Collins, 1986; Lachman, 2012; Chernoff, 2013; Hayes, 2022).

Further, the narratives of the participants collectively reveal a deeply entrenched pattern of gender-based discrimination in school disciplinary practices. These accounts highlight significant issues regarding the severity and nature of discipline meted out to learners, which is heavily influenced by gender norms and expectations. For example, Jordan exposes the differential treatment boys and girls receive, with boys subjected to harsher physical punishment. He notes that boys are often targeted for severe beatings because they are perceived as troublesome and are expected to "*toughen up*" as "*real men don't cry*." Conversely, girls receive less severe beatings because they are viewed as soft and fragile. This perspective underscores the harmful stereotype that masculinity equates to toughness and endurance, while femininity is associated with weakness and delicacy. Jordan also highlights the unique challenges faced by queer learners, noting that feminine gay boys are beaten less severely due to their perceived femininity, whereas masculine lesbians face harsher punishments because they are seen as strong and masculine. This indicates a complex intersection of gender and sexuality in disciplinary practices (an issue I focus on in the next sections of this chapter).

Second testimonies from participants such as Goldiroger provide personal accounts of how academic performance can intersect with gender to exacerbate disciplinary severity. Goldiroger explain that being labelled a slow learner subjects him to more severe beatings, illustrating a punitive approach towards learners struggling academically. This treatment not only physically harms the learners but also likely exacerbates their academic difficulties by creating an environment of fear and anxiety. Goldiroger's experience highlights how disciplinary practices can perpetuate cycles of failure and punishment, particularly for boys perceived as not meeting academic or behavioural expectations.

Finally, narratives of participants such as Alicia further reinforces the gender disparity in disciplinary measures. For example, Alicia's description of a teacher wielding a thick tree branch and the severe beatings boys receive compared to the minor strokes' girls endure vividly illustrates the physical brutality boys face. Alicia's empathy for the boys, who can barely sit after beatings and often have bruising, underscores the physical and psychological toll of such punishment. She also notes that boys are more frequently insulted by teachers, with these insults often targeting their physical appearance. In contrast, girls face fewer verbal assaults, which are typically related to accusations of promiscuity, reflecting societal judgments about female behaviour and sexuality.

In summary, these findings reveal a consistent pattern of gender-based discrimination in school discipline. Boys are disproportionately subjected to harsher physical punishment and more frequent verbal abuse, driven by entrenched stereotypes about masculinity and strength. Girls, while facing less severe physical discipline, are still subject to gendered judgments and shaming related to their behaviour and sexuality. The intersection of gender, sexuality, and academic performance further complicates these dynamics, with queer learners and academically struggling boys facing additional layers of discrimination. These practices not only perpetuate harmful gender norms but also create an environment of inequality, fear, and psychological distress, underscoring the urgent need for more equitable and compassionate disciplinary approaches in schools.

5.4 'They enforce heterosexuality during discipline': Queerphobia Masked as Discipline

Despite the emphasis on equality in national and international legislation and policies, which set out to protect the rights of queer individuals, queer learners continue to experience school discipline which is meted out against their diverse gender and sexual identities (Snapp et al., 2015; Palmer et al., 2016). Internationally, scholars note that queer learners are frequently punished for retaliating against ongoing harassment that has been ignored by school teachers (Graytak & Palmer, 2017; Bellinger et al., 2016; Mittleman, 2018). Francis and Monakali (2021) argue that school is an environment that refuses to acknowledge queer learners' oppression, existence, and the mistreatment they experience within the school premises. They are also target of queerphobic bullying, gay bashing, mocking, and intimidation (Bhana, 2014). In the South African context, identifying as queer in township schools is associated with homophobic bullying, marginalisation, and negative consequences (Msibi, 2012; Francis, 2017; Francis, 2023; Mayeza, 2023). In this

section, I draw on the data to show that the only ‘acceptable’ sexuality at Qamatha Secondary School is heterosexuality. Therefore, learners who identify as queer are marginalised, humiliated, and othered during discipline.

5.4.1 ‘You sinful child! Lucifer has taken over your mind!’: Jordan’s Narrative

A central narrative emerging from the data is that discipline is meted out specifically against learner’s sexual identities; demonstrating some sort of ‘corrective’ approach. Within this context, teachers use queerphobic sentiments, including queerphobic slurs and bullying, as a tool for disciplining learners into their correct places within the gender binary. To demonstrate, I draw on a lengthy exchange between myself and 16-year-old Jordan who identifies as lesbian. The exchange was based on one of Jordan’s drawings (see, for example, Figure 5.7, below) of a male teacher insulting a girl who identifies as lesbian. Jordan added a speech bubble where the teacher administering discipline is shouting “*You sinful child! Don’t you read the bible? You are a sin in front of God. Lucifer has taken over your mind. Kids like you don’t belong in this school*”.

When viewed through the lens of queer theory, the extract above exposes the deep-seated homophobia and heteronormative enforcement present in school disciplinary practices. The teacher’s actions and words not only punish the learner for her behaviour but also seek to correct her sexuality, reinforcing heteronormative ideals and perpetuating a culture of exclusion and discrimination. The suggestion that “*kids like you don’t belong in this school*” further points to deliberate exclusion of queer learners; against Constitutional ideals that no person should be discriminated against based on their gender and sexual orientation.

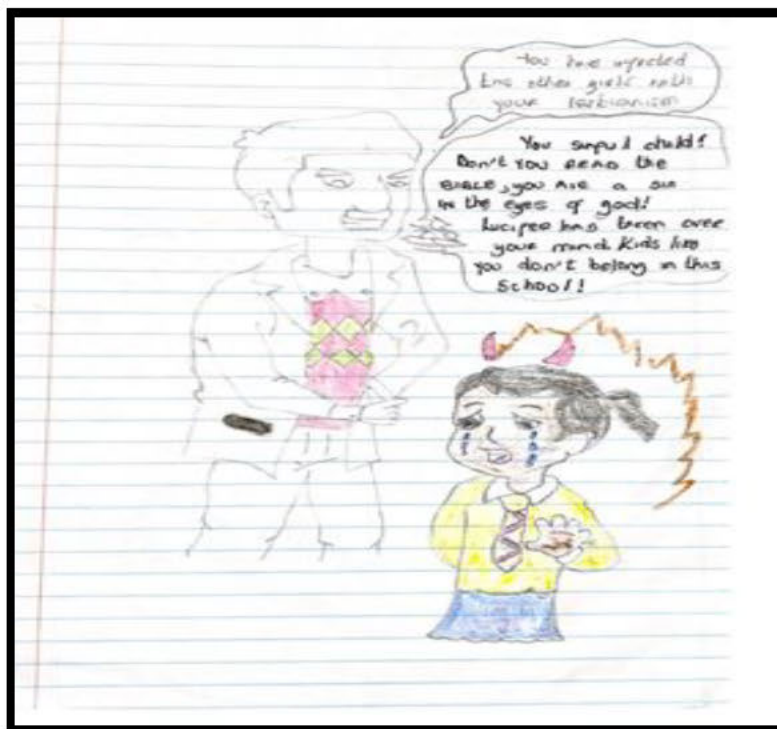


Figure 5.7: A teacher using queerphobic slurs to discipline a learner (16-year-old Jordan)

Below, I have intentionally extracted the lengthy conversation between myself and Jordan, as it best demonstrates the central theme and argument made in this section. While other participants shared similar concerns through their drawings and narratives, it was Jordan's account and imagery that captured my attention the most. This is how the conversation went:

Melicia: Jordan, I can see a demonic figure in your drawing as suggested by the horns on the girl's head. Can you please share with the group what the drawing personally means to you?

Jordan: I have illustrated a male teacher and a female learner who identifies as lesbian. In the picture, I am trying to demonstrate how this teacher discriminates against gay and lesbian learners. The teacher is shouting at the girl, he says that the learner is going to infect other learners with her homosexuality. He also questions whether the girl goes to church because if she did, she would be aware that she is a sin in the eyes of God. When the teacher shouts the girl starts crying because she is hurt by the teacher's words. The girl gets extremely sad and emotional because she did not choose her sexuality, it is in her nature, and she identified as lesbian from a very young age. In my drawing, I also wanted to add how teachers always reinforce the idea that learners should date the opposite sex. They

enforce heterosexuality during discipline and in conversations they have in the classroom. Teachers constantly reiterate the fact that positives don't attract positives and negatives do not attract negatives.

Melicia: What do they mean when they say positives do not attract positives?

Jordan: They mean that it is unacceptable for girls to date girls and for boys to date boys because the only sexuality that is acceptable is heterosexuality.

Melicia: Okay, I see you have speech bubbles on your drawing. Share the words you have written with us and what they mean to you.

Jordan: The teacher is saying "You have infected the other learners with your homosexuality. You sinful child, don't you read the bible? You are a sin in the eyes of God. Lucifer has taken over your mind. Kids like you do not belong in this school". The learner gets extremely emotional and starts crying but she does not respond because she is being respectful to the teacher.

Melicia: Okay, so the drawing basically shows us how teachers use insults and discrimination to discipline and punish learners for being queer. I have also noticed from your drawing that the learner has horns and you have illustrated fire behind the learner's head. What are you trying to tell us about the learner?

Jordan: The learner has horns because I illustrated her as a demon because that is how teachers view queer learners. They think that if you are lesbian, you have demonic spirits, and a demon has taken over your body. I think that teachers view lesbian and gay learners as demons.

Melicia: Okay, so the horns and fire symbolize how teachers do not view the learners as human but instead view the lesbian as a demon?

Jordan: Yes, I also illustrated fire behind the learner's head which symbolizes hell. Teachers always tell me that I will never go to heaven because I am lesbian so that is why I added fire behind the learner's head.

Melicia: Okay, anything else you would like to share with us based on the drawing?

Jordan: The learner whom I portrayed as a demon is also crying because of the discrimination she experiences during discipline. The learner was born lesbian, and she cannot change her sexuality. She wishes that she could, but she cannot, that makes her burst into tears.

Melicia: Oh, so she cries because of the discrimination she experiences because of her sexuality?

Jordan: Yes, teachers often insult queer learners during discipline. A queer learner never receives a beating without experiencing verbal abuse.

Using queer theory as a lens for analysis, Jordan's narrative and accompanying drawing vividly illustrate the profound discrimination and emotional trauma faced by queer learners in a heteronormative school environment. Queer theory, which challenges normative constructs of sexuality and gender, provides a critical framework to unpack the experiences depicted by Jordan, particularly the ways in which institutional power dynamics perpetuate heteronormativity and marginalize non-heterosexual identities. Analysis of my conversation with Jordan points to a discourse centred on discriminatory practices and heteronormativity.

First, Jordan's account reveals how teachers enforce heteronormativity, both explicitly and implicitly. The teacher's condemnation of the lesbian learner for potentially "*infecting*" others with her homosexuality underscores a belief that non-heterosexual identities are aberrant and contagious. This rhetoric enforces compulsory heterosexuality, positioning it as the only acceptable form of sexual expression. According to queer theory, such enforcement is a mechanism to maintain heteronormative social order, which delegitimises and marginalises queer identities.

Second, the teacher's invocation of religious morality to shame the lesbian learner exemplifies the intersection of heteronormativity with religious discourse. By labelling the learner's sexuality as sinful and demonic, the teacher weaponise religious beliefs to reinforce heteronormative norms and discipline queer identities. Queer theory critiques such moral judgments, arguing that they serve to pathologise and stigmatise non-heteronormative identities, further entrenching societal exclusion and discrimination.

Third, Jordan's use of a demonic imagery in his drawing, including horns and fire, symbolises how queer learners are dehumanised by their educators. The depiction of the learner as a demon reflects how teachers view and treat queer learners as otherworldly and evil. This dehumanisation is a critical aspect of queer theory, which posits that non-normative identities are often cast as

monstrous or deviant to justify their marginalisation. The association with demonic figures illustrates the extent to which queer learners are vilified and stripped of their humanity within the school context.

Fourth, the emotional distress experienced by the queer learner, as depicted in Jordan's narrative, highlights the psychological impact of constant discrimination and verbal abuse. The learner's tears symbolise the internal struggle and pain resulting from being incessantly told that her inherent identity is wrong and sinful. Queer theory emphasises the psychological damage inflicted by societal rejection and the internalization of negative societal attitudes towards one's identity. Jordan's account poignantly captures this dynamic, showing how the learner's sense of self-worth and mental health are severely affected by the teacher's relentless homophobic abuse.

Finally, Jordan's narrative underscores how disciplinary actions in schools are not just about maintaining order but are deeply intertwined with the reinforcement of societal norms, including those related to gender and sexuality. The specific targeting of queer learners for both physical and verbal abuse reveals a punitive system that seeks to discipline non-normative identities into conformity. Queer theory's critique of such power structures highlights how discipline is used as a tool to uphold heteronormativity, punishing those who deviate from prescribed gender and sexual norms more harshly.

Overall, Jordan's narrative, when viewed through the lens of queer theory, exposes the deep-seated queerphobia and heteronormative enforcement present in school disciplinary practices. The teacher's actions and words not only punish the learner for her behaviour but also seek to correct her sexuality, reinforcing heteronormative ideals and perpetuating a culture of exclusion and discrimination. The symbolic representation of the learner as a demon underscores the extent of dehumanisation faced by queer learners, while the emotional trauma depicted highlights the profound personal impact of such systemic discrimination. By examining these experiences through queer theory, we can better understand the mechanisms of power and oppression that shape the lives of queer learners, calling for a critical re-evaluation of disciplinary practices in educational institutions to foster a more inclusive and equitable environment.

Moreover, the data above presents personal accounts of rejection, humiliation, and marginalisation by teachers during discipline. Using the queer theory, this analysis shows how some teachers use queerphobic slurs and marginalisation to discipline and punish queer learners in school. In particular, in this section of the analysis, I have drawn on the queer theory to show, as the theory suggests, how queer learners constantly have negative experiences of schooling that range from punitive actions expressed through derogatory language to vicious reactionary hate, often expressed through violence and often perpetrated by teachers (Msibi, 2013).

5.4.2 'lonely and isolated learners': Discipline as a Price for Being Queer

In relation to Jordan's drawing discussed above, during the FGD, other queer-identifying participants, such as 14-year-old Chommie, shared their experiences about sexuality-based inequalities in discipline. To share his experiences of discipline, Chommie produced the image (Figure 5.8 below).

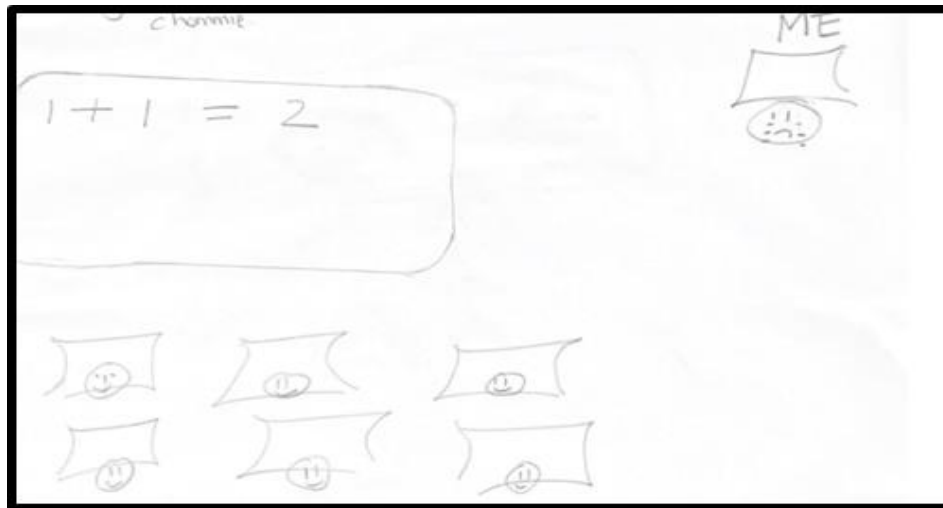


Figure 5.8: A queer learner isolated in a classroom corner while other learners are laughing (14-years-old Chommie).

Describing his picture, Chommie said,

Chommie: To show the inequalities in how discipline is meted out I have illustrated a classroom which comprises a chalkboard, learners, and desks. All the learners are happily sitting together, and they have smiley faces. In the corner of the classroom, one learner is sitting alone and he has a sad facial expression. I illustrated this drawing because during discipline teachers always ask me to move away from the straight learners because I will

infect them with my homosexuality. This makes me very sad because I enjoy sitting with girls.

Melicia: Do they ever rearrange the straight learners' places when the class is disruptive?

Chommie: No, they always ask me to move away from other learners because I will infect them with my homosexuality. This makes me feel sad, unwanted, and unaccepted. I do not understand why it bothers them so much when we sit with girls.

Chommie's drawing and testimony highlight the marginalisation of queer learners during discipline. As a result, he feels unwanted and unaccepted by teachers because they perceive his sexuality as infectious. Indeed, Chommie shared how teachers usually move him away from heterosexual-identifying learners when the class is disruptive. However, they do not rearrange the places of heterosexual learners. Chommie's description of his drawing offers a poignant illustration of the discrimination and segregation faced by queer learners within the school environment. By employing queer theory as an analytical lens, I delve deeper into the underlying power dynamics and social structures that perpetuate these inequalities and the resultant emotional impact on queer learners. My analysis of Chommie's testimony points to a couple of things.

First, Chommie's experience highlights the enforcement of heteronormativity through classroom seating arrangements. The practice of isolating Chommie from his peers under the pretext of preventing the "*infection*" of homosexuality underscores a deeply entrenched belief in heteronormativity. Queer theory critiques this by revealing how such practices are used to maintain a binary understanding of sexuality, positioning heterosexuality as normal and homosexuality as deviant. This isolation serves to reinforce the idea that queer identities are inherently problematic and contagious, further entrenching homophobic attitudes.

Second, the segregation of Chommie from his classmates is symbolic of broader societal stigmatisation of queer individuals. By being physically separated, Chommie is marked as different and other, reinforcing his outsider status. This physical separation mirrors societal exclusion and marginalisation, where queer individuals are often relegated to the peripheries. Queer theory argues that such stigmatisation is a means of maintaining social order by policing the boundaries of acceptable behaviour and identity.

Third, Chommie's sadness and feelings of being unwanted and unaccepted are direct consequences of the discriminatory practices he faces. Queer theory emphasises the emotional and psychological toll of such marginalisation, highlighting how systemic discrimination can lead to internalised homophobia and a diminished sense of self-worth. Chommie's desire to sit with girls and his resultant sadness when forced to move underscores the natural human need for social connection and acceptance, which is cruelly denied by the discriminatory practices of the teachers.

Fourth, the teachers' actions in rearranging Chommie's seating but not that of his straight peers during disruptions reveal an unequal application of discipline that is rooted in power dynamics. By singling out Chommie, teachers exercise their authority to enforce conformity to heteronormative standards, thereby maintaining their power and control within the classroom. Queer theory critiques these power dynamics, arguing that they serve to perpetuate systems of oppression that privilege heterosexual identities while marginalising queer ones.

Finally, the narrative that Chommie will "*infect*" others with his homosexuality is a particularly malicious form of discrimination that reflects a deep-seated fear of queerness. This rhetoric of infection not only dehumanises Chommie but also positions his identity as a threat to the social fabric of the classroom. Queer theory deconstructs such narratives, revealing how they are used to justify exclusionary practices and to instil fear and prejudice against queer individuals.

In sum, Chommie's narrative, viewed through the lens of queer theory, exposes the multifaceted ways in which heteronormativity is enforced within educational settings, leading to the marginalisation and stigmatisation of queer learners. The physical segregation, emotional distress, and unequal application of discipline reflect broader societal attitudes that pathologise and ostracise queer identities. By critically analysing these experiences, queer theory not only highlights the pervasive nature of these discriminatory practices but also calls for a re-evaluation of the power structures that perpetuate them. This analysis underscores the urgent need for more inclusive and equitable approaches to discipline that recognise and respect the diversity of student identities.

Other participants supported these sentiments by also sharing their narratives on the inequalities in how discipline is meted out. For example, 17-year-old Shakira detailed his experience with school discipline where he reported that he is frequently referred to as ‘*sinful and demonic*’. Sharika narrated his experiences as follows:

Shakira: “I openly identify as gay so on several occasions teachers have referred to my sexuality as infectious during discipline. They also refer to me as sinful and they say that I have evil spirits. Queer learners always receive homophobic insults before they receive beatings”.

Again, Shakira’s experiences shed light on several things. For one, his experience of being labelled as “*infectious*” and “*sinful*” by teachers exemplifies the pathologising of queer identities. This aligns with queer theory’s critique of how heteronormative societies often pathologise and demonize non-heterosexual orientations. By referring to Sharika’s sexuality as “*infectious*,” teachers are invoking a fear of contamination, suggesting that queer identities are not just abnormal but also dangerous. This language serves to further dehumanise and delegitimise Sharika’s identity, reinforcing the idea that queer individuals are inherently flawed or diseased. Likewise, the references to Sharika as “*sinful*” and possessed by “*evil spirits*” draw on religious and moral discourses to justify discrimination. Queer theory examines how these discourses are used to enforce heteronormativity by framing queer identities as morally and spiritually deviant. By invoking religious rhetoric, teachers are not only expressing personal prejudice but also mobilising broader societal beliefs to justify their discriminatory behaviour. This form of moral judgment serves to alienate queer learners, positioning them as morally inferior and unworthy of the same respect and dignity afforded to their heterosexual peers. Moreover, Sharika’s account highlights how homophobic insults are used as a prelude to physical punishment. Queer theory helps us understand that this verbal abuse is not just incidental but a deliberate form of psychological violence designed to reinforce heteronormative norms. The use of insults before beatings serves to degrade and humiliate queer learners, making the physical punishment not just a disciplinary action but a tool of oppression. This combination of verbal and physical abuse aims to enforce conformity to heteronormative standards through fear and intimidation. Further, the intersection of queerphobia with school discipline practices reveals how institutional power is used to enforce societal norms. Teachers, as authority figures, use their position to impose heteronormative values

through punitive measures. Queer theory critiques this misuse of power, arguing that it perpetuates systemic inequality by marginalising those who do not conform to dominant norms. Sharika's narrative shows how discipline is weaponised to maintain social hierarchies, with queer learners disproportionately targeted and punished. This also aligns with Marx's conflict theory of education. Finally, the psychological impact of such treatment on queer learners is profound. Being consistently subjected to homophobic insults and physical punishment can lead to internalised queerphobia, depression, and a diminished sense of self-worth (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016; Heekes et al., 2022; Alison et al., 2023). Queer theory emphasises the importance of recognising these psychological effects as part of the broader systemic oppression faced by queer individuals. Sharika's experiences underscore the need for supportive and inclusive environments that affirm queer identities rather than degrade them.

Sharika's narrative, analysed through the lens of queer theory, sheds light on the multifaceted discrimination faced by queer learners in schools. The 'pathologisation' of queer identities, use of religious and moral judgment, and the combination of verbal and physical abuse all serve to reinforce heteronormative norms and maintain systemic inequality. This analysis highlights the urgent need for educational reforms that promote inclusivity, respect, and equality for all learners, regardless of their sexual orientation. By addressing these issues, we can work towards creating a more just and equitable educational environment for queer learners.

Likewise, 15-year-old Daisy and 15-year-old Melly affirmed Shakira's experiences; sharing how they have been referred to as 'demonic and evil faggots' an experience that has left them with permanent emotional scars.

Daisy: "Recently, my classmates were disruptive, but the teacher targeted me for discipline. She insulted me and called me '*isitabane*' for very minor transgression. The teacher went on to say that the reason that I am behaving that way is because I am a faggot and she suggested that I do not interact with other learners because I will infect them with my homosexuality".

Melly: "I am lesbian and whenever I make a minor mistake, my teachers always say that they expected such unruly behaviour from '*isitabane*' because faggots have bad and

demonic spirits. They say that I need prayer and that I will never go to heaven because of my demonic spirits. Apparently, God does not accept gay people so I will burn in hell. It is almost as if the teachers see me as a demon, they constantly try to turn learners against me because they think that I am going to infect other learners with my homosexuality. Almost as if it is an infectious disease. However, the very same teachers treat straight learners in a very kind and loving manner”.

The accounts of Daisy and Melly provide powerful examples of the discrimination and violence faced by queer learners within the educational system; uncovering the deep-rooted prejudices and institutional practices that perpetuate inequality. Their experiences highlight how queer learners are disproportionately targeted for discipline, even for minor infractions. This selective targeting is a manifestation of systemic homophobia, where teachers use their authority to single out and punish queer learners. According to queer theory, such actions reinforce heteronormative structures by marginalising and isolating those who do not conform (Meyer, 2007). Daisy’s experience of being insulted and called derogatory names like “*isitabane*” (a derogatory term for a gay person) exemplifies how queer learners are othered and dehumanised. This isolation serves to stigmatise queer identities and reinforce the notion that they are abnormal and unacceptable. Also, both narratives continue to reveal how queer learners are pathologised and demonised by their teachers. Melly’s account of being labelled as having “*bad and demonic spirits*” and being told she will “*burn in hell*” underscores the use of religious and moralistic rhetoric to condemn queer identities. Queer theory critiques this ‘pathologisation’, arguing that it serves to delegitimise and vilify queer individuals (Jagose & Genschel, 1995). By portraying queerness as a disease or a demonic possession, educators not only invalidate the learners’ identities but also perpetuate harmful stereotypes that contribute to their marginalisation and exclusion.

As opposed to testaments by other participants, the metaphor of homosexuality as an “*infectious disease*” is particularly salient in Daisy’s and Melly’s accounts. Daisy’s teacher’s suggestion that she will “*infect*” other learners with her homosexuality, and Melly’s similar experience, continues to add to the narrative of a deep-seated fear of queerness as something that can spread and corrupt. Queer theory examines how such metaphors reinforce heteronormativity by framing queerness as a threat to societal norms (Butler, 1993). This metaphorical framing not only justifies the exclusion and isolation of queer learners but also perpetuates fear and misunderstanding among their peers,

further entrenching homophobia within the school environment. The stark contrast in how queer and straight learners are treated, as noted by Melly, underscores the systemic nature of this discrimination. Straight learners receive kindness and love, while queer learners face hostility and violence. Queer theory emphasises the importance of recognising these disparities as indicative of broader societal norms that privilege heterosexuality. This differential treatment not only harms queer learners but also reinforces the notion that heterosexuality is the normative and desirable state, further marginalising queer identities.

The data and experiences presented in this section reveal the pervasive and systemic nature of queerphobia within the educational system. The targeting and isolation of queer learners, the pathologisation and demonisation of their identities, the use of metaphors framing queerness as an infectious disease, and the religious justifications for discrimination all serve to reinforce heteronormative values and marginalise queer learners. These narratives highlight the urgent need for inclusive and affirming educational environments that respect and validate all learners, regardless of their sexual orientation (Francis, 2017; Francis, 2021). Addressing these issues requires not only policy changes but also a shift in the cultural and institutional practices that perpetuate discrimination and inequality. Msibi (2013) notes that queer learners constantly have negative experiences of schooling that range from punitive actions expressed through derogatory language to vicious reactionary hate, often expressed through violence and often perpetrated by teachers. In township schools, words such as 'isitabane', 'moffie' and 'ongqingili', which are all derogatory isiZulu and Afrikaans words with a meaning similar to 'faggot', are often used to refer to queer learners in an attempt to humiliate them (see, also Msibi, 2012). The findings from this study affirm the queer theory which acknowledges the punitive experiences of queer learners within schooling contexts (Msibi, 2012).

5.5 Queered Disparities: The Intersectionality of Gender and Sexuality in School Discipline

Internationally, scholars have documented that queer learners often face disciplinary actions in response to their resistance to homophobic behaviours, fostering an environment conducive to queerphobic violence both within and outside of school settings (Bellinger et al., 2016; Greytak & Palmer, 2018; Mittleman, 2023). Queer learners frequently endure punishment for their self-expression and deviation from gender norms, highlighting schools' failure to create inclusive

environments (Snapp et al., 2014). Mittleman (2018) argues that sexual orientation significantly influences how learners are treated and disciplined within educational institutions, with queer learners who do not conform to societal norms facing heightened risks of mistreatment from both peers and educators (Palmer et al., 2016).

The data reveals a recurring narrative regarding the disparate disciplinary experiences of queer learners. Despite being targeted for discipline, the severity of punishments often hinges on perceptions of the learners' masculinity or femininity. For instance, a feminine gay boy may receive milder physical reprimands compared to a masculine lesbian, indicating that teachers' perceptions of queer learners' gender presentations heavily influence disciplinary measures. Drawing on queer theory, conflict theory, and comparative literature, the analysis in this section delves into how perceptions of queer learners' gender expressions dictate disciplinary outcomes.

As evidenced in the accounts of participants below, teachers' perceptions of queer learners' gender presentations profoundly shape their disciplinary experiences within the school environment. For instance, 17-year-old Andile's drawing (Figure 5.8) depicts a teacher using homophobic language while disciplining a queer-identifying boy.

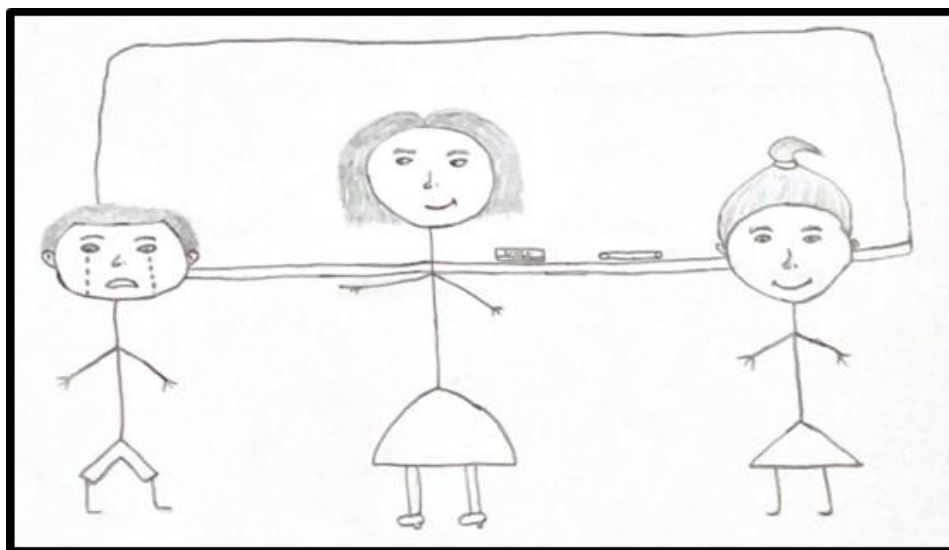


Figure 5.9: Teacher discrimination based on queer learners' femininity and masculinity (17-year-old Andile)

Andile's portrayal underscores the unequal treatment based on perceived gender conformity, where more feminine presentations receive comparatively lenient discipline. Describing his picture, Andile further explained,

"Boys are generally seen as very troublesome, and they are disruptive which is why they receive frequent beatings. The beatings that boys receive are severe and teachers tend to be aggressive towards boys because they tend to have very extreme cases. For example, last week we were sent to the staffroom to receive a beating."

However, Andile's testimony further elucidated some notable disparities. He continued, "*I'm treated less harshly because I'm seen as feminine. Teachers treat me like a girl, so I get lighter punishment.*" This statement offers a critical insight into the gendered dynamics of school discipline and the intersectionality of gender and sexuality within the educational context. Using queer theory, I unpack the underlying assumptions and power structures that inform this differential treatment. First, Andile's experience highlights how gender norms are reinforced through disciplinary practices. The fact that he is treated more leniently because he is seen as feminine suggests that teachers are upholding traditional gender expectations. This reinforces the binary view of gender, where masculinity is associated with toughness and femininity with gentleness. Furthermore, the differential treatment of Andile, compared to other boys who are perceived as more masculine, reveals the patriarchal attitudes that underpin school discipline. Boys who conform to traditional masculine norms are subjected to harsher punishments, while those who do not are treated more leniently. This not only enforces a rigid understanding of gender but also punishes deviations from these norms. Indeed, Andile's femininity, whether actual or perceived, positions him as more vulnerable and less deserving of harsh punishment. This indicates that femininity is associated with weakness and a need for protection, a stereotype that is applied regardless of the individual's actual gender identity. Likewise, the treatment Andile receives is also influenced by his sexuality. As a boy who identifies as gay, his perceived femininity shields him from the severe discipline that his more masculine peers face. This suggests a complex interplay between gender and sexuality, where non-normative sexualities intersect with gender expectations to produce varied disciplinary outcomes. The inconsistency in disciplinary measures based on perceived gender and sexuality can create a confusing and hostile environment for queer learners. Andile's experience of being treated like a girl because he is seen as feminine might be seen as a

lesser evil compared to the harsher punishments meted out to masculine boys, but it still reflects a lack of acceptance and understanding of diverse gender expressions and sexualities. By treating learners like Andile more leniently due to his femininity, teachers are not challenging the underlying biases and discriminatory attitudes. Instead, they are reinforcing the marginalisation of those who do not conform to heteronormative and patriarchal standards. This can have long-term impacts on the mental health and self-esteem of queer learners (Palmer & Greytak, 2017), as they navigate an environment that constantly judges and punishes them based on their gender expression and sexual orientation.

Similarly, to affirm Andile's testimony 15-year-old Nature's drawing (Figure 5.10) portrays a teacher using corporal punishment, with a lesbian learner receiving harsher treatment due to her perceived masculinity. Providing clarity to her drawing, Nature explained that, "*Teachers always target me for being masculine. They say I deserve harsh punishment for acting like a boy.*" Pointing to her drawing, Nature added that

Nature: "The lesbian learner in my drawing is receiving strokes of the pipe while the straight learner is laughing in the background. Teachers always ensure that I receive severe beatings because I have a deep voice and I am a little masculine, so they always tell me to take the severe beatings since I want to act like a boy."

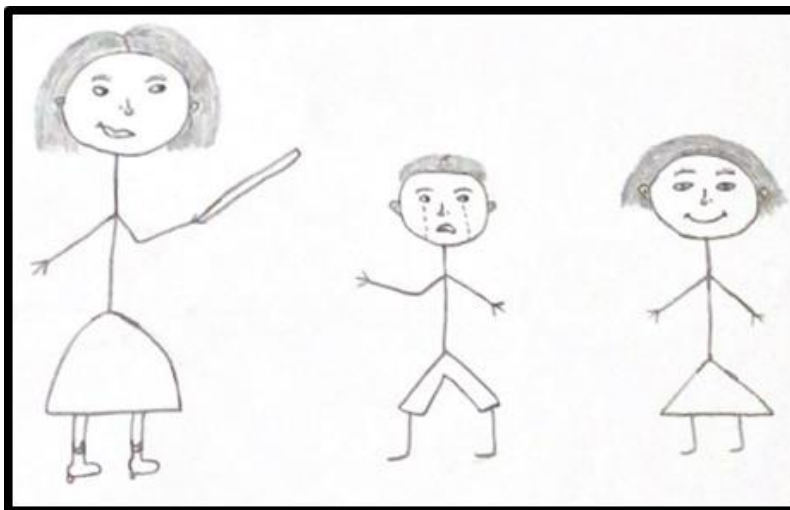


Figure 5.9: A teacher using a stick to punish learners (15-year-old Nature).

Nature's account along with the depiction of the lesbian learner receiving harsh punishment while a straight learner laughs, provides a powerful illustration of how gender nonconformity and queer

identities are policed and punished within the educational setting. Applying queer theory to this data, I deconstruct the power dynamics and cultural norms that inform these disciplinary practices.

Nature's experience highlights how educational environments enforce strict adherence to traditional gender norms. Her perceived masculinity subjects her to harsher punishments because she deviates from what is expected of her gender. This enforcement perpetuates the binary understanding of gender, punishing those who do not conform. The severity of punishment that Nature receives is directly linked to her masculine presentation. This reflects societal attitudes that associate masculinity with toughness and a capacity to endure more pain, thus justifying harsher disciplinary measures. Such practices not only reinforce harmful stereotypes but also legitimise violence against those who do not fit neatly into gender binaries. Furthermore, her narrative underlines how her lesbian identity intersects with her masculine presentation to result in targeted punishment. Queer theory reveals that such disciplinary measures are not just about enforcing gender norms but also about policing sexuality. Her punishment is a way to enforce heteronormativity, where deviation from heterosexual norms is met with violence and ridicule. Likewise, the illustration of a straight learner laughing while the queer learner receives punishment demonstrates the social sanctioning of queer identities. This public humiliation serves to reinforce heteronormative standards and discourages other learners from deviating from these norms. It creates an environment where queer learners are not only physically punished but also socially ostracised.

Likewise, 17-year-old Zamo recounted how his feminine presentation leads to lighter punishments, stating, *"I act like a girl, so I get treated like one."* This sentiment is echoed by Andile, who noted, *"If you act like a girl, you get girl treatment."* Conversely, 15-year-old Sibongile mentioned how *"Lesbians who appear masculine get treated like boys. It's unfair."* These accounts by Zamo, Andile and Sibongile provide further insights into the gendered nature of school discipline. These narratives reveal a complex interplay between gender presentation, sexual orientation, and the corresponding disciplinary measures meted out by teachers. Through the queer theory lens, I show how these practices reinforce heteronormative and gender normative frameworks within the school environment. For example, Zamo's statement suggests that femininity in boys is perceived as less threatening and more acceptable within the school context. This results in lighter punishments for boys who present in a feminine manner. Queer theory is useful for understanding this as a form of

conditional acceptance, where deviation from traditional masculinity is tolerated only when it aligns with stereotypes of femininity. Likewise, Sibongile's remark highlights how masculinity in girls, particularly those who identify as lesbian, is perceived as a challenge to gender norms. This leads to harsher disciplinary measures. This reflects societal expectations that associate masculinity with strength and toughness, justifying more severe punishments for those who exhibit these traits. The differential treatment based on gender presentation serves to reinforce rigid gender norms within the school environment. By rewarding conformity to traditional femininity with lighter punishments and punishing deviations from these norms with harsher measures, the school system perpetuates a binary understanding of gender. Queer theory critiques this binary, advocating for a more fluid and inclusive understanding of gender and sexuality. The conditional acceptance of feminine boys and the marginalisation of masculine girls reflect broader societal attitudes towards gender and sexuality. This creates a hierarchy of acceptability, where certain expressions of gender and sexuality are more acceptable than others. This hierarchy marginalises those who do not conform, further entrenching inequalities within the educational system.

The data highlights discrepancies in how disciplinary measures are applied to queer learners. Those perceived as conforming to normative gender roles often face less severe punishment, while those perceived as deviant encounters harsher treatment. This mirrors broader findings in international literature (Bellinger et al., 2016), illustrating how schools reinforce normative gender expectations through disciplinary practices (Skiba, 2016). The conflict theory's framework of power dynamics in educational settings aptly explains how disciplinary actions police gender identities and sexual orientations (Tittle, 2018). The findings from this study affirm these theoretical perspectives, emphasising the need for schools to adopt inclusive disciplinary policies that mitigate biases against queer learners.

5.6 Discussion and Theorisation of the Findings

The findings from this chapter on learners' experiences of school discipline at Qamatha Secondary School in Umlazi Township provide a profound critique of the mechanisms of power, control, and identity within educational settings. Using Foucault's concepts of discipline and punishment, Marx's conflict theory, and queer theory, the analysis reveals complex layers of institutional control, gender norms, and sexual identity struggles within the school environment.

Foucault's theory of discipline and punishment offers a useful lens for understanding the pervasive use of corporal punishment at Qamatha Secondary School. Despite its legal prohibition, corporal punishment remains a salient method of maintaining order and exerting authority. Foucault's idea of the *panopticon*—a system of surveillance and control where power is internalised by those being watched—resonates strongly with the findings. Teachers at Qamatha employ corporal punishment not just as a reactive measure to misbehaviour but as a proactive strategy to instil discipline and conformity. The learners, aware of the omnipresent threat of punishment, often self-regulate their behaviour, thus perpetuating the cycle of control and subjugation. These dynamic highlights the deep-seated power imbalances within the school, where authority figures wield significant control over the bodies and actions of learners.

Conflict theory, particularly Karl Marx's perspective on education, further elucidates these power dynamics. Marx viewed education as a tool for perpetuating social stratification and maintaining the status quo of capitalist societies. At Qamatha, the use of corporal punishment and other disciplinary measures serves to reinforce existing social hierarchies. Learners from marginalised backgrounds—whether due to socio-economic status, race, or other factors—experience harsher disciplinary measures, reflecting broader societal inequalities. This disparity in treatment underscores how the education system at Qamatha functions to reproduce societal power structures, disadvantaging those already on the periphery. Teachers, acting as agents of the state, enforce these disciplinary practices, thus perpetuating the systemic inequities that conflict theory critiques.

Queer theory provides a critical framework for understanding the intersection of discipline, gender, and sexual identity at Qamatha. The findings reveal a school environment steeped in heteronormativity, where deviations from traditional gender norms and sexual identities are met with disciplinary action. Boys, for instance, face stringent disciplinary measures due to societal expectations of masculinity. They are often punished more severely for behaviours perceived as aggressive or non-compliant, reflecting a broader cultural narrative that equates masculinity with dominance and control. This expectation places boys in a double bind—encouraged to exhibit masculine traits yet penalised for behaviours that align with these traits within the school context.

Girls, on the other hand, navigate a disciplinary landscape shaped by traditional notions of femininity. The findings indicate that girls are often disciplined for behaviours that challenge conventional feminine norms, such as assertiveness or deviation from expected socially constructed behavioural codes. This disciplinary focus on conformity to gender norms serves to regulate and control girls' bodies and behaviours, reinforcing a heteropatriarchal order within the school. Queer theory helps us understand these disciplinary practices as part of a broader societal effort to maintain gender binaries and suppress non-normative identities.

The intersection of discipline with sexual identities is particularly striking in the findings on homophobia and queerphobia. Learners who identify as queer or who exhibit non-normative gender behaviours face significant challenges within the school environment (Bellinger et al., 2016; Mittleman, 2018). They are often subjected to bullying and harassment from peers, with little recourse or support from school authorities (Francis, 2023; Mittleman, 2023). In some cases, disciplinary measures are used against these learners under the guise of maintaining order, further marginalising and stigmatising them. This reflects a broader societal attempt to regulate and control non-heteronormative identities, aligning with Foucault's concept of biopower—the regulation of populations through institutional practices.

The themes of sexuality, femininities, and school discipline reveal the intricate ways in which power operates through gender and sexual norms. Female learners, particularly those who do not conform to traditional gender expectations, face unique disciplinary challenges. The findings indicate that these learners are often disciplined not just for their behaviours but for their identities, suggesting a deeper level of control aimed at regulating who they are rather than what they do. This regulation of identity through discipline aligns with Foucault's notion of governmentality, where the state's power is exercised through the management and control of individual behaviours and identities.

The critical discussion of these findings underscores the pervasive influence of societal norms and power structures within the educational system at Qamatha Secondary School. The use of corporal punishment, despite its legal prohibition, highlights the enduring legacy of authoritarian disciplinary practices. These practices reflect broader societal power imbalances and serve to perpetuate existing social hierarchies. Learners from marginalised backgrounds, whether due to

socio-economic status, gender, or sexual identity, bear the brunt of these disciplinary measures, reinforcing their marginalised status.

The application of conflict theory to these findings reveals how the education system functions as a tool for maintaining social stratification. The unequal application of disciplinary measures based on learners' backgrounds and identities underscores the systemic nature of these inequalities. Teachers, acting as agents of institutional authority, play a crucial role in perpetuating these dynamics, often unconsciously reproducing the societal power structures that disadvantage certain groups of learners.

Queer theory provides a critical lens for examining the intersection of discipline with gender and sexual identity. The findings highlight the regulatory function of disciplinary practices in enforcing heteronormative and heteropatriarchal norms. Learners who deviate from traditional gender and sexual norms face significant challenges within the school environment, reflecting broader societal efforts to control and marginalise non-normative identities. The disciplinary measures used against these learners serve to reinforce traditional gender binaries and suppress non-heteronormative identities, aligning with Foucault's concept of biopower.

5.7 Chapter Conclusion

The findings from this chapter on learners' experiences of school discipline at Qamatha Secondary School provide a critical examination of the mechanisms of power, control, and identity within the educational setting. Using Foucault's concepts of discipline and punishment, conflict theory, and queer theory, the analysis reveals the complex layers of institutional control, gender norms, and sexual identity struggles that shape learners' experiences. The use of corporal punishment, the regulation of gender and sexual identities, and the reproduction of societal power structures through disciplinary practices highlight the pervasive influence of societal norms and power dynamics within the school environment. These findings underscore the need for a critical examination of disciplinary practices and their impact on marginalised learners, advocating for more equitable and inclusive approaches to school discipline.

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTIONS, CONTRIBUTIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

The study presented in this dissertation stems from my experiences as a high school teacher in a South African township for six years. I began teaching in 2018 within the Department of Basic Education in a High School located in the Umlazi District. Throughout my tenure, I observed with great concern how discipline was administered based on a learner's gender identity or sexual orientation. Teachers displayed ignorance and intolerance towards learners who openly identified as queer. The unfair treatment of boys who identified as gay, for instance, highlighted some of the injustices present in the school environment. On several occasions, teachers told these boys to "toughen up" or to "act like a man." Some teachers had a habit of administering harsher and more embarrassing forms of discipline against these learners. Consequently, many learners, after experiencing discipline that targeted their gender or sexual orientation, ended up leaving the school system and resorted to working low-wage jobs within the community.

The chapters of this dissertation have examined how gender and sexuality influence the administration of discipline in a South African township school. Specifically, the study engaged learners from a township secondary school to investigate school discipline in the context of their intersecting gender and sexual identities. The research aimed to understand how school discipline discriminates against learners based on these identities. To explore and understand how learners experience school discipline at the intersection of gender and sexuality, the study was guided by the following critical research questions:

3. How do learners in a South African township school experience discipline and punishment?
4. Do learners report inequalities in how discipline is meted out based on their diverse gender and sexual identities, and if so, in what form or shape do these discrepancies manifest?

This study was situated within the interpretivist paradigm, which seeks to understand a particular social issue within a specific context, with its core assumption being that reality is socially

constructed (Putnum & Banghart, 2017; Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). It employed a qualitative approach to gain deeper insights into participants' experiences and narratives (Brown et al., 2020; Hammer et al., 2012; Mitchell, 2011). Specifically, participatory drawings were used as the primary data-generating method. The use of drawings is resourceful when working with vulnerable populations, such as children, as it allows for the expression of experiences that differ from verbal communication (Ozden, 2009; Hammer et al., 2012; Alerby, 2015). This approach is also praised for its usefulness in prompting participants to explain relationships and processes, recall their experiences, and explain reasons for certain actions through self-produced illustrations (Mair & Kierans, 2007; Zweifela & Wezemaël, 2012; Tay-Lim & Lim, 2013). To provide a platform for participants to give deeper meaning to their drawings and to probe for collective perspectives, the study also used focus group discussions (FGDs). These group discussions are considered useful in revealing participants' collective attitudes, beliefs, and values about a particular topic (Mishra, 2016; Akyidiz & Ahmed, 2021; Yayah, 2021). In other words, to gain a deeper understanding of how discipline and punishment are administered at the intersection of gender and sexuality, the study employed FGDs to probe participants about their experiences of discipline.

To address the research questions posed in this study, I recruited 23 boys and girls who attended Qamatha Secondary School, located in a South African township. To generate data, I used participatory drawings as a visual method. Linked to the participatory drawings and to allow participants to narrate their experiences of discipline, I engaged them in focus group discussions. Data analysis was informed by John Fiske's (1992; 1994) visual data analysis and Braun and Clarke's (2012) thematic analysis.

The findings reveal significant discrepancies in how discipline is administered based on learners' gender and sexual identities. These discrepancies manifest in harsher punishments and more humiliating disciplinary practices targeted at queer learners, particularly boys who identify as gay. This form of discipline not only perpetuates gender and sexual inequalities but also contributes to the marginalisation and dropout rates of these learners. The study underscores the urgent need for a more inclusive and equitable approach to school discipline that recognises and respects the diverse identities of all learners.

6.2 Methodological Reflections

The study was founded on the understanding that gender and sexuality significantly influence the administration of discipline in South African township schools. Bhana (2012) posits that gender and sexuality are fundamental to how discipline is enacted and managed within the school environment. To explore this dynamic, the study reviewed literature indicating that schools globally are perceived as spaces where gender and sexualities are policed (Mittleman, 2018; Davies et al., 2019; Bhana & Mayeza, 2019; Bhana & Mayeza, 2020). In its pursuit to understand learners' experiences of discipline and punishment in school, the study employed focus group discussions (FGDs) and participatory drawings; both of which provided a conducive environment for engaging the participants in this study. These data collection methods were instrumental in gathering rich and contextual data. Participants shared their experiences of discipline at the nexus of gender and sexuality and highlighted how discrepancies in discipline manifest. Using a qualitative research approach enabled me to understand how learners make sense of their school's social ecologies, including everyday practices around discipline and punishment, and how they interpret and experience these practices. Drawings were particularly effective, as they allowed participants to share experiences of discipline that might have been difficult to express verbally. These drawings evoked reflections connected to individuals' accounts of discipline. Similarly, the FGDs offered participants an opportunity to draw from their complex personal experiences, perceptions, and attitudes regarding how discipline is administered at the nexus of gender and sexuality. These data collection methods facilitated the gathering of rich, complex, and relevant data for the research.

A small sample size of 23 participants was recruited to obtain data on how learners experience discipline at the intersection of gender and sexuality. This sample was also useful in obtaining narratives of how discipline discrepancies manifest. However, the findings from this study cannot be generalised to the entire population due to the limited number of participants. Consequently, the findings are not applicable to all 6,021 schools across the Kwa-Zulu Natal province (Cowling, 2024). The study aimed to explore how learners in a South African township school experience discipline at the nexus of gender and sexuality.

While the participatory drawings and FGDs provided in-depth data for analysis, there were limitations in the research. Data gathering was scheduled for the morning, which sometimes coincided with the assembly and the first teaching period. To compensate for these disturbances, data collection continued during break time, although this was challenging because participants needed a break to eat and refresh. Occasionally, discussions based on the drawing sessions were held during break time to mitigate these issues.

Despite these limitations, the study was able to provide valuable data on how learners experience discipline at the nexus of gender and sexuality, highlighting discrepancies in how discipline is administered. This research contributes to the body of knowledge on how learners experience discipline and punishment at the intersection of their gender identities and sexual orientation. The findings, contributions, and implications of the study are discussed in the following sections.

6.3 Reflecting on the Findings

A key finding from the analysis was that teachers at Qamatha Secondary School disregard the abolishment of corporal punishment and continue to rely on punitive disciplinary methods. The use of corporal punishment results in physical and emotional scars. The study revealed that learners at Qamatha Secondary School experienced harmful, violent, and pervasive discipline. Teachers used injurious tools such as *sjamboks*, tree branches, thick rulers, and pipes to discipline learners. The data showed that learners often sustained physical scarring on their hands and buttocks from these brutal beatings. This highlights how discipline is administered in South African township secondary schools, exposing disparities where discipline is physically and emotionally detrimental to learners.

The critical discussion of the key findings from this research offers an in-depth analysis of how learners in South African township schools experience discipline and punishment and whether they report inequalities based on their diverse gender and sexual identities. This examination is crucial in understanding the underlying mechanisms that shape these experiences and the broader societal implications they hold. The following two sub-sections discuss these key findings in relation to the research questions posed in the study.

6.3.1 Experiences of School Discipline and Punishment

Learners at Qamatha Secondary School in Umlazi Township encounter discipline and punishment as complex and multifaceted experiences that are deeply influenced by societal norms and expectations. The findings reveal that discipline is not merely a means of maintaining order but a tool for enforcing compliance and perpetuating power dynamics. Michel Foucault's concepts of discipline and punishment are particularly relevant here as they help illuminate the ways in which these practices regulate behaviour through the internalisation of authority.

Boys, for example, described their experiences with discipline as being characterised by harsher measures and stricter oversight. This reflects societal expectations that equate masculinity with assertiveness and non-compliance, leading to more severe punitive actions for behaviours deemed aggressive or defiant. These disciplinary practices serve to reinforce traditional masculine norms, creating a paradox where boys are expected to exhibit toughness yet are punished for behaviours that align with these expectations. This dynamic underscores the regulatory function of discipline in controlling male behaviour and maintaining societal norms.

Girls, on the other hand, report being disciplined for behaviours that deviate from traditional feminine roles. They described facing punitive measures for assertiveness, non-conformity in dress, and other actions that challenge expected gender norms. These disciplinary practices are aimed at regulating and controlling female students' bodies and behaviours, reinforcing a patriarchal order within the school. Girls' experiences highlight how the school environment perpetuates gender stereotypes and enforces conformity to traditional gender roles, illustrating the broader societal implications of these disciplinary measures.

Queer learners face unique challenges in their experiences with school discipline. These learners reported being subjected to both formal and informal disciplinary actions that aim to regulate their identities and behaviours. They described encounters with bullying and harassment from peers, as well as punitive measures from school authorities. These practices further marginalise and stigmatise queer learners, reflecting broader societal efforts to control and suppress non-heteronormative identities. The experiences of queer learners at Qamatha Secondary School

highlight the pervasive influence of heteronormative standards in shaping disciplinary practices and the regulation of gender and sexual identities.

6.3.2 Inequalities in the Administration of Discipline

The second research question examined whether learners report inequalities and discrepancies in how discipline is administered based on their diverse gender and sexual identities. The findings unequivocally indicate that such inequalities and discrepancies exist, manifesting in various forms that reflect broader societal power dynamics.

Boys from marginalised backgrounds reported facing disproportionately severe disciplinary measures compared to their peers. They described being subjected to stricter scrutiny and harsher punishments for behaviours perceived as aggressive or non-compliant. These findings suggest that disciplinary practices at Qamatha Secondary School reinforce existing social hierarchies, disadvantaging learners who do not conform to normative gender roles. This unequal application of discipline highlights how schools function as instruments of social control, perpetuating societal norms and power structures.

Girls also reported significant discrepancies in how discipline is administered. They described being punished for behaviours that challenge traditional feminine norms, such as assertiveness and non-conformity in dress. These disciplinary practices serve to regulate and control girls behaviours, perpetuating a heteropatriarchal order within the school. The unequal application of discipline based on gender underscores the regulatory function of disciplinary practices in enforcing traditional gender roles and maintaining societal power structures.

Queer learners reported experiencing substantial inequalities in the administration of discipline. They described facing both formal and informal punitive measures aimed at regulating their identities and behaviours. These learners reported encounters with bullying and harassment from teachers, as well as disciplinary actions that further marginalise and stigmatise them. The findings indicate that queer learners are often subjected to more severe punishments for behaviours that deviate from heteronormative standards, reflecting broader societal efforts to control and suppress non-normative identities. This unequal treatment highlights the pervasive influence of

heteronormative standards in shaping disciplinary practices and the regulation of gender and sexual identities.

The study's findings reveal a complex interplay between disciplinary practices and the regulation of gender and sexual identities within the school environment. The unequal application of discipline based on gender and sexual identities underscores the ways in which schools function as instruments of social control, perpetuating existing power structures and reinforcing societal norms. This dynamic is particularly evident in the experiences of marginalised learners, who face disproportionate disciplinary measures that reflect broader societal inequalities.

The findings from this study provide a critical examination of how learners in a South African township school experience discipline and punishment and report inequalities based on their diverse gender and sexual identities. The study reveals significant disparities in the administration of discipline, highlighting the regulatory function of disciplinary practices in enforcing societal norms and maintaining power structures. By applying theoretical frameworks such as Foucault's concepts of discipline and punishment, Marx's conflict theory, and queer theory, the study illuminates the ways in which school discipline operates as a mechanism of social control, perpetuating existing inequalities and marginalising non-normative identities. These findings underscore the need for a critical re-evaluation of disciplinary practices within educational institutions, advocating for more equitable and inclusive approaches to school discipline that recognise and address the diverse experiences of all learners.

6.4 Study Contributions

This study offers significant scholarly and methodological contributions, particularly in understanding the intersection of gender, sexuality, and disciplinary practices in South African township schools. By using participatory drawings and focus group discussions, the research not only provided rich, contextual data but also highlighted the lived experiences of marginalised learners. The use of these methods enabled a deeper exploration of how disciplinary practices are experienced and perceived by learners, particularly those who are boys, queer and/or gender non-conforming.

In terms of scholarly contributions, the study advances the discourse on how gender and sexuality shape disciplinary practices in educational settings. By revealing the differential treatment based on perceived gender norms and sexual orientation, the research contributes to the understanding of how schools enforce normative constructs of heterosexuality and masculinity, often to the detriment of queer learners and those who do not conform to traditional gender roles.

Moreover, the study exposes the persistence of corporal punishment despite its legal abolishment. Within this context, corporal punishment remains a prevalent and problematic disciplinary method in township schools. The study documents the physical and emotional harm caused by these practices, underscoring the need for stringent enforcement of anti-corporal punishment policies and the development of alternative disciplinary strategies that promote positive behavioural outcomes without causing harm.

Likewise, the study contributes towards intersectionality in educational research by focusing on the nexus of gender, sexuality, and discipline. The study, thus, contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the complexities within school environments. It underscores the importance of considering multiple identities and social categories in educational research and policy-making to address the unique challenges faced by marginalized groups.

Methodologically, the study contributes toward innovative Use of Participatory Visual Methodologies (PVM). The employment of PVM, particularly through participatory drawings, provided a novel way to capture the experiences of learners. This approach allowed participants to express their experiences and perceptions in a non-verbal, creative manner, facilitating a deeper understanding of their realities that might not have been possible through traditional verbal methods alone. Further, the study enhances participatory research through the use of FGDs in conjunction with drawings. This created a participatory research environment where learners could collectively share and reflect on their experiences. This methodological combination proved effective in eliciting rich, collective insights into the disciplinary practices at the school, demonstrating the value of participatory approaches in educational research.

Based on the findings of this study, a comprehensive framework for understanding and addressing the intersection of gender, sexuality, and disciplinary practices in South African township schools

is proposed in this dissertation. This framework integrates insights from the critical theories with practical strategies for policy and practice reform. The proposed framework comprises three key components: 1) Recognition and Sensitisation; 2) Policy and Practice Reform; and, 3) Support and Empowerment. Figure 6.1 presents the framework for understanding and addressing the intersection of gender, sexuality and disciplinary practices in South African township schools.

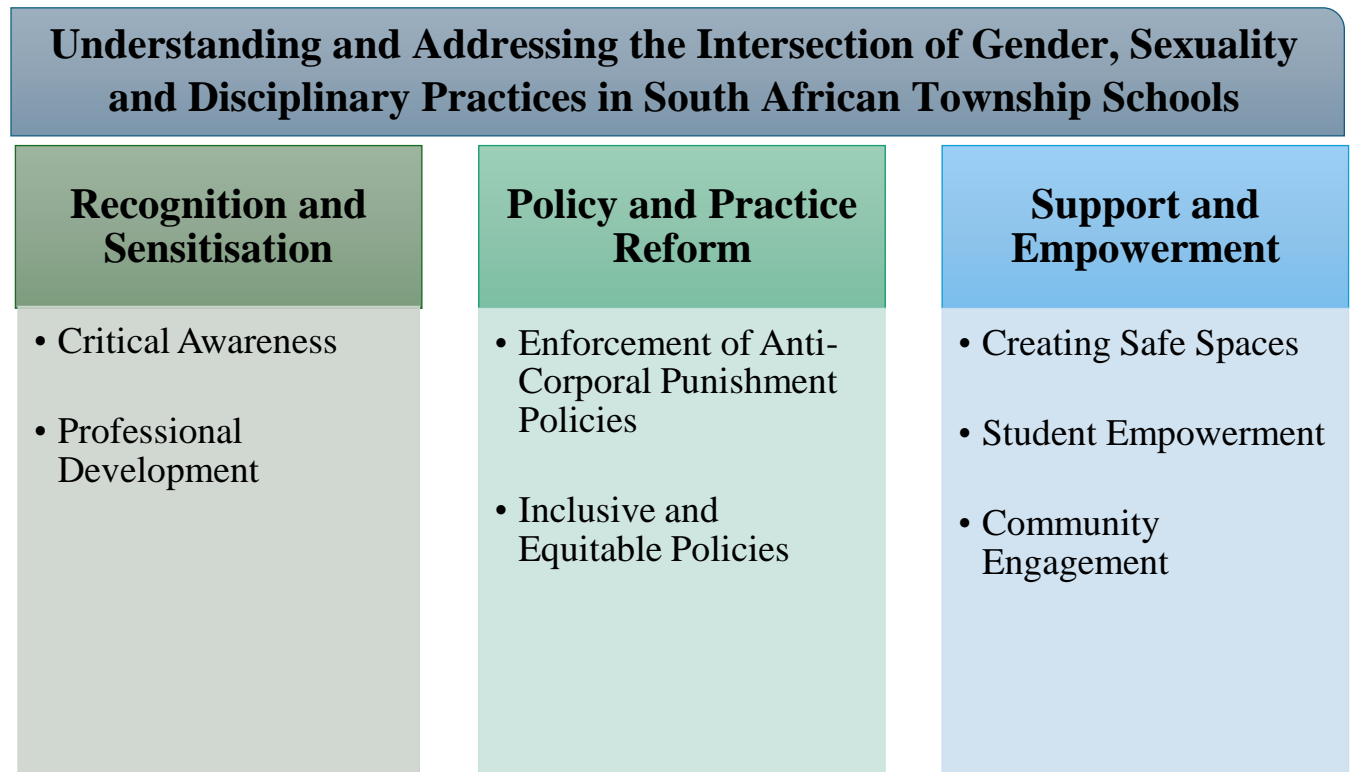


Figure 6.1: Framework for understanding and addressing the intersection of gender, sexuality and disciplinary practices in South African township schools

First, in the spirit of creating critical awareness, the framework proposes that teachers and whole school administrators need to recognise how intersecting identities (i.e., gender, sexuality, race, socioeconomic status, etc) influence learners experiences and disciplinary practices. Thus, efforts should be made to deconstruct heteronormative and gender-normative biases that underpin disciplinary practices in schools. Indeed, the framework points to a need for teacher and whole school professional development. This entails developing and implementing comprehensive training programmes for teachers and other staff. These training programmes should focus on inclusive education, gender sensitivity and queer-related sociocultural issues. Moreover, as the

framework suggests, teachers must be encouraged to engage in reflective practices to examine their bases and the impact of their disciplinary methods on different learners.

Second, the framework calls for a reform of policies and practices guiding schools. This requires the enforcement of anti-corporal punishment policies that require strict compliance against the corporal punishment of learners. Such policies with work to ensure strict adherence to laws prohibiting corporal punishment, with regular monitoring and accountability measure in place. Likewise, policies should guide and promote positive disciplinary practices that focus on restorative justice, conflict resolution, and behavioural support. The framework further calls for the development and enforcement of inclusive and equitable policies that protect learners from gender-based and sexual orientation-related discriminations. Moreover, there is a need for a more closely linked and integrated comprehensive sexuality education that includes discussions on gender diversity and queer-related issues; fostering an inclusive school culture.

Finally, the framework argues for support and empowerment interventions. This entails, first, creating safe spaces, such as the establishment of support groups, where marginalised learners can share their experiences and receive psychosocial support. Within this context, the framework calls for the provision of accessible counselling services that are sensitive to the needs of queer learners and those facing gender-based discrimination. Likewise, there is a need for intentional student empowerment interventions that are participatory. These participatory approaches should involve learners in the development and implementation of school policies and disciplinary practices; ensuring that their voices are heard and respected. These approaches should also encourage marginalised learners to take on leadership roles within the school to promote diversity and inclusion. Moreover, the framework calls for community engagement including engaging parents/caregivers in conversations about gender, sexuality, and inclusive disciplinary practices to foster a supportive home and school environment. It also argues for collaborations with local organisations and queer advocacy groups to provide resources and support for learners and educators.

This framework aims to address the harmful and discriminatory disciplinary practices in South African township schools by promoting recognition and sensitisation, policy and practice reform, and support and empowerment for learners. By integrating critical awareness, inclusive policies,

and participatory approaches, this framework seeks to create a more equitable and supportive educational environment for all learners, particularly those marginalised because of their gender identities and sexual orientations.

6.5 Implications of the Study

The study's findings have several implications for policy and practice. First, there is a pressing need for policy reforms that enforce the prohibition of corporal punishment and promote alternative disciplinary methods. Policies should be developed and implemented to protect all learners, especially those who are queer or gender non-conforming, from discrimination and violence. Second, teachers need comprehensive training on inclusive and equitable disciplinary practices that respect the diverse identities of learners. Professional development programmes should focus on sensitising teachers to the impacts of gender and sexuality on learners' experiences and the importance of fostering a supportive and inclusive school environments. Third, schools should establish support systems for marginalised learners, including counselling services and safe spaces where they can express their concerns and experiences without fear of retribution or discrimination.

Moreover, the findings of this study are aligned with critical theories such as conflict theory, which emphasises the need for educational practices that promote critical consciousness and challenge oppressive structures. This study's revelations about discriminatory disciplinary practices resonate with calls for education that liberates rather than oppresses learners (Msibi, 2009; 2012). By exposing the punitive and discriminatory practices at Qamatha Secondary School, the study advocates for educational reforms that are inclusive, equitable, and cognisant of the diverse identities of learners. The queer theory applied in this study further supports the critical framework by challenging the heteronormative assumptions and practices within educational settings. It highlights how non-heteronormative identities are marginalised and oppressed through institutional practices. The study's findings on the treatment of queer learners at Qamatha Secondary School underscore the necessity of applying queer theory to understand and dismantle the systemic biases and discriminatory practices within schools.

This study provides a critical and methodological contribution to the understanding of school discipline within the nexus of gender and sexuality. By aligning with critical frameworks such as conflict theory and queer theory, the study advocates for educational reforms that promote justice, equity, and inclusivity in South African township schools.

6.6 Conclusion

I embarked on this research study, drawing from my experience as a high school teacher for six years. At the beginning of my teaching career, I was intrigued by how discipline was meted out based on a learner's gender identity or/and sexual orientation. For example, boys would receive severe beatings because of their innate male toughness while queer-identifying learners received homophobic insults and vicious hate from teachers. On several occasions, teachers would use homophobic slurs to insult queer learners during discipline. Even though both girls and boys received punishment for school-based transgressions, gender played an important role in terms of the form and length of discipline and punishment they experienced.

As the years progressed, I closely observed several discrepancies in how discipline was meted out to learners intersecting gender and sexual orientations. Whenever I engaged with learners to question them about their experiences of discipline, they would say that 'we are used to it now'. Such responses prompted me to delve deeper into understanding how gender and sexuality play a role in learners experiences of discipline and punishment. This study was born out of a desire to comprehend how learners in South African township schools experience discipline at the nexus of gender and sexuality.

As an educator, I began reflecting on how I discipline learners and how it affects their overall physical and mental well-being. Through informal conversations with learners, I developed an interest in how gender and sexuality factor into the administration of discipline in South African township schools. My research led me to uncover how discipline and punishment accentuate gendered inequalities and queerphobia within the schooling system.

In concluding this dissertation, the experiences and perceptions shared by participants summarised feelings of anger, resentment, and frustration. Their narratives provide in-depth data on how

discipline is meted out at the nexus of gender and sexuality. Analysing these narratives revealed several imperative insights:

1. Discipline practices in township schools are often pervasive and harmful, and they reproduce gendered inequalities.
2. Boys and girls are subjected to corporal punishment. However, this corporal punishment is experienced in gendered and discriminatory ways.
3. Queer learners often experience discrimination, marginalisation, lack of protection, and are often at the receiving end of both physical and psychological victimisation in the school.

The findings in this study suggest the urgent need for schools to redefine their discipline strategies, focusing on the protection of learners physical and psychological well-being. Discipline practices in school necessitate the effective control and maintenance of a conducive teaching and learning environment. However, learners should not be subjected to any form of discrimination and violence in schools. Therefore, the findings suggest an urgent need for policy interventions involving stakeholders such as the Department of Basic Education. DBE should ensure that school policies and legislation are implemented to ensure the protection of learners regardless of their diverse gender identity or sexual orientation.

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APPENDIX A

LETTER OF ETHICAL APPROVAL



07 August 2023

Melicia Bongekile Khasa (214515782)
School Of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear MB Khasa,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00005817/2023

Project title: Discipline and punishment at the nexus of gender and sexualities, the voices of learners from a South African township secondary school

Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 07 July 2023 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 07 August 2024.

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.

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

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dípane Hialele (Chair)

/dd

APPENDIX B

EXAMPLE OF CONSENT FORM GIVEN TO PARTICIPANTS

INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A

RESEARCH

Letter of Information

Research title: Discipline and punishment at the nexus of gender and sexualities, the voices of learners from a South African township secondary School.

Researchers' details:

Names: Melicia Bongekile Khasa

Email: 214515782@stu.ukzn.ac.za

Contact: [REDACTED]

Institution: UKZN, School of Education

Qualification: Master of Education

Research supervisor:

Name: Dr N.Ngidi

Email: NgidiN10@ukzn.ac.za

Contact: [REDACTED]

Address: University of KwaZulu Natal

Durban

4041

This letter seeks to help you make an informed decision regarding your participation in this research study. This letter will explain what the study is about, possible risks and benefits and your rights as a research participant. If you do not understand something in this letter, you may contact the researcher to enquire, prior to consenting to the study. If you choose to participate, you will be required to sign a consent form.

The purpose of this research is to find out how discipline and punishment are experienced using the perspectives of learners in a secondary school from Umlazi township. The study is expected to enroll 20 learners from the secondary school.

The study will involve face-to-face interviews for a duration of 45 minutes per interview. It will also involve a focus group discussion with 5- 6 participants in each group for a duration of an hour. This study has no risks in the future and has no direct benefits to the participants. I however hope that it will raise relevant questions for the South African curriculum developers and provide aid to future research like this study. Participants may have the option to have their interview hour divided into different time frames (i.e. divide the hour into three 20 minutes).

Participation in this research is voluntary as a participant you may decide to withdraw participation at any point of the study. No penalty or loss of treatment will incur if you withdraw. Participants may be removed from the study if they show no interest in the study and/or fail to answer questions or verbally interact with the researcher.

There are no costs that might be incurred to the participants for this study. There will be no benefits for participation. I hope your perspectives will help draw the study's conclusion.

Pictures, audio recordings, videos will be taken during this research project. These will serve as evidence of the study and some of the digitally collected data will be used for data – collection purposes. The data will be password protected and no one will have access to it. Participants have the right to withdraw from the study if they feel uncomfortable to participate.

Code names (anonymous names) will be assigned to participants to keep their identities anonymous. Real names will not appear in any of the data collected during this study.

Confidentiality will be preserved by keeping notes, audio recordings, videos, pictures, interview transcripts and any other identifying participant information safe in a password protected file in the personal documents of the researcher. Data collected from the participants will be used to address the research question mentioned above.

CONSENT

ASSENT DOCUMENT

Research title: Discipline and punishment at the nexus of gender and sexualities, the voices of learners from a South African township secondary School.

Date:

Greetings: Learner

Researcher's details:

Names: Melicia Bongekile Khasa

Email: 214515782@stu.ukzn.ac.za

Contact: [REDACTED]

Institution: UKZN, School of Education

Qualification: Master of Education

Research supervisor:

Name: Dr N. Ngidi

Email: NgidiN10@ukzn.ac.za

Contact: [REDACTED]

Address: University of KwaZulu Natal

Durban

4041

Do you understand this research study and are willing to take part in it? YES/ NO

Has the researcher answered all your questions? YES/ NO

Do you understand that you can stop being in this research at any time? YES/ NO

Additional consent, where applicable

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview / focus group discussion YES / NO

Video-record my interview / focus group discussion YES / NO

Use of my photographs for research purposes YES / NO

CONSENT

I (Name of parent _____) have been informed about the study entitled Discipline and punishment at the nexus of gender and sexualities: the voices of learners from a South African Township Secondary School by Melicia Bongekile Khasa.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study entitled Discipline and punishment at the nexus of gender and sexualities: the voices of learners from a South African Township Secondary School.

I declare that my child's participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that he or she may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that he or she is entitled to.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study, I understand that I may contact the researcher Melicia Bongekile Khasa on [REDACTED] 214515782@stu.ukzn.ac.za.

Additional consent, where applicable

I hereby provide consent to my child's participation in:

Audio-record my child's interview / focus group discussion YES / NO

Video-record my child's interview / focus group discussion YES / NO

Use of my child's photographs for research purposes YES / NO

Signature of Parent Date

Signature of Witness Date

APPENDIX C GATEKEEPER'S INFORMATION LETTER

██████████
Road

██████████
Durban

4001

Date: 24 May 2023

To: The principal
2369 Pistol Mpanza Avenue
KwaMakhutha
Amanzimtoti
4126

For Attention: Mr MJ Ngidi

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT KWAMAKHUTHA COMPREHENSIVE HIGH SCHOOL.

Dear Mr Ngidi

I am writing this letter to request permission to conduct my research study at the school. The topic of the research is **Discipline and Punishment at the Nexus of Gender and Sexualities: The Voices of Learners from a South African Township Secondary School**. The study will be conducted solely for study purposes as I am a student at the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN) doing my master's degree in education.

If my request for permission is granted, I will conduct focus group discussions and participatory drawing with a maximum of 23 learners. Upon completion of the study, I undertake to provide the college with a bound copy of the full research report.

Yours Faithfully

Ms MB Khasa

██████████
██████████

APPENDIX D GATEKEEPER'S APPROVAL LETTER



ADDRESS: Kwamakhutha Comprehensive High School
P.O Box 23489
ISIPINGO
4110
TELEPHONE: (031)9051924, Fax: (031) 9051913
ENQUIRIES: M.J. NGIDI (Principal)
CONTACT DETAILS: 072 350 6177
PERSONAL EMAIL: jmnngidi@yahoo.com
DATE: 01 JUNE 2023

Re: CONFIRMATION OF ACCEPTING M.B KHASA FOR A RESEARCH

This serves to confirm that Ms MB Khasa, student no: 214515782 has been granted permission to conduct research at KwaMakhutha comprehensive high school from the 1st of June 2023 to the 30th of November 2023.

Research title is: Discipline and Punishment at the Nexus of Gender and Sexualities: The Voices of Learners from a South African Township Secondary School.

Thank you.

Yours Faithfully

[Redacted Signature]

M.J Ngidi

(Principal)

PROVINCE OF KWAZULU NATAL
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
KWAMAKHUTHA COMPREHENSIVE
HIGH SCHOOL

2023-06-01

P.O. Box 23489, ISIPINGO, 4110
TEL: 031 905 1924 FAX: 031 905 1913
EMAIL: jmnngidi@yahoo.com
PRINCIPAL: [Redacted]



Private Bag X9137, PIETERMARITZBURG, 3200
Anton Lembede Building, 247 Burger Street, Pietermaritzburg, 3201
Tel: 033 392 1051

Email: Phindile.duma@kzndoe.gov.za

Enquiries: Mrs B.T. Ntuli

Ref.:2/4/8/7484

Ms Melicia Bongekile Khasa

AMANZIMTOTI
4126

Dear Ms Khasa

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"DISCIPLINE AND PUNISHMENT AT THE NEXUS OF GENDER AND SEXUALITIES: THE VOICES OF LEARNERS FROM A SOUTH AFRICAN TOWNSHIP SECONDARY SCHOOL."**, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from **5TH June 2023 to 31ST December 2025**.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Mrs Buyi Ntuli at the contact numbers above.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.


Mr G N Ngcobo
Head of Department: Education
Date: 05TH June 2023

APPENDIX E FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

Interview and focus group discussion (FGD) schedule

Below is a table of participants schedule which has two parts (interview and FGD). Time is not assigned as it will depend on when during the day the participants are available for the interview session. For FGD, participants will meet during non – teaching and learning time (i.e break / lunch) as the sessions requires the presence of participants at the same time.

Interview schedule

Both the interviews and FGD will be conducted in one school. The interview schedule below is for 5 participants; however, it is common for all 20 participants.

Participant name	Interview
Participant 1	45 minutes
Participant 2	45 minutes
Participant 3	45 minutes
Participant 4	45 minutes
Participant 5	45 minutes

FGD schedule

The learners will be in groups, each group will have between four to six participants.

Group number	FGD
Group 1	1 hour
Group 2	1 hour
Group 3	1 hour
Group 4	1 hour
Group 5	1 hour

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Name: Melicia Bongekile Khasa

Address: [REDACTED]

Amanzimtoti

4126

Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: 214515782@stu.ukzn.ac.za

RESEARCH SUPERVISOR

Name: Dr N Ngidi

Address: University of KwaZulu Natal

Durban

4041

Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: NgidiN10@ukzn.ac.za

QUESTIONS FOR LEARNERS FOCUS GROUPS AND PARTICIPATORY DRAWINGS

Discipline and Punishment at the Nexus of Gender and Sexualities: The Voices of Learners from a South African Township Secondary School

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For learners

1. Describe how you experience discipline in your school?
2. Have you noticed any differences in how you experience discipline in comparison to your peers who identify as male, female, or queer?
3. How is the discipline experienced by your male, female and peers who identify as queer different?
4. If you were a teacher for a day, describe the changes you would enforce in how discipline is meted out, and explain why.
5. Describe the significance of maintaining discipline in schools?

APPENDIX F TURNITIN REPORT

Melicia's Dissertation

ORIGINALITY REPORT

9% SIMILARITY INDEX	10% INTERNET SOURCES	1% PUBLICATIONS	5% STUDENT PAPERS
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PRIMARY SOURCES

1	researchspace.ukzn.ac.za Internet Source	4%
2	Submitted to University of KwaZulu-Natal Student Paper	3%
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