

**LESBIAN STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF  
CHALLENGES FACED AT A SOUTH AFRICAN  
UNIVERSITY**

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## DECLARATION

I, Tarah Imelda Leonard (student no. 218056509), declare that

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2. This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
3. This dissertation does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
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## **ABSTRACT**

Despite South Africa having one of the most progressive legal systems in the world, especially when it comes to the rights of sexual minorities, discrimination and violence against homosexual individuals remains a challenge. It appears that the social issues and prejudices present across South African society also permeate its tertiary education institutions, as South African universities tend to subscribe to the same homophobic ideologies present in South African society. Although the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) aims to provide a safe and protective environment for its student population, there are still numerous challenges for its homosexual student population on campus.

This study aimed to explore the experiences of six lesbian students studying at the UKZN, Pietermaritzburg campus. Using Pryor and Reeder's (2011) theoretical framework that delineates four manifestations of stigma (public stigma, self-stigma, stigma by association and structural stigma), this study sought to describe how lesbian students experience challenges due to their sexual orientation. Using a qualitative research design, a focus group was conducted with six participants who self-identified as lesbian. The research findings revealed that lesbian students face a variety of challenges on the UKZN campus, and that significant levels of homophobia were experienced by the participants. Homophobia on campus was experienced by the participants in the form of verbal abuse, physical and sexual violence, psychological harm, physical and sexual threat, and social exclusion. Campus social gatherings and events were positioned as being the main sites of concern for targeting homosexual students. University staff members were constructed as perpetuating homophobia on campus. Being identified as lesbian on campus produced high levels of stress for all participants. More research is recommended in order to more fully understand the challenges that student minority groups, such as the LGBT community, face on campus.

**Key words:** Lesbian students, higher education, South Africa, homophobia, discrimination, stigma

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
APA	American Psychological Association
CHASU	Campus HIV/AIDS Support Unit
DSM	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
LGB	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender
LNH	Love Not Hate
PEPUDA	Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act
RMS	Risk Management Services
SASAS	South African Social Attitudes Survey
SRC	Student Representative Council
TARSC	Training and Research Support Centre
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal

# Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

Almost ten years ago the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) released its Transformation Charter. This was developed and adopted to reflect South Africa's constitution with the purpose of shifting the university's identity and culture in order to embrace progressive and non-discriminatory views in relation to race, religion, gender or sexuality. The Transformation Charter declares that the university will protect the human rights of all its students, including homosexual students, and prohibits any form of discrimination, including discrimination based on sexual orientation (University of KwaZulu-Natal [UKZN], 2012). The university has an obligation and responsibility to ensure the safety of all its students on campus. This descriptive study seeks to describe lesbian students' experiences on campus almost ten years after the Transformation Charter was first implemented at UKZN.

UKZN is one of the largest residential universities in South Africa with over 45 000 students and 4 400 staff members (UKZN, 2017). The university prides itself on being a transformative university that supports and encourages diversity among its staff and students. UKZN has implemented standard services that most universities require in order to protect its students, as well as assist it in fulfilling its obligations, such as the Student Representative Council (SRC), the Risk Management Services (RMS) and the Student Support Services. The SRC is a group of student leaders who are responsible for representing the study body in interactions with the university (<http://src.ukzn.ac.za>). The RMS is responsible for the safety and security of all students, staff and visitors on campus (<http://rms.ukzn.ac.za>). Student Support Services provide a variety of services, such as counselling services, which aim to address and support students' personal and emotional development (<https://aessupport.ukzn.ac.za>). Although UKZN has implemented the standard services to assist its students, it is unclear whether there have been specific services for or interventions designed to assist homosexual students. While UKZN aims to provide a safe and protective environment for its student population, there is evidence that their homosexual students face discriminatory attitudes and behaviour on campus (Kleinhans, 2018; Mutambara, 2015). In 2017 UKZN acknowledged the increase in the number of cases of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) occurring on campus, particularly in student residences. The university adopted a GBV policy in

October 2017 as well as established a GBV committee and task team in September 2018 to monitor and address the issue. This followed after the announcement that sexual violence, homophobic assaults and bullying of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) students were common. This was thought to be the result of a profound lack of awareness on issues relating to sexual orientation, sexual harassment and GBV (Shabangu, n.d.). While the university has a Transformation Charter and has openly committed to protecting its LGBT students, students continue to report homophobic abuse, threats and violence on campus (Kleinhans, 2018; Mutambara, 2015). Hence, this research seeks to further understand lesbian students' experiences at UKZN.

## **1.2 Definition of terms**

According to the American Psychological Association (American Psychological Association [APA], n.d.), the term sexual orientation is used to describe a person's enduring pattern of sexual, emotional and/or romantic attractions. This may include attraction to the opposite sex (heterosexual, also referred to as 'straight'), same-sex attraction (homosexual), attraction to both men and women (bisexual), attraction to all sexes (pansexual), or no attraction to any sex (asexual). A person's sexual orientation also refers to a sense of personal and social identity based on those attractions (APA, n.d.). Furthermore, common practice differentiates between homosexual men and women, where homosexual men are often referred to as gay men and homosexual women are often referred to as lesbians (Mashaba, 2005).

The acronym 'LGBTQIA+' encompasses the many different sexual and gender identities, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transvestite, transsexual and transgender, queers, intersex, asexual, and other. However, for the scope of this dissertation the initials 'LGBT' will be used as this is often the most common umbrella term used to refer to the 'LGBTQIA+' community as a whole (LGBTQIA Resource Center, 2020). The acronym 'LGBT' stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. The 'LGB' in the acronym refers to sexual orientation, however the 'T' stands for transgender or gender non-conforming (APA, n.d.). Transgender is an umbrella term which refers to people whose gender identity or gender expression is different to the sex that they were assigned at birth. A person's internal sense of being male, female or other is referred to as gender identity.

Gender expression refers to the way a person conveys their gender identity to others, such as through behaviour, mannerisms, voice or body characteristics, dress and hairstyles (Castro-Peraza et al., 2019; Newhouse, 2013). However, a deeper engagement with transgender concerns is outside the scope of this study (for more information, see Castro-Peraza et al., 2019; Newhouse, 2013), as this study focused on self-identified lesbians and their experiences at UKZN.

Weinberg (1972, cited in Berkman & Zinberg, 1997, p. 320), who coined the term ‘homophobia’, defined it as the “dread of being in close quarters with homosexuals”. The term is now more broadly defined as “any belief system which supports negative myths and stereotypes about homosexual people” and refers to the irrational fear, intolerance, anger, discomfort, hatred, or disgust towards homosexuality (Berkman & Zinberg, 1997, p. 320). It also describes the rejection of, and hostility towards, homosexuality, which is often combined with the refusal to accept homosexuals (Mashaba, 2005). Individuals who practice homophobia are referred to as homophobic, which can often manifest as discrimination and maltreatment of homosexuals. Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is any act of violence, such as psychological, sexual and/or physical harm, targeted toward a person due to that person’s gender. GBV is embedded in gender inequality, and can be experienced by both men and women, however most victims are reported to be women (Simister, 2012). GBV is often used interchangeably with the term violence against women, and is also a form of discrimination and violation of human rights (Mpani & Nsibande, 2015). Pilane (2021) argues that homophobic violence is essentially a form of GBV too, for example, corrective rape practices are forms of violence against lesbian women (i.e. where men rape women with the intention of ‘curing’ their sexual identities).

### **1.3 The phenomenon of homosexuality**

In 1952, homosexuality was classified in the ‘Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders’ (DSM-I) as a mental illness. The DSM is an authoritative guide in the form of a handbook that assists in the diagnosis of mental disorders and is used by health care professionals around the world. However, due to the lack of scientific evidence in pathologizing homosexuality, it was removed from the DSM-III in 1973. Since then, homosexuality is more commonly viewed as a normal variant of human sexuality (APA, n.d.). Throughout modern history there have been a

number of etiological theories of homosexuality which generally fall into three broad categories: theories of pathology; theories of immaturity and theories of normal variation (Drescher, 2008). For example, theories of pathology, including most psychoanalytic approaches, consider homosexuality to be a disease or deviation from healthy living, and regard homosexuality as a condition or atypical behaviour that deviates from the 'norm'. Hence, homosexuality is viewed as a defect or 'bad'. Theories of immaturity view features of homosexuality that emerge at a young age as typical stages or normal development toward adult heterosexuality, accordingly homosexuality is regarded as a phase that will be outgrown. However, if adult homosexuality persists it is understood as stunted growth. Thus, homosexuality is viewed as mildly 'bad'. Theories of normal variation view homosexuality as natural. These theories maintain that not everyone is born the same and people who are 'born gay' are naturally different to others, similar to those who are born left-handed. Consequently, homosexuality is viewed as neither 'good' nor 'bad' (Drescher, 2008).

One of the first scientific theories regarding sexuality, particularly focusing on homosexuality, was formulated by Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1864, cited in Kennedy, 1997), who is considered to be one of the pioneers of sexology as well as one of the major influencers in the modern gay rights movement. During Ulrichs (1864, cited in Kennedy, 1997) time, the term 'homosexuality' did not exist, however he argued that sexual attraction between members of the same sex was innate. Therefore, those who experienced same-sex attraction should be treated in the same way as others, i.e. should be treated equally and fairly (Drescher, 2008; Kennedy, 1997). Homosexuality is a complex phenomenon that has been studied across numerous disciplines which has produced various theories, these studies are outside the scope of this research dissertation (for more information, see Drescher, 2008; Giles, 2015; Kennedy, 1997). However, what is of interest in this study is the psychological, emotional and/or behavioural responses that are experienced by individuals when identifying as homosexual. This study is interested in the experiences of self-identified lesbian students at UKZN.

#### **1.4 The phenomenon of homosexuality in South Africa**

In South Africa, some researchers have observed that a relatively common belief regarding same-sex relations is that it is ‘not African’, but instead is seen as a Western construct (Nyeck, Shepherd, Sehoole, Ngcobozi & Conron, 2019; Prado-Castro & Graham, 2017). However, there is evidence that homosexuality, among men and women, existed during pre-colonial times within indigenous societies and was accepted on a situational basis (Nyeck et al., 2019; Pushparagavan, 2014). For example, the taking of ‘boy-wives’, who were known as ‘hlobongo’, has historically been practiced in Zulu culture (Mashabane, 2018). In polygamous family arrangements lesbian acts also occurred, however these were rarely documented (Mashabane, 2018; Pushparagavan, 2014). There is also evidence that modern society in South Africa holds a belief that homosexuality is an illness that can be ‘cured’ or ‘corrected’ (De Ru, 2013; Mashabane, 2018). A reason may be that some of South African society’s foundational beliefs are taken from the Christian church, these inform its social norms and values (De Ru, 2013).

Despite South Africa having one of the most progressive legal systems in the world, especially when it comes to the rights of sexual minorities, South African research indicates that society’s attitudes and social norms are not always aligned with its progressive legislation (Kleinhans, 2018; Mahomed & Trangoš, 2016; Mwaba, 2009; Nyeck et al., 2019). Instead, many South Africans still subscribe to the ideologies of monogamy and heterosexuality. Furthermore, these ideologies and attitudes are reported to permeate tertiary education structures, where homosexual students are at risk of stigmatisation or violence (Arndt & De Bruin, 2006; Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2017; Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2017; Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017). According to Kleinhans (2018, p. 2), South African universities, such as UKZN, are “reflections of the larger South African society and they are struggling with the same social issues and prejudices present outside the campus environment”. Research has shown that homophobia, as well as stigma and violence, is common in institutions of higher education and can be experienced frequently and in various locations on campus, including student residences, classrooms, or cafeterias (Arndt & De Bruin, 2006; Ellis, 2009; Kleinhans, 2018; Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2017; Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2017; Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017; Ncanana & Ige, 2014). Prejudiced views and/or behaviours can come from various individuals on campus such as heterosexual students, university employees and academic staff (Ellis, 2009; Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2017). It is against this background that

this study aimed to explore whether lesbian students at UKZN describe challenges similarly to those in other research settings. This study sought to explore whether these challenges were experienced frequently, where students felt at risk on campus and which groups or individuals were viewed by participants as perpetuating homophobic discrimination.

### **1.5 Study population**

Estimating the number of lesbian women in South Africa, and specifically on university campuses, is challenging. Many lesbian women are not open about their sexual orientation due to fear of discrimination (Love Not Hate Campaign, 2016; Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2017). However, attempts have been made to quantify the number of individuals who identify themselves as LGBT in South Africa, even if these may be underestimates. Findings from the 2015 ‘South African Social Attitudes Survey’ (SASAS), a nationwide survey (representing rural and urban areas), of those aged 16 years and older, indicate that approximately half a million South Africans identify themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or ‘other’, rather than ‘straight’ or heterosexual, 1.4 percent of the total population (Sutherland, Roberts, Gabriel, Struwig & Gordon, 2016). The ‘Other Foundation’ notes that this “is within the range observed in other countries around the world”, which is between 1.2 to 6.8 percent of the adult population (Sutherland et al., 2016, p. 30). Simultaneously, it is noted that the nature of the survey question asks about the respondent’s ‘identity’, as oppose to same-sex ‘attraction’ or ‘behaviour’, which may further increase the rate of underreporting. In other studies around the world, which ask about the existence of same-sex attraction or same-sex behaviour, a greater proportion respond in the affirmative (e.g. 8 percent in the US) (Sutherland et al., 2016).

The SASAS is also able to provide results for women in particular, with 1.6 percent identifying themselves as lesbian, bisexual, or ‘other’, rather than ‘straight’ or heterosexual, and 0.7 percent as lesbian specifically. The SASAS study also highlights the significant stigma associated with being LGBT. Seven out of 10 South Africans feel “strongly that homosexual sex and breaking gender dressing norms is simply wrong and disgusting” (Sutherland et al., 2016, p. 37). Although the lesbian community is a minority of the South African population, the number of lesbians is still a significant number of persons. This population group regularly face discrimination and

prejudice, and therefore further investigation into their experiences and avenues for support is warranted (Arndt & De Bruin, 2006; Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2017; Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017).

## **1.6 The stigmatised lesbian identity**

This study explored the experiences of six female students, who self-identified as lesbian, in order to investigate the challenges that they experienced on campus due to their sexual orientation. Throughout this paper the term ‘lesbian’ will be used to describe homosexual females. It was established with the participants this is the term they preferred to use when describing their sexual orientation. This study focused on lesbian students, as research indicates that lesbian students continue to face various challenges while studying (Arndt & De Bruin, 2006; Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2017; Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017; Tati, 2009). Tati (2009) argues that the lesbian population in South Africa suffers frequently, due to the effects of living in a homophobic society. South African society seems to hold the belief that “women have stepped out of line through challenging the hegemonic discourses stipulating that they have specific and distinct roles to play – that of wives, mothers, home makers and sexual partners to men” (Tati, 2009, p. 6). Furthermore, Tati (2009) explains that due to homosexual women diverting from the perceived norm, the ‘natural order’, and thus not fitting into their social role and construct, their behaviour is socially condemned. One major challenge that lesbians face in South Africa is ‘corrective rape’ practices – that being men who rape lesbian women with the intention of ‘curing’ their homosexuality (Mashabane, 2018).

According to a news article published by the Mail and Guardian (2016), a South African weekly newspaper and website, there is an ‘epidemic’ of reported hate crimes against lesbians in South Africa, i.e. prejudice-motivated crime, in this instance driven by bias against sexual orientation (Judge & Nel, 2008). On Wednesday, 21 April 2021, representatives of the LGBTIQ+ community assembled at Constitution Hill in Johannesburg for a press conference to address the “series of brutal hate crimes against its members” (DeBarros, 2021, para 15). DeBarros (2021) reported on a statement, published on 22 April 2021, signed by over 20 LGBTIQ+ organisations and human rights groups from across South Africa, which stated that at least six known LGBTIQ+ individuals

have been killed in “brutal hate crimes” since February 2021. The report described the victims as: Bonang Gaelae (29 years old), whose throat was slit in Sebokeng on 12 February 2021; Nonhlanhla Kunene (37 years old), whose body was found half naked in Pietermaritzburg on 5 March 2021; Sphamandla Khoza (34 years old), who was beaten, stabbed and had his throat slit in Durban on 29 March 2021; Nathaniel ‘Spokgoane’ Mbele, who was stabbed in the chest in Vanderbijlpark on 2 April 2021; Andile ‘Lulu’ Nthuthela (41 years old), whose mutilated and burned body was found in Kariega on 10 April 2021; and Lonwabo Jack, whose body was found on a pavement the day after his 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday in Cape Town on 17 April 2021. Furthermore, a lesbian couple, who was assaulted on the University of Fort Hare campus, was refused health care services at a medical facility on 16 April 2021 amid a claim by medical staff that ‘masculine’ lesbian females ‘are taking our women’ (DeBarros, 2021). This study intentionally limited its focus to a small group of students who self-identified as lesbians in order to explore the unique challenges associated with this minority group.

### **1.7 Theoretical framework**

Although there is extensive literature on the challenges that the LGBT community face, more investigative and focused research is needed in South Africa, specifically at institutions of higher education (Kleinhans, 2018). This is necessary in order to understand lesbian students’ experiences of discrimination, as well as the effect this has on their physical and mental wellbeing. This study used social stigma related research, primarily Goffman’s (1963/2014) social stigma theory and Pryor and Reeder’s (2011) conceptual model, as its theoretical framework.

Goffman’s (1963/2014) social stigma theory offers an analytical framework for theorising lesbian students experiences. Pryor and Reeder’s (2011) model will be used to narrate the participants’ experiences. Pryor and Reeder (2011) have produced a conceptual model that assists in understanding and differentiating the complexities of stigmatisation. It allows for the exploration of psychological, emotional and behavioural responses to stigmatisation, which appear on an intrapersonal level (i.e. the stigmatised persons’ psychological processes that are involved in the response to stigma), an interpersonal level (i.e. the interactions between the non-stigmatised and the stigmatised), and a societal level (i.e. the broader societal forms of stigma) (Bos, Pryor, Reeder

& Strutterheim, 2013; Hatzenbuehler, 2016; Roelen, Ackley, Boyce, Farina & Ripoll, 2020). This theoretical framework will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

### **1.8 Purpose of the study**

This study aimed to investigate the challenges that lesbian students experience on campus at UKZN. The research problem is that lesbian students live with an identity that is stigmatised. The hypothesis was that lesbian students face a variety of challenges on campus, such as stigma, that have damaging psychological, emotional and/or behavioural consequences. The study had one central aim: to explore and describe lesbian students' experiences on campus. This study sought to answer the following research questions: Firstly, what are the experiences of lesbian students on campus? Secondly, what are the unique challenges related to their sexual identities that lesbian students face on campus?

This study seeks to contribute to the body of knowledge that explores the challenges faced by homosexual South Africans at higher education institutions. This study hypothesises that homosexual students face challenges which have negative consequences. Examining the female participants' constructions of their reality and the ways in which they position themselves within the campus community, potentially provides some insight into how this minority group is affected by the challenges associated with being homosexual.

The results of this study provide useful insights into the challenges that lesbian students experience on campus. The information gathered may be useful in helping South African universities improve their resources and social support for homosexual students, as well as increase awareness and education regarding homosexuality of staff and students. This kind of study can potentially contribute to improving existing policies and implementation of services within the university context.

### **1.9 Structure of the dissertation**

This chapter, Chapter One, has introduced this research project.

Chapter Two: The Literature Review provides a comprehensive review of previous studies and their findings relating to the challenges that lesbian students may experience at a South African university. The literature review also outlines social stigma related research, primarily Goffman's (1963/2014) social stigma theory and Pryor and Reeder's (2011) conceptual model, as this was its theoretical framework.

Chapter Three: The Aims and Rationale chapter provides the rationale of the research and highlights the particular aims of the study combined with the research questions to be answered.

Chapter Four: The Methodology chapter details the interpretive methodological approach employed in this study, which includes the particulars of the qualitative research design; the purposeful and snowball sampling techniques, recruitment, data collection (i.e. focus group) and data analysis processes (i.e. thematic analysis) that were utilized in the study. It concludes with a consideration of certain ethical issues.

Chapter Five: This chapter presents the findings of the research which includes the analysis and interpretation of the data collected.

Chapter Six: The Discussion chapter discusses the findings in relation to relevant literature, theory and the research questions.

Chapter Seven: The Conclusion chapter offers a review of the main findings. It discusses the strengths and limitations of the study and concludes by making recommendations for university policy and further research.

## **Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Large parts of South African society continue to subscribe to the ideologies of monogamy and heterosexuality. This is also true at tertiary education institutions, where homosexual students may face prejudice or discrimination within the university setting (Kleinhans, 2018; Nyeck et al., 2019). Lesbian students are reported to be at risk of stigmatisation and violence on campuses (Arndt & De Bruin, 2006; Kleinhans, 2018; Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2017; Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2017; Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017; Nyeck et al., 2019; Tati, 2009). Although UKZN aims to provide a safe and protective environment for its student population, sexual violence, homophobic assaults and bullying of LGBT students are frequently reported on campus (Kleinhans, 2018; Mutumbara, 2015; Shabangu, n.d.). Therefore, this study aimed to explore the experiences of six female students, who self-identified as lesbian, in order to investigate the challenges that they may experience on campus due to their sexual orientation.

This chapter provides a comprehensive literature review, which discusses previous studies and their findings regarding the research problem and establishes a theoretical basis for addressing the objectives of this study. This chapter begins first by exploring social stigma related research through investigating the concept of stigma and its definitions. Goffman's (1963/2014) social stigma theory is briefly discussed. Pryor and Reeder's (2011) conceptual model is then explored. This model distinguishes between the four manifestations of stigma, namely: public stigma, self-stigma, stigma by association and structural stigma. As Pryor and Reeder's (2011) model will be used as the framework through which participants' experiences are presented in the Findings chapter (Chapter 5), the literature review is also structured in the same way. The broad themes examined through the literature will be examined through the four lenses of Pryor and Reeder's (2011) model: public stigma, self-stigma, stigma by association and structural stigma. Hate crimes and corrective rape practices will be discussed under 'public stigma'. The internalisation of stigma and the psychological impact that this may have on lesbians will be explored under 'self-stigma'. The psychological, emotional and behavioural impact on family members associated with lesbians will be considered under 'stigma by association'. The challenges that lesbians experience

regarding adhering to cultural norms, societal-level conditions, gender norms and university pressures will be explored under ‘structural stigma’.

## **2.2 Theoretical framework: Social stigma theory**

This study used social stigma related research, primarily Goffman’s (1963/2014) social stigma theory and Pryor and Reeder’s (2011) conceptual model, as its theoretical framework. Goffman’s (1963/2014) social stigma theory offers an analytical framework for understanding aspects of lesbian students’ experiences. Pryor and Reeder’s (2011) model assists in understanding and differentiating the complexities of stigmatisation, and it provides a framework for narrating participants’ experiences. It also allows for the exploration of psychological, emotional and behavioural reactions to stigmatisation, which appear on the intrapersonal, interpersonal and societal levels.

### **2.2.1 Definitions of stigma: Goffman’s (1963) social stigma**

The term ‘stigma’ and how it is used today originates from ancient Greece – where it referred to the branding or marking of particular individuals or groups, such as slaves or criminals, who then became ostracized by the community. These markings graphically represented their devalued status, and indicated that they were different and needed to be avoided (Coleman, 2013; Martinez & Hinshaw, 2016). In today’s culture, the act of marking or branding individuals in such a way is not as common and instead has changed to a more cognitive interpretation and manifestation (i.e. social marking) of stigma. However, stigma continues to maintain its original function, where differences between individuals are used as a way to avoid them, or make them outcasts (Coleman, 2013; Link & Phelan, 2001).

Erving Goffman (1963) was one of the pioneers of social stigma research. He defines stigma as “an attribute that is deeply discrediting” (Goffman, 1963/2014, p. 257). In this process of stigmatising the individual is reduced from “a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one” (Yang et al., 2007, p. 1525). Furthermore, he identifies three key categories of stigma: first, “bodily abomination” (physical stigma which includes a variety of physical impairments and conditions,

such as genetic deformities, deafness or blindness); second, “character blemishes” (stigma of character traits which involves a generalised negative or bad identity or lifestyle, such as homosexuality, unemployment or addiction); and third, “tribal stigma” (stigma of group identity which are generalised negative or bad features associated with a particular group, such as religion, race or nationality) (Bradford & Clark, 2011, p. 184). LGBT individuals, which includes lesbian students, are often categorised and described in terms of character blemishes. Goffman (1963/2014, p. 257) refers to individuals who stigmatise others as “normals”, however he does not provide an explanation or a conceptualisation of what normality is. Instead Goffman (1963/2014) provides an explanation for how stigma is socially constructed, suggesting that what is considered to be a norm is created by the social setting that one finds oneself in. Goffman (1963/2014, p. 257) explains that stigma is a social phenomenon that mainly develops within the process of individual and group relations. Hence, the social setting is vital in determining what is discrediting or what is a source of pride (Bradford & Clark, 2011; Msomi, 2014).

Since Goffman’s (1963/2014) profound work on theorising stigma, stigma has become a complex issue, studied across numerous disciplines. Stigma comprises of multiple aspects and features which are constantly interacting and fluctuating (Coleman, 2013; Link & Phelan, 2001; Pescosolido & Martin, 2015). Examples of theories that have emerged from Goffman’s (1963/2014) work are: Crocker, Major, and Steele (1998) who describe stigma as an attribute that an individual possesses that they themselves define as a feature that carries a devalued social identity in a social context. Major and O’Brien (2005) expand on these social psychological concepts stating that stigma is socially constructed and consists of an attribute that identifies and labels individuals as different, leading to devaluation. Link and Phelan (2001) take a more sociological perspective, defining stigma as an all-inclusive term used to capture a number of complex elements, which consist of five main components: labelling, stereotyping, cognitive separation, emotional reactions, and status loss and discrimination. Stigma is also believed to be a process that relies on social, political and economic power, and has discriminatory consequences (see Coleman, 2013; Crocker et al., 1998; Link & Phelan, 2001; Major & O’Brien, 2005; Pescosolido & Martin, 2015; Yang et al., 2007).

Across various definitions, the concept of stigma is commonly associated with an attribute or trait that is socially deviant and/or unacceptable and which elicits social disapproval. Therefore, stigma is socially constructed and may change over time (Ragins, 2008; Ragins, Singh & Cornwell, 2007). Definitions for the term stigma tend to encompass two important features, namely the identification of ‘difference’ and ‘devaluation’ (Bos et al., 2013; Flowerdew, 2008; Pryor, Reeder & Monroe, 2012; Roelen et al., 2020). This dissertation adopts the definition of stigma as an individual’s psychological, emotional and/or behavioural response to a characteristic of another individual that is perceived as socially deviant, undesirable or offensive according to that social context (Ragins, 2008; Ragins et al., 2007).

### **2.2.2 Four manifestations of stigma: Pryor and Reeder’s (2011) conceptual model**

Pryor and Reeder (2011) have produced a conceptual model that assists in understanding the complexities of stigmatisation. Their model incorporates the following aspects and features of stigma: Stigmatisation can be clearly apparent (e.g. humiliation) and it can be subtle, such as non-verbal communications indicating discomfort (e.g. avoiding eye contact) (Bos et al., 2013; Major & O’Brien, 2005). It can also appear as negative responses, such as avoidance, social exclusion and/or rejection, a strong dislike of interaction or disinclination to interact, disregarding, dehumanizing, shaming, sexual violence or threat, and depersonalising individuals into stereotypical exaggerations (Bos et al., 2013; Major & O’Brien, 2005). Furthermore, stigmatisation has widespread consequences and appears on an intrapersonal level (i.e. the stigmatised individuals’ psychological processes that are involved in the response to stigma), an interpersonal level (i.e. the interactions between the non-stigmatised and the stigmatised), and a societal level (i.e. the broader societal forms of stigma) (Bos et al., 2013; Hatzenbuehler, 2016, Roelen et al., 2020). Hence, Pryor and Reeder (2011) have distinguished four manifestations of stigma that are interconnected and dynamic, namely: public stigma, self-stigma, stigma by association and structural stigma. However, public stigma is at the root of this model, as it underscores all of the other forms of stigma.

#### **2.2.2.1 Public Stigma**

Stigma develops from cognitive interpretations that individuals (“perceivers”) have about others who bear a stigmatised identity (“targets”) (Bos et al., 2013, p. 6). Public stigma can be generated from these cognitive interpretations, that being negative psychological, emotional and behavioural responses of the perceiver towards the target (Bos et al., 2013; Major & O’Brien, 2005). Public stigma is an individual’s reaction to another person (who is classified as having a stigmatised identity). Public stigma is at the core of Pryor and Reeder’s (2011) model, as it provides the foundation for all other types of stigma to occur. An example of public stigma would be the negative responses that people within the general population may have towards individuals who identify as homosexuals.

Overt and illegal forms of public stigma are often termed ‘hate crimes’, where individuals are targets of violence and crime which are motivated by prejudice because of the group to which they belong to or identify with (Breen & Nel, 2011; Judge & Nel, 2008). Hate crimes that occur in South Africa, which can also be experienced on university campuses, include: verbal, physical and sexual abuse or assault, harassment, physical and sexual threat, damage to property, arson, bullying, and violence (Judge & Nel, 2008). South Africa has a number of laws that address discrimination, such as the Equality Act, the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (PEPUDA), and section 9 of the Constitution; as well as service providers that deal with prejudice-motivated crimes, such as the ‘Services Charter for Victims of Crime and Violence’ (Victims Charter) (Breen & Nel, 2011; Judge & Nel, 2008). However, currently there are no laws that specifically prohibit hate crimes according to sexual orientation. The statement, published on April 22 2021, signed by over 20 LGBTIQ+ organisations and human rights groups from across South Africa, urgently requested that the South African government finalise the implementation of and enact the Prevention and Combating of Hate Crimes and Hate Speech Bill (B9 of 2019), which was first drafted in 2016 and was approved by Cabinet in 2018, in order to assist in the protection of marginalised groups, such as lesbian women, from hate, bias, prejudice, and intolerance (DeBarros, 2021).

One such crime in South Africa that targets homosexual individuals, most often lesbian females, is the practice of ‘corrective rape’, where rape is believed to ‘cure’ or ‘correct’ their ‘abnormal’

sexual orientation (Mashabane, 2018). Gibson and Macleod (2014) conducted a study of eight lesbians' stories of sexual identity in post-apartheid South Africa. In one story, a Black female reported that when she began sharing that she was lesbian, she was sexually abused by her grandfather and repeatedly raped by men in her community, and this was seen as a 'norm' for dealing with homosexuality. Although there is limited understanding of the extent of these practices, due to underreporting, two non-profit organisations in Cape Town recently reported that on average their support groups dealt with 10 new corrective rape cases each week and the numbers were increasing (Van der Schyff, 2018).

Studies reveal how common public stigma is for lesbians in South Africa. The 'Rose has Thorns' survey conducted in Johannesburg, reported that out of 145 Black lesbians, 10 percent had been victims of rape, sexual and physical assault, and verbal abuse due to their sexual orientation between 2002 and 2003. Victims ranged from 16 to 35 years old, who lived in townships and were predominantly 'masculine' lesbian females (Love Not Hate Campaign, 2016; Naidoo & Karels, 2012; Rossiter, 2016). A study conducted by the 'Gay Equality Project' in 2002 on homophobic violence in Johannesburg found that out of 42 participants, 32 percent of lesbians were raped or sexually abused, 91 percent experienced physical assault and 92 percent were verbally abused due to their sexual orientation (Naidoo & Karels, 2012).

#### ***2.2.2.2 Self-stigma***

Stigmatised individuals who become aware of public stigma which is directed at them may become affected by self-stigma, hence public stigma is at the source of self-stigma. Stigmatised individuals may feel anxious about the possible exposure to stigmatisation, as well as internalise the stigma, resulting in negative feelings and beliefs about oneself (Bos et al., 2013).

The 'OUT LGBT Well-being' survey conducted in 2015 revealed some of the negative consequences that result from internalising the stigma about one's sexual identity (Love Not Hate Campaign, 2016). The survey was conducted by the research initiative of the Love Not Hate (LNH) Campaign to assess the prevalence of hate crimes and discrimination towards the LGBT population. This was a nationally representative survey (in rural and urban areas) consisting of a

sample of 2130 LGBT South Africans aged 16 and older, of which one third identified as lesbian. The survey found that 44 percent of respondents experienced discrimination due to their sexual orientation on most days within the prior 24 months. Of these respondents approximately a third reported that their self-esteem deteriorated, and over half reported that they were lacking in confidence, due to the discrimination experienced. Furthermore, 21 percent of respondents reported past suicide attempts and 9 percent of participants who identified as lesbian thought about suicide often or always. The respondents expressed concern about experiencing further discrimination, fearing that this may have greater negative consequences for their mental health (Love Not Hate Campaign, 2016).

### ***2.2.2.3 Stigma by association***

Pryor et al. (2012) compare the spread of social stigma to that of an infectious disease, where stigma can transfer from a ‘marked’ person carrying a stigmatised identity to others who are somehow affiliated with this person. Stigmatisation has the potential to not only affect the stigmatised person but also all those who are associated with this person, such as family, friends, caregivers and acquaintances of the stigmatized. These associated individuals bear some of the discrediting and devaluation associated with the ‘mark’ (Bos et al., 2013; Goffman, 1963/2014). These individuals are stigmatised because of their connection to the stigmatised individual; however, the connection may be meaningful (e.g., a close family relative) or arbitrary (e.g., a stranger in close proximity to the stigmatized individual) (Bos et al., 2013; Pryor, Reeder & Landau, 1999). For example, a person may find themselves at the same social gathering as an individual who identifies as lesbian. This person may be stigmatised by others just for associating with or being in close proximity to the already stigmatized lesbian. Stigma by association also includes psychological, emotional and/or behavioural responses (Bos et al., 2013).

Bos et al. (2013) and Pryor et al. (1999) argue that stigma by association results in negative consequences, such as poor self-esteem and psychological distress, for those connected with stigmatized individuals, especially within close familial relationships. Therefore, individuals who are associated with the stigmatized individual often conceal their connection to the stigmatized individual or they encourage the stigmatized individual to conceal their stigmatized status.

However, there seems to be very little research, if any, that has investigated the experiences of those who are associated with homosexuals and the consequences that may result from stigma by association. Bogart et al. (2008) conducted a study examining the interconnectedness of stigma in families living with a family member with HIV. In this study 33 families were interviewed, which included parents (at least one parent had HIV), children and caregivers, to explore their experiences. All the families reported experiencing stigma and 10 percent of uninfected family members experienced stigma due to being associated with the HIV-positive family member. Stigma by association was experienced through social isolation, employment and housing discrimination, rejection and avoidance by friends. Some participants reported losing friends due to being associated with someone with HIV. Several child participants reported experiencing loneliness, isolation and a lack of support from peers. Based on these findings one could infer that family, friends and caregivers who are associated with a homosexual family member may undergo similar experiences to the participants in Bogart et al.'s (2008) study. However, more research is needed to understand the experiences of those associated with homosexuals and the possible consequences that result due to stigma by association.

#### ***2.2.2.4 Structural stigma***

Structural stigma identifies stigma in the social structures within society, and refers to how social structures and institutions (e.g., governments, universities, religion, etc.) contribute to the stigmatisation of an identity (Bos et al., 2013; Hatzenbuehler, 2016). Hence, structural stigma is defined as “societal-level conditions, cultural norms, and institutional policies that constrain the opportunities, resources, and wellbeing of the stigmatised” (Hatzenbuehler, 2016, p. 742). Furthermore, current research recognises that stigma can perpetuate and legitimise existing social inequalities and is maintained by dominance, control and the implementation of social, economic, and political power (Bos et al., 2013).

##### ***2.2.2.4.1 Structural Stigma – Cultural norms and societal-level conditions***

South Africa's legislation has been changed significantly since the transition to democracy and the adoption of the new constitution in 1994, which includes the protection of human rights for all

minority groups. The Constitution and the Bill of Rights (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, p. 6) guarantees freedom from discrimination based on “race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth”. Despite South Africa’s progressive legislation regarding the protection of rights for sexual minorities, South Africa remains a socially conservative, heteronormative and patriarchal society (Mthembu, 2014; Nyeck et al., 2019; Tati, 2009). Irrespective of these transformative policies homophobic stigmatisation is perpetuated and reflected in public opinion (Mthembu, 2014; Mutambara, 2015).

Heteronormativity is apparent in South Africa, as South African society is deeply traditional and family-orientated (Lubbe, 2007; Sathiparsad, Taylor & Dlamini, 2008; Strebel et al., 2006). The nuclear family (a two-parent, heterosexual, legally married couple) is viewed as the ‘norm’ (Lubbe, 2007). Within the patriarchal system (a social system in which men hold primary power and dominant roles) the man is positioned as the ‘father’, the head of the household, while women are constructed as subordinate to men (Lubbe, 2007; Sathiparsad et al., 2008; Strebel et al., 2006). The patriarchal system also constructs the ideal man as assertive, dominant and aggressive (Sathiparsad et al., 2008). Jewkes and Morrell (2010, p. 1) argue that “the dominant ideal of Black African manhood emphasizes toughness, strength and expression of prodigious sexual success” and this form of masculinity is thought to be desired by women. Furthermore, there is an expectation that men should be in control of women and that men may use violence to exert their control. In contrast, the feminine ideal embodies submission, obedience and acquiescence (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010). Lubbe (2007, p. 17) claims that because of patriarchal culture, a woman’s “power to negotiate and engage in decision making processes is undermined”. This is reflected in the high rate of GBV and sexual violence against women in South Africa (Strebel et al., 2006; Swarr, 2012).

Discussing and implementing sexual rights challenges the unequal power dynamics between men and women in society. In socio-economic and cultural settings men are positioned to be superior to women. Men are positioned to claim the more dominant roles and authoritative positions over women (Lubbe, 2007). In South Africa, women are positioned as having to engage in sexual

relations with men, as society instructs that heterosexual relations need to be obeyed in order to procreate (Lubbe, 2007). Within a conservative patriarchal worldview, lesbians are viewed as violating cultural norms and African traditions (Lubbe, 2007). In a large-scale survey conducted in Johannesburg, which investigated public opinion regarding homosexuality, a significant proportion of participants viewed homosexuality negatively, with approximately two fifths of participants believing that homosexuality undermines and violates the values and traditions of their community. In addition, more than 12 percent of respondents believe that violence against homosexual people is acceptable (Mahomed & Trangoš, 2016). The 2015 ‘OUT LGBT Well-being survey’, consisted of 2130 South African LGBT respondents, with 63 percent of the respondents aged between 16 and 29, of which one third were lesbians. The study reported that approximately one in ten (11 percent) of the LGBT respondents aged between 16 and 29 reported being raped (at least once in their lifetime) or sexually abused at school or university within the past two years due to their sexual orientation (Love Not Hate Campaign, 2016). There are a number of studies that demonstrate the high prevalence rates of violence, particularly sexual violence, against lesbians in South Africa due to their sexual identity (Love Not Hate Campaign, 2016; Nyeck et al., 2019; Sutherland et al., 2016; Swarr, 2012).

#### *2.2.2.4.2 Structural Stigma – Gender nonconformity*

Biological sex, which is assigned at birth as either being male or female, relates to physiology and anatomy. Gender is more complex as it establishes the meanings of the male and female constructs, and relates to behaviour. Gender refers to a collection of shared sets of beliefs, emotions, expectations, traits, roles, customs, values and norms that differentiate between masculinity and femininity. These shared masculine and feminine ideologies are constructed socially, they change and develop over time and across cultures, and are learned at a young age (Strebel et al., 2006; Tati, 2009). Goffman (1963/2014) explains that societies socially construct the rules that govern behaviour (e.g. expected behaviours that prescribe masculinity and femininity) and place particular traits into categories that society deem to be ordinary, natural and normal. This then creates a ‘normal’ social identity, or in this case a ‘normal’ gender identity (Rossiter, 2016). Children develop their gender identity by internalising these rules that govern behaviour, which are imposed by that society and are seen as the norm (Tati, 2009). Homosexuality deviates from this ‘norm’.

Not conforming to cultural rules of behaviour and violating gender norms results in a stigmatised identity, that may evoke stigma and diminish access to privilege and power (Strebel et al., 2006).

Rossiter (2016) and Swarr (2012) explain categorisations for lesbian gender labels, that differentiate between ‘feminine lesbians’ and ‘masculine lesbians’, which traditionally have been identified through the behaviours, mannerisms, and dress and hair styles adopted by lesbians. For example, feminine lesbians tend to appear as ‘normal’ heterosexual women as they often conform to the feminine gender norms regarding their dress and body language. Whereas masculine lesbians often conform to masculine gender norms, and may dress or act in ways that are typically perceived as ‘masculine’. Since masculine lesbians tend to stand out from other women, other individuals are likely to see them as different and not belonging to their ‘category’, resulting in higher risk of discrimination and diminishing access to privilege and power (Goffman, 1963/2014; Rossiter, 2016; Strebel et al., 2006). Findings from the SASAS survey report that gender nonconforming participants, including masculine lesbians, fear for their safety most days, especially when walking alone at night, compared to gender conforming participants.

#### *2.2.2.4.3 Structural Stigma – University setting*

Besides the already mentioned structural stigma that lesbian students may face due to their sexual identity, research indicates that the university setting provides additional challenges that are uniquely associated with tertiary education institutions (Arndt & De Bruin, 2006; Jagessar, 2015; Kleinhans, 2018; Mutambara, 2015; Tati, 2009). The role and responsibility of university establishments is to provide and maintain physical and relational spaces that are conducive to teaching and training which supports the protection of human rights for all its students (Kleinhans, 2018). Universities are often perceived as environments where students have the opportunity to freely and safely express and develop their sexual identities, whilst encountering alternative and novel aspects to life, without discrimination (Jagessar, 2015; Mutambara, 2015). However, in South Africa this is not the case, instead students are experiencing university spaces as discriminatory, hostile and violent, lesbian students are targets for sexual violence, homophobic assaults and bullying (i.e. reflecting the social issues present across South African society) (Arndt & De Bruin, 2006; Jagessar, 2015; Kleinhans, 2018; Mutambara, 2015; Shabangu, n.d.).

Mavhandu-Mudzusi and Sandy's (2017) study explored homosexual students' experiences of human rights violation at a South African rural-based university, where 20 LGBT students were interviewed, aged between 19 and 25, of which five were lesbians. Almost all of the participants reported that university employees and heterosexual students frequently violated LGBT students' human rights. Participants reported experiencing hostile threats, damage to property (e.g. graffiti or profanities written on residence doors or lockers) or personal items stolen on campus, physical violence and some participants were subjected to corrective rape. Participants claimed that some lecturers considered homosexuality as a 'sin' and therefore students were ignored and their participation in lectures was limited, which would affect students' academic performance. Furthermore, all of the participants described being excluded from certain social activities on campus by other heterosexual students. Some participants claimed that when they sought assistance from university management they were not supported. This illustrates how structural stigma is perpetuated by heterosexual students, university employees, lecturers and university management.

Ellis (2009) conducted a nationally representative UK survey that explored the experiences of 291 LGBT students from 42 universities throughout the UK. Similar to Mavhandu-Mudzusi and Sandy's (2017) findings, the survey reported that homophobic discrimination was experienced by respondents mostly in the form of derogatory remarks (77.9 percent), verbal threats or harassment (47.1 percent), and physical violence or threat (26.5 percent). Respondents reported that these incidents were perpetrated mostly by heterosexual students (76.5 percent), as well as from lecturers or tutors (4.4 percent) administrative staff (1.5 percent), security staff (1.5 percent), or other university employees (1.5 percent). It was also reported that these incidents often took place within public spaces on campus such as in cafeterias or dining halls (38.2 percent), in student residences (27.9 percent), when walking around campus grounds (25.0 percent), in classrooms or lecture halls (8.8 percent) or in offices of university staff members (1.5 percent). This illustrates that structural stigma occurs frequently and in various locations on university campuses. There are very few studies conducted at South African universities that indicate where discrimination occurs on campus. However, of the limited studies, most tend to focus on student residences, and they have

found that homophobia is common practice in these university spaces (for more information see, Jagessar, 2015; Munyuki & Vincent, 2017).

The LGBT Forum is a student-facilitated support group, dedicated to assisting LGBT students at UKZN. The LGBT Forum is situated in the ‘Campus HIV/AIDS Support Unit’ (CHASU) premises. The LGBT Forum was founded by a group of LGBT students at UKZN and provides a place on campus where LGBT students can feel accepted and supported by other students who identify as LGBT. This Forum aims to provide a safe space for LGBT students where they can access support, as well as educating and advocating for LGBT students on campus (Mutambara, 2015). According to Mutambara’s (2015) study, which explored whether lesbian students’ rights were being upheld at UKZN, participants reported that belonging to the LGBT Forum at UKZN made them feel more supported and understood. This was due to being part of a group who had shared norms and values and who were informed and educated about LGBT issues, which gave them a sense of acceptance and belonging. Furthermore, participants reported forming and being part of ‘lesbian cliques’ which consisted of other students who identified as lesbian, as this provided them with a sense of safety and protection, as well as a support system. This suggests that lesbian students may create their own informal means of support and protection against structural stigma experienced within the university institution.

### **2.3 Summation**

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a comprehensive literature review which discussed previous studies and their findings regarding the challenges that lesbian students may experience at a South African university, as well as to explore the various theoretical frameworks for addressing the objectives of this study. This chapter first investigated social stigma research by examining the concept of stigma and its definitions and then briefly exploring Goffman’s (1963/2014) social stigma theory. The study adopted the definition of stigma as a socially constructed phenomenon which is defined as a person’s psychological, emotional and/or behavioural response to a characteristic of another person that is perceived as socially deviant, undesirable or offensive (Ragins, 2008; Ragins et al., 2007). Thereafter, the study discussed Pryor

and Reeder's (2011) conceptual model, which distinguishes between the four manifestations of stigma, namely: public stigma, self-stigma, stigma by association and structural stigma.

Pryor and Reeder's (2011) model was used as the framework for presenting the literature from previous studies regarding the unique challenges relating to lesbian students. Therefore, under the 'public stigma' section the issues pertaining to hate crimes and corrective rape practices were discussed, which revealed how common public stigma was for lesbians in South Africa. Under the 'self-stigma section' the challenges surrounding internalising stigma was explored, and the potential psychological consequences, such as decreased self-esteem, poor self-confidence and suicidal tendencies, that exposure to stigmatisation can produce were discussed. Under the 'stigma by association' section the consequences of being associated with lesbians was considered, however this section revealed a gap in the literature as there was a lack of research on the experiences of those who are associated with lesbians. Under the 'structural stigma' section the challenges relating to lesbians' experiences of adhering to cultural norms, gender norms and university pressures was explored. This section revealed unique challenges that lesbians experience in the broader South African context. These challenges included living in a heteronormative, patriarchal and homophobic society; the issues relating to violating gender cultural norms; and how homophobia was experienced in the university context. Overall, the literature findings provide evidence that lesbian students face a variety of challenges on South African university campuses, which have potential negative psychological, emotional and/or behavioural consequences. Therefore, this study aims to explore whether lesbian students at UKZN describe challenges similar to the literature presented in this chapter. The next chapter will highlight the aims and rationale of the study as well as the particular research questions to be answered.

## **Chapter 3: AIMS AND RATIONALE**

### **3.1 Aims and rationale**

Based on the Literature Review it is evident that lesbian students face various challenges at higher education institutions in South Africa due to their sexual identity. This occurs despite the adoption of South Africa's new constitution into university policies, which includes the protection of rights for sexual minorities. Although UKZN aims to provide a safe and protective environment for its student population, research suggests that there are still numerous challenges that occur on campus for its lesbian student population (Kleinhans, 2018; Mutambara, 2015). It appears that the social issues and prejudices present in South African society are also present at its universities, and some universities exhibit heteronormative, patriarchal and homophobic ideologies (Kleinhans, 2018; Love Not Hate Campaign, 2016; Mthembu, 2014; Mutambara, 2015; Nyeck et al., 2019; Sutherland et al., 2016; Swarr, 2012; Tati, 2009). This study aimed to describe the experiences of six female students, who self-identified as lesbian, in order to investigate whether similar challenges that were presented in the literature were experienced on the UKZN campus.

### **3.2 Research objectives**

The objectives of this study were:

1. To explore lesbian students' experiences
2. To identify the unique challenges related to their sexual identities that lesbian students face on campus

### **3.3 Research questions**

This study addressed the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of lesbian students on campus?
2. What are the unique challenges related to their sexual identities that lesbian students face on campus?

The methodology used to conduct this study is detailed in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 4: METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter consists of three sections, the first section describes the research paradigm, which is a model, framework or an ‘analytic lens’ that guides the research and is informed by the three philosophical underpinnings that define the nature of the research: the ontology (i.e. beliefs about the nature of, or what constitutes, reality), epistemology (i.e. the study of the nature of, or what constitutes, knowledge), and methodology (i.e. the plan of action or approach that outlines the research process and describes and evaluates the methods used through which research is conducted) (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole, 2013; Creswell, 2013; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). This methodology chapter also provides a description of the research design (i.e. the strategy for how the research will be conducted). The next section explains the research process, which includes the particulars of the sampling techniques, the recruitment process, the data collection process and the data analysis process that was utilized in the study. The last section concludes with a reflection of certain ethical considerations.

### **4.2 Research paradigm and design**

#### **4.2.1 The interpretive paradigm**

This study adopted an interpretive paradigm. The ontological assumption is that reality is internal and complex, as it is constructed by participants’ subjective experiences (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, the interpretive paradigm adopts an ontology of relativity and subjectivity (Creswell, 2013). In other words, as the phenomenon under study, in this case the experiences of lesbian students, is understood from the different perspectives of each participant in the study, there are multiple realities. Each participant constructs their realities through shared meanings and interactions, therefore the phenomenon under study can have multiple interpretations, and can be understood through examining the discourse (i.e. the actual words of the participants) that the participants use to explain their subjective realities (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006).

The epistemology of the interpretive paradigm is interactional where the researcher engages with the participants, producing a subjective understanding between researcher and participants. Therefore, knowledge is personally experienced and acquired, as the researcher (from a subjective stance) interprets the participants' subjective experiences (i.e. epistemology is intersubjective) (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Creswell, 2013). Hence, the researcher's personal philosophical assumptions and views (such as their strongly held beliefs about the issues that are under study, the research questions, the data gathering methods, etc.) affect the study. Therefore, the researcher's role is to understand the experiences of the participants through adopting an empathic stance when interpreting the participants' realities, and to reflect critically on their own biases (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006).

The methodology employed within the interpretive paradigm is one of interpretation and interaction, where the phenomenon can be studied within its social context (Creswell, 2013). The methodological designs are characterised as emerging and inductive. This means that instead of commencing with a firm hypothesis, the researcher may begin with a set of assumptions regarding a phenomenon that they wish to understand (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). The methodology procedures can be flexible as the researcher can adapt and modify the research process as new information develops (Creswell, 2013).

The interpretive paradigm is thought to be appropriate for this study, as it is interested in meaning and offers rich and in-depth descriptions and understandings of complex human phenomena. Hence, this approach can provide greater clarity and authentic insights into how lesbian students make sense of their experiences (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). As the methodology can allow the researcher to interact with participants within the interpretive paradigm, the researcher is able to probe and inquire into aspects that cannot be observed, such as the participants' thoughts, feelings, values and perspectives. This potentially allows for better understanding of and insight into lesbian students' experiences, providing valuable data for further investigation (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Pham, 2018). However, as the interpretive approach understands behaviour through subjective meanings and deeper interpretations, the findings of interpretive studies cannot be easily generalised (Bhattacharjee,

2012). Furthermore, the findings of the study can be affected by the researcher's own perspectives, interpretations, cultural preferences and belief systems causing issues relating to bias (Pham, 2018).

#### **4.2.2 The qualitative methodological approach**

As the interpretive paradigm relies on qualitative data, this study adopted a qualitative methodological approach for describing lesbian students' experiences at UKZN. Qualitative research addresses research problems involved with describing and understanding the meaning that participants assign to a phenomenon (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). A qualitative research design was best suited for this study because it aimed to explore how the participants experience, interpret and understand an aspect of the social world from their own perspectives. The advantages of using a qualitative methodological approach is that the generation of data is flexible. Data can be collected in the participants' natural setting, which makes it sensitive to the participants' social context. In addition, this approach allows for the collection of rich and detailed data which can be generated with limited resources (Creswell, 2013). The qualitative approach shares the same generalisability and bias limitations as previously mentioned, however qualitative research usually focusses on transferability (i.e. degree to which research findings can be applicable to similar populations in similar settings) instead of generalisability. Furthermore, it can be labour intensive (e.g. transcribing, categorisations, etc.) and may require specific skills (e.g. interview skills, etc.) (Creswell, 2013; Pham, 2018).

#### **4.2.3 The descriptive research design**

Descriptive research is a research method for describing and interpreting a phenomenon under study, and the data is often collected through qualitative approaches (Bless et al., 2013). A qualitative descriptive design was thought to be appropriate for this study as it aims to acquire information relating to 'what exists' with respect to the phenomena being investigated. It also aims to explore 'what', 'when', 'who', 'where' and 'how' questions regarding the specific research problem (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Bhattacharjee, 2012). In this study the participants were encouraged to describe their experiences of being lesbians at a South African university. A

descriptive research design is best suited for this study because it allows the participants to provide rich, in-depth accounts and descriptions of their experiences. A limitation to using a descriptive research design is that it can be difficult to analyse the data as the information does not neatly fit into clear standard categories or themes (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Bhattacharjee, 2012).

### **4.3 Research process**

#### **4.3.1 Location of the study**

The study was conducted at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus, in Scottsville, South Africa. This campus offers a wide range of academic programmes, in the broad areas of Science and Agriculture, Education, Law, Human and Management Sciences, within undergraduate and postgraduate training, where English is the medium of instruction. UKZN (2017a) recorded 46 520 registered students in 2016 where women accounted for 26 631 (57.2 percent) of the total student population. The campus student population is predominantly Black (71.6 percent), followed by Indian (21.9 percent), White (4.1 percent), Coloured (2.1 percent) and Other (0.4 percent). Many students are from previously disadvantaged backgrounds, with the majority of the Black UKZN student population's home language being *IsiZulu* (UKZN, 2017a).

#### **4.3.2 Sampling**

To locate potential participants, purposeful sampling was utilized. This was to ensure that the participants selected were UKZN students who self-identify as lesbians. This sampling technique was suitable for this qualitative study as it identifies participants who can provide information-rich data needed for the particular research questions. Furthermore, it assists in making the best use of limited resources (Palinkkas et al., 2015). However, a limitation to purposeful sampling is that due to the lack of random selection of participants, it is vulnerable to selection bias and error (Creswell, 2013).

The sample needed to be students studying at UKZN, Pietermaritzburg, as the research focused on the student population at UKZN. The Pietermaritzburg campus was selected for pragmatic reasons, as the researcher and supervisor were based on the campus. To minimise study costs related to

travelling and venue hire for the focus group discussion, the researcher elected to recruit participants from only the Pietermaritzburg campus.

The sample for the study were women who self-identified as lesbian, as the research focused on the experiences of lesbian students. Hence, the appropriate sample was women who self-identified as lesbian studying at UKZN. Although this was not deliberate, as an outcome of the advertising and recruitment process all of the participants were Black *IsiZulu* speaking, South Africa, female students who self-identified as lesbian with many being from rural areas that are culturally and religiously conservative (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010).

The participants needed to be over the age of 18 years in order to autonomously consent to participating in the research study, 18 years being the legal age for consent in South Africa (Strode, Slack, & Essack, 2010).

#### **4.3.3 Recruitment**

Permission was obtained from the Registrar's office (Appendix 1) to conduct research with students at UKZN, Pietermaritzburg campus, initially under the supervisor's broader study, using the same data collection approach. Ethical clearance was also granted from the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics committee to conduct the study (Appendix 2 for the supervisor's study & Appendix 3 for this research study).

Participants were recruited through advertisements distributed around the university (Appendix 4). Contact was made with the 'Campus HIV/AIDS Support Unit' (CHASU), where the LGBT Forum is located, and the advert was distributed around the CHASU premises, in order to gain the attention of the lesbian student population who formed part of the LGBT Forum. The advert provided the following information for recruiting of participants: the aim of the study, type of participants needed for the study, data collection process (i.e. focus group setting) and contact information. Participants who were interested in participating in the study made contact with the researcher via email, who then responded by emailing the information sheet (Appendix 5) for the participant to read. The information sheet contained all the relevant information regarding the

study, such as the reason for the study, potential risks and benefits, feedback to participants and psychosocial benefits of the study. The participants were informed of the amount of time that they would need to be available for the study.

However, this recruitment process was not particularly successful as the advert did not generate a sufficient number of participants. Harvey, Mitchell, Keeble, McNaughton Nicholls and Rahim (2014) suggest that lesbians may not be as open and forthcoming about their sexual orientation due to the fear of discrimination and maltreatment. Lesbian students may be reluctant to participate in the study, which may explain the low response rate. Therefore a snowball sampling technique was utilized. Snowball sampling is a method that allows the recruiting of more participants using the knowledge and contacts of current resources (e.g. other participants) to ensure all participants meet the suitability criteria for participation (Creswell, 2013; Kelly, 2006). In other words, this technique involves participants, known as ‘insiders’, assisting in the recruitment of other participants to join the study, hence it is useful in qualitative studies where access to participants is limited (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Creswell, 2013). This sampling technique can be effective at accessing closed communities or subcultures, as it relies on familiarity between the participants and those they refer, as well as participants being able to encourage others to participate in the study. Snowball sampling assists in breaking down the potential barriers that may have prevented some people from taking part in this study (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Harvey et al., 2014).

In this study snowball sampling meant that the participants recruited through the advert, which were a total of three participants, were asked to assist in the recruiting of more participants. The three participants assisted in recruiting a further five students, which meant that there were potentially a total of eight participants to join the study. However, two of these students were not willing to participate due to time constraints and lack of availability. Therefore, a total of six students agreed to participate in the study. The snowball sampling technique is appropriate for this study as it is well suited for qualitative research of a sensitive and personal nature. However, a disadvantage is that the participants may know the identities of each other and the sample is drawn from a particular network of people, which may result in participants sharing similar views, beliefs

and experiences about the phenomena being investigated. Hence, this may limit the range of perspectives and reduce variation of findings (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Creswell, 2013).

Participants were informed in the information sheet (Appendix 5) that was emailed to them before the study commenced, that they would be given a R30 gift voucher at the end of the focus group to use at the university coffee shop. The R30 gift voucher was used to compensate participants for their time, to symbolise an expression of gratitude for participation and recognise the contributions that participants made to the research (Zutlevics, 2016). However, as participants were informed of this before the study commenced, it could have been seen as an incentive to attract participants to join the study, which was not the intention. An incentive can be useful in increasing the number of participants opting to be involved in a study. However, a disadvantage is that it can be seen as a coercive practice that undermines autonomous decision-making, especially if the participants are from poor socio-economic backgrounds (Zutlevics, 2016).

The final sample consisted of 6 participants. According to Kitzinger (1995) the ideal size for a focus group is between 4 and 8 participants as smaller groups are easier to recruit, easier to manage and control, and are more comfortable and relaxed for participants to share personal and uncomfortable issues. Furthermore, smaller groups allow participants to share and participate in discussions more often and for longer periods of time, especially if groups are limited to a timeframe (Creswell, 2013). However, a disadvantage is that it limits the amount of data gathered, as fewer participants will generate fewer experiences due to the group being small (Kitzinger, 1995). All six participants were female students, who self-identified as lesbian, and studied at UKZN, Pietermaritzburg campus.

#### **4.3.4 Data collection instrument**

*'The Auntie Stella toolkit: Teenagers talk about sex, life, and relationships'* is an innovative reproductive health toolkit that was used in this study as a data collection instrument during the data collection process. The researcher's supervisor received permission from the 'Training and Research Support Council' (TARSC) (Appendix 6), which is the organisation who assisted in the development of the Auntie Stella (AS) material, to conduct studies using the AS material in a

South African context. The researcher applied, under the auspices of her supervisor's study (ethical clearance number is: HSS/0445/017) to use the AS material in research with students at the UKZN campus (Appendix 2).

*'The Auntie Stella toolkit: Teenagers talk about sex, life, and relationships'* was originally developed in 1997 from research conducted around reproductive health rights which recognized the need for adolescents to acquire more information relating to reproductive health issues in Zimbabwe (Harnmeijer, 2001). The Auntie Stella (AS) material provided a platform for gathering information around reproductive health issues and became a useful tool for assisting adolescents in obtaining and accessing information and support networks for these particular issues (Harnmeijer, 2001; Gwarada, 2009). Since then, the AS material has been revised to include various topics, such as peer, social and economic pressures and difficulties; and adapted to be applied in diverse contexts (Training and Research Support Centre [TARSC], 2006). The AS material can be viewed on-line at [www.tarsc.org](http://www.tarsc.org) (TARSC, 2006).

The AS material uses a format which is similar to the 'agony aunt' format which one might find in magazines or newspapers, and is based on a series of letters, written by 'young people' to Auntie Stella. These letters draw upon experiences and narratives of young persons living in southern and east Africa. Each letter has an accompanying response which deals with the various personal, emotional and social issues that are in the letter (Leach & Humphreys, 2007). These letters have been developed into question-and-answer cards and additional talking points and action points are also included on the cards. All of these form part of an activity pack which can then be used as focus points for discussion within small groups (Kaim & Ndlovu, 2000).

There are three steps that are involved when using the AS material. The first step involves participants reading through a letter, in which the author is seeking assistance with a specific issue. The letter is written to an agony aunt called Auntie Stella. Each letter is written from a different person's perspective, which provide a diverse range of beliefs and attitudes regarding various issues. This makes the letters relevant and relatable (Kaim & Ndlovu, 2000; Ntinga, 2019). In the second step participants are encouraged to discuss and unpack the particular issue addressed in the

letter. In order to prompt and assist group discussions talking points are offered at the end of each letter. The third step requires participants to read through the response letter from Auntie Stella. The response letter provides suggestions on how to deal with that particular issue. There are also action points included at the end of the response letter which offer possible actions that could be taken to address the issue. This provides the space for participants to learn new ways of dealing with potential issues (see Appendix 7 for an example of an AS card) (Kaim & Ndlovu, 2000; Ntinga, 2019).

The AS material was beneficial for this study as it provided a means to generate discussion points and facilitate conversation during the data collection process. Furthermore, the AS card was useful in encouraging critical thinking, reflection and assistance in assessing risks, options and support networks for participants regarding the research topic (Leach & Humphreys, 2007; Gwarada, 2009). Particularly card number 34, i.e. *“I’m gay – will anyone love me?”* (Appendix 7), was a suitable point of reference and guide for this study as it addresses the topic of social pressures around sexual orientation. A limitation of using the AS material in this study, is that the participants may not have related to certain aspects of the card, as the card was designed for adolescent learners in other African countries. However, this was overcome by adapting the card to suit students at a tertiary education level.

Card number 34, i.e. *“I’m gay – will anyone love me?”*, was adapted to suit the age, content and site of the students participating in the focus group (Appendix 8). The AS card number 34 focuses on an issue relating to sexuality from the perspective of a school-going female learner from Zimbabwe. Therefore, the age of the female was changed to 18 years. The name on the card was changed to an *IsiZulu* name – as *IsiZulu* is the most commonly spoken home language in Pietermaritzburg (UKZN, 2017a). Certain terminology was changed to suit the South African context. For example, ‘Form One’ was changed to ‘school’ as South Africa does not use ‘Forms’ within the schooling system. In addition, the talking points and action points were adapted to be more appropriate to a university context. For example, an action point was adapted to include discussions around organisations on ‘campus at UKZN’ (as opposed to ‘in general’) that provide support.

#### **4.3.5 Data collection**

A focus group was the main form of data collection. Focus groups, which are usually run by a facilitator, involve a group of selected participants who have informal discussions related to the specific phenomenon under investigation. Through informal group interaction, focus groups facilitate conversation on a certain topic, with the aim of obtaining participants' perceptions, ideas and experiences on the research topic (Bless et al., 2013; Litosseliti, 2003). A focus group was best suited for this study as this methodology is not time intensive, it is convenient, and it gathers rich and in-depth data through encouraging individuals to discuss the topic in a more natural and relaxed way, i.e. participants ask questions, exchange personal narratives and comment on each other's experiences and viewpoints (Bless et al., 2013; Kelly, 2006; Kitzinger, 1995). In addition, participants are able to learn from each other, and this was particularly beneficial considering the sensitive nature of the phenomenon under study. Focus groups are especially beneficial when the researcher has a number of open-ended questions that encourage participants to explore the topic in various ways (Kitzinger, 1995). However, a limitation of this methodology is that participants may influence each other or may be persuaded or dominated by another participant, therefore the findings may be skewed (Bless et al., 2013).

Initially the aim was to conduct two focus groups with the same set of participants in both groups, however only one focus group was conducted due to time constraints and availability of participants. There were two stages to the data collection process, which were merged into one focus group. The first stage was the completion of the focus group discussion. The second stage was an action step, which included the writing of a letter by each participant to an agony aunt named Auntie Stella, in order to provide further data.

During the first stage of the data collection process, a focus group was held which used the adapted AS card number 34: "*I'm gay – will anyone love me?*" (Appendix 8), and followed the three steps involved when using AS cards. The first step required the researcher to read through the letter written by the student to Auntie Stella seeking assistance regarding social pressures around sexuality. The second step involved encouraging participants to discuss and unpack the issue

addressed in the letter, and discussed the talking points offered at the end of the letter. The third step involved the researcher to read through the response letter from Auntie Stella and the participants were encouraged to discuss and unpack Auntie Stella's response, and discussed the action points offered at the end of the Auntie Stella's response. In order to prompt further discussion during these steps, a semi-structured focus group schedule (Appendix 9) was also utilised, as the AS material did not generate enough data required for exploring lesbian students experiences within a South African university. The semi-structured focus group schedule consisted of discussion points that were organised and clustered into specific topics according to the research questions, which provided further discussion points regarding lesbian student's experiences at the UKZN campus. These questions also assisted in focusing on the challenges that lesbian students may experience at UKZN. Semi-structured focus group schedules consist of open-ended questions and topic areas, as this allows the researcher to remain focused by providing basic guidelines and topic areas to be explored. It also allows for flexibility, for certain topics to emerge that might not have been taken into account during the planning phases (Kelly, 2006). However, a limitation is that the participants' discussions may be diverted onto topics unrelated to the phenomenon under investigation producing data that is irrelevant, and this then requires the researcher to be skilled in controlling and redirecting participants' discussions back on topic (Kitzinger, 1995; Litosseliti, 2003).

During the second stage of the data collection process, participants were asked to complete the action step which involved writing personal letters to Auntie Stella regarding an issue that they would like assistance on relating to challenges around sexuality. This assisted in providing further data.

Two-and-a-half hours were allocated to the data collection process. This was to ensure that there was sufficient time for the researcher to establish rapport with the participants, and to ensure both stages of the data collection process could be completed (Litosseliti, 2003). According to Kitzinger (1995), the ideal duration of focus groups is between one to two hours; therefore, the focus group session was two hours in duration, and an additional 30 minutes was spent on the action step. Participants were informed in advance that they needed to be available for the full two and a half

hours. The focus group was conducted in English, as English is the primary medium of instruction at UKZN. A limitation of this research is that the focus group was not conducted in the participants' home language, which is *IsiZulu*, therefore this may limit the depth of information gathered as participants may have found it difficult to express themselves fully in English. However most of the participants were fluent in English, and did not seem constrained by the use of English as a medium of discussion. The focus group was conducted in February 2019 and took place in a convenient, comfortable and quiet venue in the Psychology building on the Pietermaritzburg campus.

#### ***4.3.5.1 The focus group process***

At the start of the focus group the researcher handed out the information sheet (Appendix 5) and the consent form (Appendix 10). Informed consent is the process through which participants voluntarily give their permission to participate in the study after being informed of all the relevant information relating to the study and research expectations (Kitzinger, 1995; Litosseliti, 2003). During the focus group, ten minutes were allocated to discussing the details of the study, explaining the particulars of informed consent and answering any questions the participants had regarding the study. A consent form was signed by the participant only if they fully understood all the details of the study, including voluntary participation and freedom to refuse or withdraw from the study at any point. Each participant was also informed that confidentiality is limited in a focus group setting, therefore participants needed to restrict what they say to what they were comfortable sharing in public (Kitzinger, 1995). This limitation is due to other participants participating in the focus group, hence full confidentiality cannot be guaranteed on the participants' behalf (Kitzinger, 1995). However, participants were requested to preserve the confidentiality of all participants by not speaking of what was discussed in the focus group to people outside of the study. Furthermore, participants were assured that all information obtained during the study would remain confidential and any information that could identify them would be modified or removed, and pseudonyms would be used (Kitzinger, 1995).

During the focus group, the adapted card number 34, i.e. "*I'm gay – will anyone love me?*" (Appendix 8), was read aloud and the talking points were discussed. Thereafter the accompanying

response from Auntie Stella was read aloud and the action points were discussed. During and after these discussions the semi-structured focus group schedule (Appendix 9) was utilised to generate more discussion points. After the focus group discussion the participants were asked to complete an action step which involved each participant writing a brief letter to Auntie Stella (which could be anonymous) regarding a particular issue that they, or someone they knew, were facing on campus due to their sexual orientation . These letters provided further insights into the participants' experiences.

To assist the data analysis process the focus group was recorded with an audio recorder, with participants' permission (Appendix 11). This was to ensure the researcher captured the participants' use of language, expression and tone of voice. Although audio recording provides a good record of data, a limitation is that it can be intrusive for participants (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). However, all of the participants agreed to the recording of the discussion and the audio recorder was placed in a discreet location within the venue to record the participants' discussions clearly without being intrusive.

#### **4.3.6 Data processing**

Once the focus group was completed, the researcher began to process the data. Initially, the researcher listened to the focus group recordings several times before commencing the transcription process in order to familiarize herself with the data. The participants hand written letters to Auntie Stella, produced during the action step, was typed into a Microsoft Word document. The Jefferson transcription system (Appendix 12) was used by the researcher to transcribe the audio recordings of the focus group discussions into written text in order for the data to be analysed and interpreted. This transcription technique utilizes a system of symbols and punctuation in a manner that tries to capture *how* the participants' words were spoken. The Jefferson transcription system is a suitable method of transcription for focus group recordings as it allows for in-depth analysis of group discussions and interactions (Markle, West & Rich, 2011). It is useful for research that involves a detailed analysis of conversations. The system enables the researcher to code and capture the nuances of a spoken conversation, which is invaluable to the analysis process. For example, it indicates using symbols that the speaker is emphasising speech,

which could be conveyed by volume, tempo, pitch or voice quality. It also indicates sounds, such as laughter or sighing (Jefferson, 1984). However, a limitation of this technique is that transcribing spoken word into written language can lose some of the intended meaning, as these symbols do not perfectly represent the complexities of spoken communication. Another limitation is that this transcription technique is time consuming and labour intensive (Markle et al., 2011).

#### **4.3.7 Data analysis**

A process of thematic analysis was used to analyse the transcribed data from the focus group and the participants' letters. Thematic analysis is a qualitative technique that is used to identify, analyse and report patterns (i.e. themes) identified within the data, as well as variations and discrepancies within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This technique was best suited for this study as the research is of a subjective nature. This technique enables the research to systematically organise and interpret the primary data, enabling a more robust data analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Although this data analysis technique is flexible and enables the researcher to look for patterns emerging from the data, it can be difficult to analyse the data as it does not neatly fit into categories or themes. Therefore this methodology does involve some subjective judgement and interpretation (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The data analysis process began by the researcher familiarizing herself with the data through reviewing the transcript and looking for reoccurring themes that related to the research questions and literature. This was achieved by looking for reoccurring topics, naturally occurring categories, metaphors, similarities and differences, as well as any missing data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The initial set of codes and themes was generated from the data where the researcher noted recurring topics being discussed. The researcher began sorting and organising extracts in the data into potential themes. These potential themes were reorganised and grouped into overarching themes and subthemes, this process was guided by the data, the research questions and the literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In this study, the process of thematic analysis meant that, each time a participant described, for example, experiencing negative psychological consequences due to their sexual identity, such as

‘shame’, ‘anxiety’, or ‘depression’, these specific extracts were coded. The transcribed data was printed in paper format and different coloured highlighters were used to code and identify specific themes in the data. The transcribed data was also in digital format (i.e. saved in a Microsoft Word document), and these specific extracts were copied from the transcribed data in the Microsoft Word document and pasted into a Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet under an initial code labelled ‘internal impact’. These specific extracts under the initial code ‘internal impact’ were then sorted, organised and grouped into a potential theme initially labelled ‘mental health challenges’. However, once the potential themes (which were guided by the emerging data and the research questions) were integrated with the literature, they were re-organised and grouped into the overarching themes and subthemes as they are now presented in this dissertation. An overarching theme that emerged from the data was the ‘challenges experienced’, and under this theme the four manifestations of stigma, drawn from Pryor and Reeder’s (2011) model, were used as the four sub-themes: public stigma, self-stigma, stigma by association and structural stigma. Pryor and Reeder’s four manifestations of stigma were used as the sub-themes as their model is an academically robust framework, and the four themes provided clear categories for grouping the data. The theme initially labelled ‘mental health challenges’ was re-named ‘self-stigma’. The themes were organized in a way that allowed for effective data analysis, in order to produce a report with rich descriptions and critical interpretations (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

There were a number of themes that emerged from the data analysis process. However, due to the word count limitations of this dissertation, the researcher decided to exclude certain themes from the Findings chapter (Chapter 5). For example, ‘coping strategies’ utilised by participants on campus, was another overarching theme that emerged from the data analysis. However, considering the word count limitations of this document, and the fact that this theme was mentioned only a few times by participants, the researcher made the decision to exclude this theme from the final dissertation. This was only done when the data did not produce enough information to discuss these themes in detail and these were themes that were not central to the research question. Other themes that were mentioned too few times to be considered fully within this dissertation include: institutional discrimination within religious institutions, as well as in other

African countries' policies and legislation. These two sub-themes were removed from the Structural stigma section.

#### **4.4 Ethical considerations**

In order to improve the ethical sensitivity and enhance the scientific value of this study; Emanuel, Wendler and Grady's (2008) ethical framework will be used to discuss the ethical principles that were considered throughout the research process. Emanuel et al.'s (2008) framework provides a thorough and methodical guide to conducting ethical research. Emanuel et al. (2008) outline eight ethical principles that minimise the potential for harm or exploitation of research participants. Although Emanuel et al.'s (2008) ethical framework was developed for biomedical sciences research, Wassenaar and Mamotte (2012) recommend that this framework be used in social science research. Tsoka-Gwegweni and Wassenaar (2014) argue that Emanuel et al.'s (2008) framework can be used in all settings and contexts as the eight ethical principles are comprehensive, universal and applicable. The eight ethical principles are: collaborative partnership, social value, scientific validity (i.e. credibility, dependability and transferability), fair participant selection, favourable risk/benefit ratio, independent ethics review, informed consent, and ongoing respect for participants and study communities. Reflexivity is included and discussed thereafter.

##### **4.4.1 Collaborative partnership**

The principle of collaborative partnership entails that researchers should include and collaborate with those involved in the study, such as relevant local community representatives, in all stages of the research process in order to respect the context of the study and share responsibilities and benefits (Emanuel et al., 2008; Tsoka-Gwegweni & Wassenaar, 2014). The participants in this study were not involved in developing, planning or conducting of the research process. However, the study ensured that the researcher and the methods of the study were respectful and sensitive to the traditions, cultural practices, context and values of the participants. This was achieved through investigating the UKZN campus community, researching current literature on the topic and familiarising oneself with the traditions, cultural practices, context and values of the student population at UKZN. Furthermore, permission was granted from the relevant authorities in order

to access the study settings and participants to conduct the research. Permission was obtained from the Registrar's office (Appendix 1).

#### **4.4.2 Social value**

The principle of social value ensures that the research conducted is beneficial and of value to the research participants, local and research community, and society (Emanuel et al., 2008; Tsoka-Gwegweni & Wassenaar, 2014). The beneficiaries of this study are the research participants themselves and possibly other lesbian students in university settings. A direct benefit is that through participation the participants may have gained additional insights or peer support. An indirect benefit is that the study focuses on an under researched and stigmatised population therefore this study could potentially add to the limited research or possibly inform university policy.

#### **4.4.3 Scientific validity – credibility, dependability and transferability**

For this qualitative study to be considered valid and reliable and to be recognised as scientific research, the researcher employed the principles of credibility, dependability and transferability in the research design (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Silverman, 2006).

Credibility is gained when the researcher ensures that the research findings correspond with the research data and that the inferences from the findings are plausible (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Silverman, 2006). In this study the researcher enhanced credibility by utilizing well established qualitative research methods for ensuring that the data would be collected accurately, such as using a focus group technique, with an open-ended focus group schedule. Furthermore, audio recordings were used to document findings and transcribed using the Jeffersonian conventions for transcription. The transcriptions provided a more objective and reliable record of the data, and aided interpretation. If participants felt uncomfortable at any point in the study, they were informed throughout the study that they were free to refuse or discontinue participation. This was to ensure that participation in the study was voluntary and that all participants were willing to be involved. The extracts from the data are provided to support the findings of the research. This demonstrates

to the reader that the research findings are congruent with the data and enables the reader to understand the researcher's analysis of the transcription. Furthermore, the researcher was reflexive throughout the study, which was accomplished by assuming a critical stance, scrutinizing the full research process and reflecting on how her own identity and biases may affect the research process and findings, which promoted validity.

According to Silverman (2006), a challenge for qualitative research is the problem of 'anecdotalism', where researchers try to warrant validity by ensuring that their findings are based on critical investigation as oppose to a few well-chosen extracts in their data set. This study tried to avoid the issue of 'anecdotalism' by including all the data from the focus group discussion and the participants' letters, and examining all the data thoroughly during the analysis process. Furthermore, the researcher sought to systematically falsify or refute initial ideas, generalisations and assumptions regarding relationships within the data to ensure objectivity (Silverman, 2006). This study utilised Silverman's (2006) principles during the analysis process to enhance validity, by adopting the constant comparative method (i.e. the researcher ensured that there was more than one extract to test out a particular hypothesis), comprehensive data treatment (i.e. the researcher ensured that all data extracts were included in the analysis process), and deviant-case analysis (i.e. the researcher included extracts in the data that did not fit with emerging hypotheses or the theoretical framework).

Dependability is gained when the researcher ensures that the study has the ability to be replicated under similar settings resulting in similar research findings (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Silverman, 2006). To enhance dependability, this study has provided detailed information regarding the research methodology; its aims, rationale, research questions, sampling decisions and the data collection and analysis procedures.

Transferability refers to the degree to which research findings can be applicable to similar populations in similar settings (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Transferability was enhanced by clearly describing the sampling and recruitment process, and adequately explaining the data collection and analysis process.

#### **4.4.4 Fair participant selection**

The principle of fair participant selection ensures that the sample for the study consist of participants to whom the research question applies, to protect vulnerable populations (Tsoka-Gwegweni & Wassenaar, 2014; Wassenaar, 2006). In this study, the research objectives were the main determinant for participant selection, as in order to qualify for this study participants needed to self-identify as lesbian. Adverts (Appendix 4) were placed around the university campus which allowed for any female student who self-identified as lesbian on UKZN Pietermaritzburg campus to voluntarily participate in the study. A potential limitation of the sample is that snowball sampling was used to recruit participants. Therefore recruitment of participants was drawn from a particular group of individuals, which meant that it was not possible that every self-identifying lesbian student had the opportunity to participate in the study (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Creswell, 2013). This limitation could have been improved by using alternative sampling strategies, such as approaching a wider range of organisations in order to recruit participants (such as CHASU, UKZN Student Support Services and other student organisations).

#### **4.4.5 Favourable risk/benefit ratio**

The principle of favourable risk/benefit ratio ensures that the researcher clearly identifies all the potential risks, harms and discomforts of the study to the participants, as well as identifying all potential benefits. The researcher should also make clear how these risks will be mitigated in order to minimise risk to the participants, further, the benefits should justify the risks of the study (Tsoka-Gwegweni & Wassenaar, 2014; Wassenaar, 2006). This was considered to be a low-risk study, as participants were asked only to provide details of their experiences. Participants' responses were kept confidential and demographic data or contact information was captured, to minimise the risk of negative consequences to the participants as a result of their participating in this study. Participants were advised in the information sheet (Appendix 5), about possible risks and benefits of participating in the study. One possible risk of the study was that the topic being discussed was of a sensitive nature. If participants felt emotionally upset or required counselling services,

arrangement had been made for them to be referred to the UKZN Child and Family Centre (Appendix 13). However, no participants requested this during or after the study.

#### **4.4.6 Independent ethics review**

The principle of independent ethics review ensures that the researcher minimises risk relating to conflict of interest and ensures public accountability of the study (Emanuel et al., 2008). This study obtained all the necessary protocols and underwent an independent ethics review before research commenced. The researcher conducted this study under the auspices of her supervisor's study, which has ethical clearance from the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics committee, number is "HSS/0445/017", to use the AS material in research with students studying at UKZN (Appendix 2). In addition, the researcher's supervisor also received permission from TARSC (Appendix 6) to conduct studies using the AS material in a South African context. Permission was obtained from the Registrar's office (Appendix 1) to conduct research with students at UKZN, on the Pietermaritzburg campus. Ethical clearance was also granted from the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics committee to conduct the proposed study (Appendix 3). Protocol reference number: HSS/0684/018M.

#### **4.4.7 Informed consent**

The principle of informed consent ensures that the researcher shows respect for participants' autonomy and that participants are fully informed before they decide about participating in the research (Emanuel et al., 2008). To ensure the participants' autonomy, the participants were informed verbally and via email about the research aims and expectations – this was done before agreeing to participate in the study. Participants were provided an information sheet (Appendix 5) which contained all the relevant information regarding the study. Each participant read and signed a consent form (Appendix 10). Respondents were aware that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any stage of the study, without fear of penalty or negative consequence. Consent to audio record the focus group was also obtained from participants (Appendix 11).

#### **4.4.8 Ongoing respect for participants and study communities**

The principle of ongoing respect for participants and study communities ensures that the researcher treat the participants and study community with respect during all stages of the research, and that all information obtained remains confidential (Emanuel et al., 2008; Wassenaar, 2006). The researcher ensured participants were treated with respect during and after this study by: clearly explaining the voluntary nature of participating in the study; monitoring the participants' emotional state and well-being throughout the research process (i.e. if participants displayed distress or were upset during the focus group, they would be referred for counselling); participants were informed about limits to confidentiality; participants were thanked and compensated with a R30 gift voucher (to use at the university coffee shop) for their time and participation; and participants were provided with refreshments during the focus group.

Participants were informed that the data and findings of this study were for the purposes of writing this dissertation. They were made aware that this document would be viewed and assessed by a member of staff from Psychology at UKZN, as well as an external examiner. The possibility of publication of the dissertation, as well as the potential of the findings being used in other research studies or journal articles, was also made clear to the participants. The privacy of participants has been respected throughout this research process, as the identity of the participants has been kept confidential throughout the write up of the research dissertation. Participants were also informed that any information that could identify them would be modified or removed, and pseudonyms would be used. Participants were informed that the findings of the study would be made available to them at their request.

All written and digital data from this study is stored securely. Written data is stored in a secured facility where only the researcher has access. Electronic data is stored in an encrypted (password protected) folder which only the researcher and her supervisor have access. All audio recordings will be deleted after the study and after 5 years all data will be shredded or deleted.

#### **4.4.9 Reflexivity**

This qualitative study adopts an interpretive paradigm, which considers the nature of reality to be relative and subjective and the nature of acquiring knowledge to be intersubjective. This

ideological position necessitates that an interpretive and interactional method be used; the researcher is considered to be an instrument who performs an active role in the research process. The researcher cannot overlook his/her involvement and influence on all stages of the research (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Kelly, 2006). The researcher brings their own perspectives, belief systems, cultural preferences, interpretations, biases and values to the study, making it difficult for the researcher to take a neutral, detached or objective stance throughout the research process. Reflexivity takes this into account and encourages the researcher to be more critically aware of their position and the active role that they play in the research process. Reflexivity is a continuous process of being aware of ones' self and how that may be impacting on the research process, the participants and the data that is emerging (Haynes, 2012).

In this study, the researcher, originally from Cape Town, is an English-speaking white middle class female master's student in the social sciences, studying Clinical Psychology, at the same tertiary institution as the participants in this study. In contrast, all six participants were *IsiZulu*-speaking Black female undergraduate or postgraduate students, with many being from rural areas in South Africa that are culturally and religiously conservative (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010). The researcher's socio-cultural background, norms and values, and experiences are different to those of the participants. The researcher worked to be aware of how this may have biased, influenced or impacted on the research process and findings. In order to try and overcome these limitations the researcher consulted her supervisor regularly and read research methodology literature (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Kelly, 2006). The researcher also investigated the UKZN campus community; familiarised herself with the traditions, cultural practices, context and values of the student population at UKZN; and immersed herself in literature relating to lesbian students' experiences in a South African context before the study commenced. This was to ensure that the researcher gained insight and knowledge regarding the target population and context before commencing with fieldwork, in order to enhance the researcher's understanding of the social context, improve her self-awareness and reflexivity.

Considering the researcher was female, this was thought to be an advantage, as the female participants may be more likely to discuss personal and sensitive issues openly and freely with a

female researcher as opposed to a male researcher. This appeared to be the case, as participants seemed to be open and willing to reflect on personal and sensitive topics, such as discussing women being coerced into sex. Although the researcher consulted her supervisor as well as immersed herself in the literature regarding qualitative research, this was her first experience as a qualitative researcher, which may have influenced the quality of the research and its findings. The researcher was preoccupied with, and focused on, conducting the research accurately during the focus group, unfortunately this reduced her ability to concentrate on the participants' discussion. This was apparent in the recordings of the focus group, listening to the recording of the conversation afterwards the researcher became aware she posed a number of close-ended questions, did not ask sufficient follow-up or clarifying questions and followed the focus group schedule firmly – rather than allowing the conversation to flow more naturally.

#### **4.5 Summation**

This chapter was divided into three sections. The first section described the study's guiding philosophical underpinnings and assumptions, and outlined the specifics of the qualitative research methodology. It also provided an explanation of the descriptive research design employed in the study. In the next section the research process was examined, which presented justifications and limitations within each process. This included a description of the purposeful and snowball sampling techniques utilised and the particulars of the recruitment process employed in the study. Furthermore, the procedures for the data collection process, in the form of a focus group; and the data analysis process, which used thematic analysis, were explained. The last section discussed the measures taken to strengthen the ethical and scientific value of the study, by using Emanuel et al.'s (2008) ethical framework which reflected on eight ethical principles that minimise the potential for exploitation or harm to participants in the study. Thereafter, reflexivity was explored.

The next chapter presents the findings of the research, which were derived from a thematic analysis of the focus group discussion and the participants' letters.

## **Chapter 5: FINDINGS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This study aimed to explore lesbian students' experiences at a South African university. This chapter presents the findings of the research, which were derived from a thematic analysis of the focus group discussion and the participants' letters. In this chapter Pryor and Reeder's (2011) model will be used as the framework through which the participants' experiences are described. Pryor and Reeder's (2011) theoretical model distinguishes four manifestations of stigma: public stigma, self-stigma, stigma by association and structural stigma. Participants' experiences are grouped and discussed under these four sub-themes. This study set out to describe lesbian students' experiences on the UKZN campus, the dominant theme that emerged from the thematic analysis of the data was 'challenges experienced'. One focus group was run by the researcher, which consisted of six participants. The sample consisted of female students who identify as lesbian and who study at the Pietermaritzburg campus at UKZN.

Extracts from the data are provided to illustrate the various themes and issues discussed by participants. Additional information is included in square brackets, this is for clarification. In the presentation of the extracts, the extract either comes from the Focus Group discussion, represented as 'FG', or from the letters that the participants wrote during the action step, represented as 'L'. These letters are numbered accordingly, example 'L. 1' represents letter 1. All extracts are presented with line numbers. This indicates the exact line numbers from the transcribed text where the extract can be found. The capital letter 'P' represents a focus group participant. A number is used to code the participants. For example, 'P. 1' to represent Participant 1, 'P. 2' to represent Participant 2, etc. The sample for the study were women who self-identified as lesbian. Although this was not deliberate, as an outcome of the recruitment process all of the participants were Black *IsiZulu* speaking, South Africa, female students who self-identified as lesbian with many being from rural areas that are culturally and religiously conservative (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010).

### **5.2 Challenges experienced**

An overarching theme that emerged from the data analysis was the ‘challenges experienced’ on campus by the participants due to their sexual identities. Pryor and Reeder’s (2011) model, delineating four manifestations of stigma, was used to provide the sub-themes. This created the framework used to narrate the participants’ experiences in this chapter. The accounts of the participants in this study will now be examined through the four manifestations of stigma: public stigma, self-stigma, stigma by association and structural stigma. These are discussed below.

### 5.2.1 Public stigma

In Extracts 1 and 2 below, Participants 4 and 5 construct accounts of public stigma, which they experienced or observed, that involved negative psychological, emotional and behavioural responses towards their lesbian identities.

Extract 1 below was taken from the Focus Group when participants were discussing what it might be like for lesbian women living in other African countries. In Participant 4’s account below she describes an incident at a social gathering where she explicitly asserts her lesbian identity, and this led to a situation where public stigma occurred in the form of threatening and destructive behaviour (“*he trashed the place all around*”, lines 641–642) and physical threat (“*was SO angry*”, line 637), which results in social exclusion (“*So we had to leave*”, line 647).

#### Extract 1: FG

631 P4: So this ↑guy, he started hitting on me you know. Asking me out  
632 through:out the ↑whole night. And I told him I'm GAY. Heh heh.  
633 And he was like, “↑gay?” And suddenly he said, “you’re gay? Okay  
634 come sit here, I want to know everything about being gay.” Okay,  
635 so I sat next to him and he started you know, and said, “what do  
636 you fe:el? Do you have a girlfriend?” All those questions, and this  
637 guy that was asking me out was SO angry. And he was braaing the  
638 meat, you know he burnt every:thing Heh heh (unclear) The other  
639 two guys, they’re from Zimbabwe and the other two were from  
640 that, I forgot the place. And then this other guy, I don’t have you

641 guys know (unclear). So the guy was all over. He trashed the place  
642 all around. >It was hectic like everything was all over the place< like,  
643 okay. I asked what's wrong. And the other friend says no [it's] his  
644 country, being lesbian is forbidden you know, it's wrong. It's against  
645 the law. And I think you guys should leave because he comes from  
646 a very religious family, and he'll even harm you. Ok. Ok. So my  
647 friends, >and my friends are straight<. So we had to leave.

In this account, Participant 4 presents herself as being near a man who is constructed as openly expressing his romantic affections for her (“he started hitting on me you know. Asking me out”, line 631), however he becomes really angry (“*was SO angry*”, line 637) in response to her disclosing her sexual identity. In response to the man’s continuous romantic remarks towards her, “through:out the <sup>↑</sup>whole night” (line 638), she responds with a statement about her identity, which she does quite firmly, as she shouts (which is indicated by the use of capitalised text), proclaiming that she is “*GAY*” (line 632). In the participant’s account of the interaction, particularly in her description of his response – “<sup>↑</sup>*gay?*” (line 633) (with emphasis seen in the rise in pitch, indicated by the up arrow) and “*what do you fe:el? Do you have a girlfriend?*” *All those questions*” (lines 635–636) (with emphasis also seen in her prolonging the sound of the word “*fe:el*”, indicated by the colon) – she constructs him as surprised by her statement and shocked by her asserting her lesbian identity. In her use of the words “*was SO angry*” (line 637) she positions him as enraged by this news.

Furthermore, in her use of the words “*the guy was all over*” (line 641), she constructs the man as out of control, as physically and emotionally distressed by her statement, and positions him as violent in his actions as “*he trashed the place all around*” (lines 641–642). She also constructs his response as out of proportion, as out of control, as she positions his actions as wild, unmanageable, “*all over*” (line 641), “*all around*” (line 642), “*all over the place*” (line 642). She constructs the situation as being “*hectic*” (line 642), as a violent and out of control situation. In her account, her statement of identity is not accepted and there is an extreme response, where she is met with rage, and the potential of physical violence. In presenting this account she constructs her expressing her

sexual identity as an act that may elicit extreme responses, so much so that the situation becomes unsafe and dangerous.

She shares that there were other people at the party, “*other two guys, they’re from Zimbabwe and the other two*” (lines 638–639) and “*the other friend*” (line 643), and constructs a situation where this response is not just from one person, there are others who share this response to a lesbian identity and find this response to be acceptable. This can be seen when Participant 4 begins to question the response that she is receiving and turns to the man’s friend, who she describes as “*the other friend*” (line 643), to try and find out what is going on (“*I asked what’s wrong*”, line 643). In using the words “*the other friend says no [it’s] his country*” (lines 643–644) she constructs “*the other friend*” (line 643) as providing the necessary information to explain why the man is upset and this also illustrates that he understands why the man is upset. He claims that the man is just stating what he believes, however in his telling them to leave (“*I think you guys should leave because he comes from a very religious family, and he’ll even harm you*”, lines 645–646), he is making it clear that if that man wanted to harm them he may not intercede. In her narrative, the participant positions herself, and her friends (whom she identifies as straight), as affected by this potential threat, “*So we had to leave*” (line 647).

In the participant’s account of the interaction in Extract 1, she initially positions herself as trying to be empowered and assertive, as she positions herself as trying to take a positive approach to her gender identity by asserting this with her statement “*I’m GAY*” (line 632). She then constructs the men’s responses to her trying to claim her gender identity as legitimate threats of violence. She constructs the situation as threatening and positions herself as taking evasive actions and withdrawing, in order to protect herself and her friends, “*So we had to leave*” (line 647).

In Extract 2 below there is also evidence of public stigma directed towards a homosexual identity, which is in the form of verbal abuse. Extract 2 is from the Focus Group; participants were asked about UKZN’s role and responsibility in the protection of lesbian students on campus.

### **Extract 2: FG**

1062 P5: And especially, okay not especially, it ↑can be lecturers, but I think the RMS  
1063 really needs the most training. Because I ↑am familiar with some  
1064 staff members. So, the RMS the security guards, so we'll just ↑sit  
1065 and chat. And then, let's say maybe a lesbian walks  
1066 by and you'll just ↑hear those com:ments like, “hey, she stays with  
1067 girls. How can they even allow that? I wouldn't even allow them  
1068 close to me” (.).It's all negative comments (.) like they'd be like  
1069 “↑why would want to be like a guy if you're a girl.” They, they  
1070 ↑don't sound educated and they ↑don't sound welcoming. ↑One  
1071 even said that “if she was in trouble, I don't think I'd respond that  
1072 quickly because she would probably be in a female bathroom,  
1073 instead of a male bathroom”, so it's just something they don't stand  
1074 up for like, ag, what is it, it's just shunned upon yeah, because they  
1075 don't have proper, yeah, proper knowledge

In her description, there are some lecturers that are constructed as lacking the skills required to deal with homosexual students, however the participant positions the RMS staff as being in greater need of acquiring skills and training for dealing with and protecting homosexual students: “*it ↑can be lecturers, but I think the RMS really needs the most training*” (lines 1062–1063). Participant 5 constructs the RMS staff as being judgmental and critical, in their use of the words “*how can they even allow that*” (line 1067). In these words, she positions the RMS staff as being critical of a particular group, “*they*” (line 1067) which might be ‘the university’ or ‘the community’. Furthermore, the RMS staff are critical of the context or the institution permitting the existence of a ‘type’ of person. They use the word “*that*” (line 1067), which objectifies the person, the lesbian identity, and her behaviour; hence positioning this person as an object engaging in unconscionable behaviour, where the speaker does not even name the act, as though it is too terrible to say (“*how can they even allow that*”, line 1067).

The participant presents herself as being familiar and friendly with the RMS staff (“*we'll just ↑sit and chat*”, lines 1064–1065), then a lesbian student who is engaging in a simple everyday activity,

she is just walking by – “*then, let's say maybe a lesbian walks by*” (lines 1065–1066) – is then met with a negative verbal response in the form of comments, which are “*all negative comments*” (line 1068). In her reflection on the RMS staff as saying “*I wouldn't even allow them close to me*” (lines 1067–1068), she positions the RMS staff as being repulsed by the mere proximity of lesbian students. Therefore, she constructs a situation where it is not unusual or controversial to voice homophobic comments, such as “*hey, she stays with girls. How can they even allow that? I wouldn't even allow them close to me*” (lines 1066–1068) and “*↑why would want to be like a guy if you're a girl?*” (line 1069), instead it is viewed as acceptable small talk (“*we'll just ↑sit and chat*”, lines 1064–1065), which can occur during the course of mundane everyday activities (“*a lesbian walks by*”, lines 1065–1066).

The participant constructs a scenario where she positions the RMS staff member as stating that if a lesbian student was “*in trouble*” (line 1071) on campus, then the RMS staff member would probably not react right away (“*I don't think I'd respond that quickly*”, lines 1071–1072). The speaker is then positioned as providing justification for not responding quickly to the distressed lesbian student, their justification being “*because she would probably be in a female bathroom, instead of a male bathroom*” (lines 1072–1073). The participant positions the RMS staff as being uneducated and unwelcoming (“*they ↑don't sound educated and they ↑don't sound welcoming*”, lines 1069–1070), and uses their justification for not assisting a distressed lesbian student, to illustrate this.

Participant 5 positions the RMS as being uneducated (“*they ↑don't sound educated*”, lines 1069–1070) regarding homosexuality, which can lead to situations where negative responses can occur, such as verbal abuse (“*all the negative comments*”, line 1068), rejection (“*they don't stand up for*”, lines 1073–1074) and ostracism (“*shunned upon*”, line 1074), towards lesbian students. She provides a sort of justification or rationalisation for their negative responses to lesbian students by linking it to a lack of awareness (“*because they don't have proper, yeah, proper knowledge*”, lines 1074–1075).

This section illustrates that the participants experienced public stigma on campus. All participants reported experiencing public stigma and their accounts indicate that public stigma was experienced in different forms (such as verbal abuse, physical threat, social exclusion). Public stigma can contribute to or reinforce self-stigma. The next section reviews accounts of self-stigma.

### 5.2.2 Self-stigma

In Extract 3 below, Participant 6 describes in her letter to Auntie Stella the psychological impact that exposure to day-to-day stigma has on her internal state:

#### Extract 3: L6

- 7 *P6: People can be very judgemental and somehow they make me feel like I'm in the wrong place*  
8 *as if I haven't found my identity as yet, doubting that I am lesbian.*  
9  
10 *I want advice on how do I go about finding out who I really am and being able to accept myself*  
11 *cause it feels like I haven't accepted that I'm lesbian. I also want to find a better way to make*  
12 *people around me accept the way that I am. I have a low self-esteem, especially when it comes to*  
13 *coming out.*

In the letter above, Participant 6 positions “people” (line 7) as being “very judgemental” (line 7). She positions herself as being in the “wrong place” (line 7) in response to these judgements (“they make me feel like I’m in the wrong place”, line 7). The use of the word “wrong” (line 7) indicates that Participant 6 positions her sexual identity as being ‘incorrect’ or ‘immoral’ in some way. Being judged ends up affecting the way she thinks and feels about herself, which could link to a deeper psychological question about how much of her identity is tied to her sense of her sexual identity, this can be seen when she constructs herself as being confused about her identity (“as if I haven’t found my identity yet”, line 8). She internalises these judgements, which is seen when she states “they make me feel” (line 7), illustrating how the feeling, is created by “they” (line 7). In her construction, the locus of control for her feelings and the judgements are outside of herself. Internalising these judgements result in her questioning her own identity as a homosexual female (“doubting that I am lesbian”, line 8). She asks for guidance (“I want advice”, line 10) regarding

understanding her identity and wanting a sense of who she is as a person (“*finding out who I really am*”, line 10). Furthermore, she wants help with acceptance, she wants to be accepted by others (“*to make people around me accept the way that I am*”, lines 11–12). She positions herself as struggling with self-acceptance, as she dismisses or rejects parts of her identity (“*it feels like I haven’t accepted that I’m lesbian*”, line 11). In the extract, Participant 6 positions people as being judgemental (“*People can be very judgemental*”, line 7), she then internalises these judgements (“*they make me feel*”, line 7), which result in her questioning her own sexual identity (“*doubting that I am lesbian*”, line 8).

Due to these judgements negatively impacting on the way she thinks and feels about herself (“*they make me feel like I’m in the wrong place*”, line 7), she experiences negative self-worth, and she positions herself as lacking in self-confidence, “*I have a low self-esteem*” (line 12). This “*low self-esteem*” (line 12) mainly impacts on or affects her willingness to disclose her sexual identity – “*especially when it comes to coming out*” (lines 12–13). This extract demonstrates how stigma self-stigma can manifest, and how it interacts with public stigma (Pryor & Reeder, 2011).

The above example provides an illustration of some of the psychological impacts that participants experienced as a result of self-stigma. Although this extract was taken from Letter 6, the majority of participants expressed similar experiences in the focus group discussion. This section reviewed how stigma affects the stigmatised, the subsequent section reviews how stigma affects those associated with the stigmatised.

### **5.2.3 Stigma by association**

In Extract 4 below, Participant 4 and 5 describe how family and friends deal with the stigma that comes from being associated with them:

#### **Extract 4: FG**

545 *P5: sometimes our families and friends, like*  
546 *they, they, they accept us in private and they’re just afraid of what*  
547 *everyone else is gonna say and what they think so, yeah, she’s*

548 *↑right when she says that not ↑everyone rejects us.*  
549  
550 *P4: I think sometimes, the pressure comes from society (.) Your mother may*  
551 *accept you, but once she sees her neighbours, she'll start shouting*  
552 *at you like it's something wrong.*

In this account, Participant 5 describes that acceptance from “*families and friends*” (line 545) is present or shown in a specific context, as “*they accept us in private*” (line 546). She positions “*families and friends*” (line 545) as being nervous or fearful (“*they're just afraid*”, line 546) of society’s responses towards them due to their association with a homosexual (“*what everyone else is gonna say and what they think*”, lines 546–547). By stating “*they're just afraid of what everyone else is gonna say and what they think*” (lines 546–547), she explains the motivations for their behaviours. Furthermore, in using the words “*not ↑everyone rejects us*” (line 548), with emphasis seen in the rise in pitch on the word “*↑everyone*” (line 548), indicated by the up arrow, she positions herself as being relieved or comforted at having a situation where she is not dismissed or rejected, even though the acceptance is only received in a specific context (“*in private*”, line 546).

Participant 4 responds to Participant 5 by positioning the ‘blame’ within the larger context, as she states “*the pressure comes from society*” (line 550). She further explains this by constructing a situation where a mother’s behaviour is different in one context (“*Your mother may accept you*”, lines 550–551), however her behaviour changes in another context, when she is in public (“*once she sees her neighbours, she'll start shouting at you like it's something wrong*”, lines 551–552). By using the words “*she'll start shouting at you*” (lines 551–552), she constructs the mother’s reaction in public as a display of aggressive communication (“*shouting*”, line 551). When using the words “*like it's something wrong*” (line 552), the “*it's*” (line 552) refers to homosexuality, which is described as being ‘incorrect’ or ‘immoral’ (“*wrong*”, line 552).

This section illustrates that even when participants family’s accept them in private, they display different behaviours in public in order to avoid being stigmatised themselves. Not all participants

had experienced this as two participants shared that their immediate family's did not seem to be concerned about stigma by association. The next section reviews participants' accounts of structural stigma occurring in the broader society and university context.

#### **5.2.4 Structural stigma**

The participants described a number of instances of structural stigma, that occurred within broader societal institutions and structures, the extracts are discussed below.

##### ***5.2.4.1 Structural stigma – Cultural norms and societal-level conditions***

In Extracts 5 and 6 below, Participants 3 and 5 constructed instances where they were pressured to conform to a heteronormative and patriarchal expectation.

Extract 5 below was taken from the Focus Group when participants were sharing personal experiences of encounters with people whom they positioned as being prejudiced about their sexual identities. In the extract below, Participant 3 presents an account of an interaction she experienced with a hairdresser.

#### **Extract 5: FG**

670 P3: When I went to  
671 go do my hair. The guy was not having it. When we told him that  
672 we're lesbians he's like, "there's no way. It's not allowed. I can  
673 change you, if you give me a chance." Like he was just trying to  
674 convince us that it's not right. Like, it's just not right.

In her description, Participant 3 constructs her experience of being a lesbian as being denied, as she constructs the hairdresser's response to her being lesbian as saying "*there's no way*" (line 672), as if this way of being is not possible, it does not exist. She positions the hairdresser as adamant that there is a transgression of a social norm or value, in his use of the words "*it's not allowed*" (line 672). Her reflection of the hairdresser's use of the words "*there's no way. It's not allowed*"

(line 672), positions a person's sexual identity as a choice and implies personal responsibility on the part of the person making that choice. However, in saying "*it's not allowed*" (line 672), a lesbian's identity is not one of the correct options to choose. Her description of his response is almost as though he is in disbelief that someone would choose this option. Furthermore, the use of the word "*allowed*" (line 672) constructs some behaviours as permissible and others as not. This implies that there is a set of rules which govern behaviour, in this case sexual identity, and certain sexual identities are allowed and others, such as homosexuality, are not.

In the participant's account the hairdresser's use of the words "*I can change you*" (lines 672–673), positions him as being powerful, and able to "*change*" (line 673) this form of sexual identity (which is constructed as aberrant – "*not allowed*") (line 672). Again, in the use of the word "*change*" (line 673), sexual identity is constructed as a choice, positioning the participant as someone who has made the 'wrong' choice. Although he does not specifically detail how he would make the change happen, underlying the comment about "*I can change you, if you give me a chance*" (lines 672–673), is a sexual implication, that as a man he "*can change*" (lines 672–673) her sexual identity through sex. The implication is that if he were to please her sexually, she would change her sexual identity. The hairdresser is constructed as perceiving the lesbian identity as 'wrong' ("*it's not right*") (line 674) and through some persuading ("*trying to convince*") (lines 673–674) one can "*change*" (line 673) this deviant ("*not allowed*") (line 672) choice in behaviour.

Extract 6 below was taken from the Focus Group when participants were sharing personal experiences of encounters with people whom they positioned as being prejudiced of their sexual identities. In the extract, Participant 5 described incidents that she experienced when encountering male students on campus.

#### **Extract 6: FG**

691 P5: It's guys they just, they have this mentality that if you're lesbian, then they  
692 can change you. And they try, by all means just to,  
693 they're all in your face and they'll be telling, they can make you feel  
694 better. Heh heh. It's, it's, "How do you even know you lesbian, are

695 you even sure?" It's. I mean like it's too much pressure. You feel like  
696 they'll harm you if you say no, if you don't want to give them your  
697 number. When you try to explain, "no I like girls." "No, I can change  
698 that just give me your number." So, I feel THAT causes like a lot of  
699 stress for me. Ja.

In this account, Participant 5's use of the words "*that if you're lesbian, then they can change you*" (lines 691–692), positions men ("*guys*") (line 691) as constructing the lesbian identity as 'not fixed', but as a choice, which can be 'changed'. In her use of the words "*they can change you*" (lines 691–692) she positions men ("*guys*") (line 691), as assuming that they have the power to change a woman's sexual identity. In the use of the words "*they can make you feel better*" (lines 693–694) she positions these men as assuming, and claiming the power to 'change', to "*make you feel better*" (lines 693–694). Here again, with the words "*they can make you feel better*" (lines 693–694), the implication is sexual. The implication is that sex is better with a man, and that the man speaking would provide the women with such pleasurable sex that they would change their sexual preferences. In this construction the state of being a lesbian is positioned as something that needs redress, it needs to be fixed, and men position themselves as being able to do this through sex. But there is a definite switch in her position thereafter, as there is a shift in her account and in her construction when she says "*It's. I mean like it's too much pressure*" (line 695). In her not completing her sentences, "*It's, it's*" (line 694), it becomes clear that it is difficult for her to make the point, and she is no longer laughing, or chuckling. Instead the situation is positioned as being anxiety provoking and stressful, as being in this situation "*causes like a lot of stress*" (lines 698–699).

Furthermore, in her use of the words "*how do you even know*" (line 694), she positions men ("*guys*") (line 691) as disbelieving, as doubting, and as undermining women's sexual identity claims. By presenting men as saying "*are you even sure*" (lines 694–695), she positions them as doubtful, but also as having the right to, or perceiving themselves as being entitled to ask the questions and to question a woman's sexual identity. In her use of the words "*I mean like it's too much pressure*" (line 695) she positions herself as feeling coerced, forced by these men. Her use

of the words “*you feel like they’ll harm you*” (lines 695–696) constructs men as threatening and/or coercive. In using the words “*if you say no*” (line 696) she positions herself as trapped if she refuses what the man is offering, which is the opportunity to make her “*feel better*” (lines 693–694), to make “*sure*” (line 694) of her sexual orientation. The participant constructs a situation where she firmly refuses the man’s offers and implements a boundary by saying “*no I like girls*” (line 697), however she positions the man’s response as being dismissive and undermining, as he states “*No, I can change that*” (lines 697–698), further implying that he can change her through sex. In her construction of the engagement with “*guys*” (line 691), refusing their offers, “*if you say no*” (line 696), will bring about harm, as she constructs the situation as potentially threatening and dangerous “*You feel like they’ll harm you if you say no*” (lines 695–696). The participant is describing the fear (“*causes like a lot of stress*”, lines 698–699) that if a man offers her sex in this way (“*No, I can change that*”, lines 697–698), if she says no there is a risk that she will be harmed (“*You feel like they’ll harm you if you say no*”, lines 695–696).

The above extracts illustrated examples of how the lesbian women were constructed as deviating from the heteronormative and patriarchal systems governing society which often resulted in unsafe situations for the participants. The majority of participants recounted similar experiences, however only the two extracts were included as these extracts captured the participants’ experiences well. The next section examines the increased stigmatisation experienced by those who are visibly gender nonconforming.

#### **5.2.4.2 Structural stigma – gender nonconformity**

In Extract 7 below, Participant 5 reveals how people respond differently to lesbians depending on their masculine or feminine appearance, and how these visual differences (“*the way she dresses*”, lines 970–971) can influence the degree to which masculine lesbians are at more risk (“*it’s a daily thing*”, line 968) for being stigmatised (“*constantly attacked*”, line 968).

#### **Extract 7: FG**

- 967 P5: I feel for feminine lesbians it’s not that common, but for masculine lesbians  
968 I feel like it’s a daily thing. Like they’re constantly attacked. Well, I

969 have a friend who is constantly attacked for being [lesbian], because  
970 every:one can see that she is lesbian because of the way she  
971 dresses and stuff. So yeah, people just keep °attacking her.

In her description, Participant 5 positions “*masculine lesbians*” (line 967) as being at a higher risk (“*it’s a daily thing*”, line 968) than “*feminine lesbians*” (line 967) for homophobic assaults (“*constantly attacked*”, line 968). By stating “*it’s a daily thing*” (line 968) and repeating the statement “*constantly attacked*” (line 968 & line 969), she emphasises that these ‘attacks’ occur frequently. By using the word “*attacked*” (line 968 & line 969) she constructs situations where “*masculine lesbians*” (line 967) are ‘criticised’, ‘harassed’, or ‘assaulted’. She constructs a situation that involves “*a friend*” (line 969) who is “*constantly attacked*” (line 969) due to her appearance and visual differences (“*the way she dresses and stuff*”, lines 970–971), and these differences inform others that she is lesbian (“*every:one can see that she is lesbian*”, line 970). Therefore, due to her masculine appearance which informs others that she is lesbian (“*every:one can see that she is lesbian because of the way she dresses and stuff*”, lines 970–971), she continues to be the target for homophobic assaults (“*people just keep °attacking her*”, line 971). In this extract, the participant describes her awareness that lesbian students who were gender non-conforming in a way that was visually discernible (“*the way she dresses*”, lines 970–971) were subject to much higher levels of discrimination (“*constantly attacked*”, line 968).

This section illustrated, as explained by the majority of participants, how lesbians who are visibly gender nonconforming are at higher risk of stigmatisation. The next section reviews structural stigma within the university setting.

#### ***5.2.4.3 Structural stigma – University setting***

In the extracts below, the participants construct personal accounts of their experiences of stigma that occurred at UKZN.

Extract 8 was taken from the Focus Group when participants were asked about UKZN’s role and responsibility in the protection of lesbian students on campus. In the extract below, campus social

gatherings are positioned as known places for homophobic violence to occur, “*that’s where they target lesbians and gays*” (lines 714–715) and RMS staff are positioned as being dismissive of these serious claims (“*RMS does not take them seriously*”) (lines 718–719).

**Extract 8: FG**

712 P2: The parties that we have. So whenever there’s something like that at school,  
713 there is always going to be a gay beaten up or lesbian raped, you  
714 know, all those kinds of things. So, I think that’s where they target  
715 lesbians and gays. AND another problem that we have is with the  
716 RMS. Whenever a gay is there to report, maybe whatever  
717 happened to them. It’s just like, “why don’t you hit them back  
718 because you’re also a guy.” So you know, I think that the RMS does  
719 not take them seriously

In Extract 8, Participant 2 constructs the social gatherings and events, such as the “*parties*” (line 712), on campus as being a site for danger as there is a high risk of physical and sexual violence for homosexual students, as “*there is always going to be a gay beaten up or lesbian raped*” (line 713). By using the words “*there is always going to be*” (line 713), she constructs this type of occurrence as common place, as though it is a norm for homosexual students to be attacked when attending these gatherings. She justifies this by constructing these campus events as spaces that are known for homophobic violence, as “*that’s where they target lesbians and gays*” (lines 714–715). By using the word “*target*” (line 714), she positions homosexuals as being a focus point for victimisation at these events.

In her description, the RMS staff are positioned as being dismissive as the “*RMS does not take them seriously*” (lines 718–719). She constructs an account of homosexual students reporting serious claims to RMS staff and positions these staff as dismissive of these claims. She positions them as drawing on masculinity and expectations of ‘proper’ masculine behaviour in their use of the words “*why don’t you hit them back*” (line 717). The RMS staff are positioned as prejudiced, providing stigmatised justifications for their lack of response to serious claims. Their responses

draw on heteronormative stereotypes pertaining to what it means to be a ‘man’ or a ‘woman’, as when “*a gay is there to report*” (line 713) the RMS staff advise, “*why don’t you hit them back because you’re also a guy*” (lines 717–718). Here a lesbian female is being constructed as a ‘male’ (“*guy*”) (line 718). In the RMS staff members’ homophobic and heteronormative reading she, as a ‘male’, is expected to use violence to protect herself, and therefore she does not need the protection provided by the RMS.

In Extract 9, Participant 1 constructs an incident where she decided to expose herself to a staff member on campus in order to prove that she was female (“*I had to flash her*”, line 836), as the staff member was trying to prevent her from entering a female bathroom on campus:

**Extract 9: FG**

833 P1: Personally. When I go to the bathroom, I just go and do what I have to do  
834 and then I just heh heh leave. But I have been kicked out of a female  
835 bathroom before. It was here on campus, it was by the cleaning  
836 lady, she got so angry, I had to flash her. Heh heh So, it was in first  
837 year, I legit just walked into the, into the toilet. Yeah I went to pee.  
838 So I walked into the toilet and there she’s >coming and she’s like  
839 “HEY!” I’m like, “what?” She says, “no boys in the  
840 bathroom.” I’m like NO< Heh heh Like, I had to show her I’m a girl.

In this account, Participant 1 constructs a situation where she was “*kicked out of a female bathroom*” (lines 834–835) by a member of staff on campus, “*the cleaning lady*” (line 835–836). By using the words “*kicked out*” (line 834) she positions herself as being expelled, forced out, prohibited from using the female bathrooms on campus. In her description, the member of staff is positioned as being angry or enraged (“*she got so angry*”, line 836) when encountering Participant 1 in the female bathroom. Participant 1 positions the “*the cleaning lady*” (line 835–836) as being confused or mistaken, as she refers to Participant 1 as being a male (“*She says, no boys in the bathroom*”, lines 839–840). In order for Participant 1 to prove that she was allowed access to the female bathroom, she positions herself as having to inappropriately expose her female genitalia to

confirm this – “*I had to flash her*” (line 836). The participant presents herself as engaging in a simple everyday activity, walking into the bathroom – “*I legit just walked into the, into the toilet*” (line 837) – when she is met with an aggressive response (“*she got so angry*”, line 836) that results in her choosing to expose herself to another woman (“*I had to flash her*”, line 836). This aggressive response is also seen when the “*cleaning lady*” (line 835–836) is constructed as responding to her in quite a firm manner, as she shouts (which is indicated by the use of capitalised text), “*HEY!*” (line 839). In her reflection on the staff members’ statement “*no boys in the bathroom*” (lines 839–840), Participant 1 retaliates to this, which she does quite firmly, as she shouts (which is indicated by the use of capitalised text), “*NO*” (line 840). However, in Participant 1’s construction of the situation, she is still required to prove that she is a female, and she does this by positioning herself as having to inappropriately expose herself – “*I had to show her I’m a girl*” (line 480).

In Extract 10 below, Participant 2 constructs a situation illustrating how an academic staff member responded negatively towards a student due to her sexual identity:

**Extract 10: FG**

740 *P2: a friend of mine had a problem*  
741 *with her supervisor. So she identified as a lesbian, almost like*  
742 *Ayanda. So when she had to hand in her research for corrections,*  
743 *um, her supervisor said that she was not going to go through it until*  
744 *she changes the way she behaves. And then she asked, “how do I*  
745 *behave?” “Why are you wearing like this?” You know, all those*  
746 *things, and it impacted a lot on her academics because she had to*  
747 *do her master's for two years, instead of a year.*

In this account, Participant 2 constructs an incident that took place between a student, who is “*a friend*” (line 740) who “*identified as a lesbian*” (line 741), and “*her supervisor*” (line 741). The supervisor is positioned as an authoritative figure who has a form of control or power over the outcome of the student’s career at university. This can be seen when she constructs the supervisor as refusing to review the student’s work “*until she changes the way she behaves*” (line 743–744),

which resulted in a negative outcome for the student as she had to “*do her master's for two years, instead of a year*” (line 747). Furthermore, the supervisor is positioned as being opposed to, or judgemental of, the student’s sexual behaviour, as she provides the student with an ultimatum – the supervisor “*was not going to go through it until she changes the way she behaves*” (line 743–744). The student is described as questioning the supervisor’s response (“*how do I behave?*”, line 744–745), however in Participant 2’s construction of the situation, the student’s question is met with further judgemental questions regarding her appearance from the supervisor (“*Why are you wearing like this? You know, all those things*”, lines 745–746).

From participants’ accounts it is clear that there are a number of instances where their rights were constructed as being violated, and in Extract 11 below, Participant 5 positions herself as being aware of her constitutional rights within the university setting and describes her “*wish*” (line 1039) for UKZN to uphold the constitutional protections promised:

**Extract 11: FG**

1039 P5: I wish the school, before they hire a professor. That they would just tell  
1040 them like, just tell them about it, because like most of my lecturers,  
1041 they are not from South Africa, and of course they have their views  
1042 and sometimes they'll say some homophobic things in class. Just a  
1043 small thing, and I wish they would just tell them “hey, you can’t say  
1044 this, you can’t cause they’re our people, you’re going to make them  
1045 uncomfortable.” And I wish you could just sit them down maybe in  
1046 the contracts or something, because I do believe in this, they do  
1047 have a Constitution in the school. I think it does include LGBT  
1048 people, but they're not doing anything about that. It's. I wish they  
1049 could do that. Sit them down and tell them about it.

In her description, Participant 5 positions herself as desiring or longing (“*I wish*”, line 1039) for UKZN to advise and direct their academic staff (“*professor*”, line 139 & “*lecturers*”, line 1040) on their conduct towards homosexual students. This is seen in her statement “*I wish the school,*

*before they hire a professor. That they would just tell them like, just tell them about it*" (lines 1039–1040). Throughout this extract Participant 5 repeats this *"wish"* (line 1039), emphasising her desire, as she states *"I wish they would just tell them"* (line 1043); further down the extract she again states *"I wish you could just sit them down"* (line 1045); and later again she repeats the statement *"I wish they could do that. Sit them down and tell them about it"* (lines 1048–1049). Furthermore, she positions the academic staff (*"most of my lecturers"*, line 1040) as being homophobic and often voicing their homophobic opinions during lectures (*"they have their views and sometimes they'll say some homophobic things in class"*, lines 1041–1042). She provides an explanation for their behaviour by linking it to their nationality – *"they are not from South Africa, and of course they have their views"* (line 1041).

In the extract, she constructs a situation where she describes how she would like UKZN to adhere to her *"wish"* (line 1039) and she positions this situation as being a minor task or simple request, *"Just a small thing"* (lines 1042–1043). This can be seen her statement *"I wish they would just tell them 'hey, you can't say this, you can't cause they're our people, you're going to make them uncomfortable'."* (lines 1043–1045). By using the words *"you can't say this"* (lines 1043–1044), she positions UKZN as potentially defending her from the lecturers' homophobic comments. By using the words *"you're going to make them uncomfortable"* (lines 1044–1045), she positions UKZN as being empathic and understanding about how these *"homophobic things"* (line 1042) affect her and other homosexual students. Furthermore, by using the words *"you can't cause they're our people"* (line 1044), she positions UKZN as being accepting of, and acknowledging, homosexual students as being 'part of' or 'belonging to' the university community; and constructs this as their justification for why these *"homophobic things"* (line 1042) are unacceptable. She positions herself as advising that UKZN could have something of this nature in the staff's contracts (*"sit them down maybe in the contracts or something"*, lines 1045–1046) and justifies this by describing her trust and faith in the university's Constitution, *"because I do believe in this, they do have a Constitution in the school"* (lines 1046–1047). However, she positions UKZN as being passive, inactive, and unresponsive towards issues relating to *"LGBT people"* (lines 1047–1048), as she states *"they're not doing anything about that"* (line 1048).

Due to participants positioning UKZN as not upholding the constitution for its homosexual students, in Extract 12 below, Participant 1 constructs a world where she reverts to alternative solutions (“*Our lesbian cliques*”, line 999) for ensuring a sense of security and protection on campus:

**Extract 12: FG**

999 P1: Our lesbian cliques. I feel like if, yeah we got each other.  
1000 It’s not the campus, or the facility or institution, it’s just ↑us. So I  
1001 know that if something happens to me. I would go to, like, either  
1002 one of them and I’d feel confident and be like, you know, this is  
1003 what happened and they’d go to like someone else who might be  
1004 of assistance and refer me to them. So it's just ↑us.

In the extract above, Participant 1 constructs a world where forming close bonds with other lesbian students (“*our lesbian cliques*”, line 999) has created a sense of protection for her on campus (“*we got each other*”, line 999). By constructing these “*lesbian cliques*” (line 999), Participant 1 has positioned herself as forming a protective group where she can feel confident that these people will help protect her. This is seen in her statement “*I know that if something happens to me. I would go to, like, either one of them and I’d feel confident*” (lines 1000–1002). By using the words “*it’s not the campus, or the facility or institution*” (line 1000), she positions the university as not providing her with safety or protection. By repeating the words “*it’s just ↑us*” (line 1000 & line 1004), and the emphasis on the word “*↑us*” (line 1000 & line 1004) (illustrated by the rise in pitch, indicated by the up arrow), she positions other lesbian students, “*our lesbian cliques*” (line 999), as being the only trusted source of protection and safety for her on campus.

In Extract 13 below, Participant 1 refers to public stigma, self-stigma and structural stigma as she positions herself as being aware of verbal and physical abuse aimed at homosexual students that occur on campus, and describes the negative psychological, emotional and/or behavioural effects of this.

### Extract 13: FG

731 P1: I haven't been in a situation where I was a victim of some sort of verbal or  
732 physical abuse ↑on campus, but I know ↑of people that [have].  
733 ↑And they seem to just go off track. Like, not just emotionally, but  
734 academically as well so it just impacts them as a be:ing. And but  
735 yeah, they did get help, there are facilities that you can go to  
736 consult and just expressive yourself. So I would assume that it just  
737 affects them, as a whole, just their functioning, like it's not in the  
738 same coming back after something happened. So, yeah.

In her description, Participant 1 positions herself as being lucky, fortunate for not being on the receiving end of the verbal or physical abuse on campus – “*I haven't been in a situation where I was a victim*” (line 731). However, she positions herself as being aware of this happening on campus as she ‘knows’ the people who have experienced this, “*I know ↑of people that [have]*” (line 732). In her use of the word “*people*” (line 732), she implies that there is more than one person who is affected by this type of abuse on campus. Furthermore, she constructs the context of the UKZN campus as a site where verbal and physical abuse occurs for homosexual students. In her use of the words “*they seem to just go off track*” (line 733), she positions people who have experienced this verbal and physical abuse as badly affected by it. In her account these people who experienced this abuse were positioned as getting assistance, as “*they did get help*” (line 737). She positions the university as being a facilitator in providing this ‘help’ – “*there are facilities that you can go to consult*” (lines 735–736). Although the university campus is positioned as a site where abuse occurs for homosexual students, it is also positioned as providing “*facilities*” (line 735) on campus that can “*help*” (line 735). However she reasserts her construction of the holistic effect of the abuse. She constructs the effects of verbal or physical abuse in relation to sexual identity as all-encompassing, affecting them “*as a be:ing*” (line 734), “*as a whole*” (line 737). In her statement “*not just emotionally, but academically as well*” (lines 733–734) she constructs the effects of this abuse as also permeating into other areas of students’ lives, not just “*emotionally*” (line 733) but having consequences on other aspects of their lives, such as “*academically*” (line 734). She

positions those who have experienced this abuse as severely affected – “*it's not in the same coming back after something happened*” (lines 737–738).

In the above extract the participant made clear constructed accounts of public stigma, self-stigma and structural stigma. It is noteworthy that while she is not describing her own experiences, her phrasing implies that she was aware of numerous accounts of stigma, how pervasive the experience is and how those who were stigmatised experienced a range of negative outcomes.

This section illustrated that the participants experienced structural stigma on campus. While most of the participants were aware of their constitutional rights on campus, their accounts made clear numerous instances where those rights were violated. All participants reported experiencing stigma and their accounts indicate that stigma occurs in multiple locations on campus. Their accounts also indicate that stigma is perpetuated by university staff members (such as academic staff, RMS staff members and cleaning staff). Participants often created their own means of safety and protection on campus.

### **5.2.5 Summation**

The purpose of this chapter was to present the findings of the research. This chapter used Pryor and Reeder’s (2011) model as the framework for narrating the participants’ experiences, therefore the accounts of the participants in this study was discussed through the four manifestations of stigma (public stigma, self-stigma, stigma by association and structural stigma). It would have been possible to have presented and analysed this data using an alternative theoretical or conceptual framework (such as Link and Phelan’s (2001) theory, which distinguished five manifestations of stigma), however Pryor and Reeder’s model was considered to be the best fit for analysing and presenting the narratives emerging from the data. The above findings indicated that through the participants’ accounts, there was stigma occurring on campus across all four categories of stigma. Being identified with the term ‘lesbian’ on campus resulted in high levels of stress for all participants. The lesbian identity was often constructed by others as wrong; needing to be changed and deviating from what society constructed as the ‘norm’. This resulted in a negative response from others, which led to damaging consequences for homosexual students, such as

verbal abuse, physical and sexual violence, psychological harm, physical and sexual threat, and social exclusion. The participants in this study construct the UKZN campus as a high-risk site for homophobic discrimination and violence. Furthermore, the findings indicate that lesbian students face a variety of challenges on the UKZN campus. In the next chapter the findings will be discussed further in relation to the relevant literature and theory provided in the Literature Review chapter.

## **Chapter 6: DISCUSSION**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This study aimed to explore the experiences of six female students, who self-identified as lesbian, in order to investigate the current challenges that they may experience on campus due to their sexual orientation.

This study found that participants reported discrimination and stigma across the four categories of the Pryor and Reeder (2011) model. As this study set out to describe lesbian students' experiences on the UKZN campus, an overarching theme that emerged from the thematic analysis of the data was the 'challenges experienced' by the participants as a result of stigma they experienced in relation to their sexuality. In this chapter the four manifestations of stigma (public stigma, self-stigma, stigma by association and structural stigma) are used as the four sub-themes through which the unique challenges that lesbian students experienced on campus are analysed and understood. This chapter first explores Goffman's (1963/2014) social stigma theory in relation to the participants' constructions of their reality of having a stigmatised identity. This chapter will then present the discussion of the research findings, which will also be presented using the framework of Pryor and Reeder's (2011) model.

Being identified as lesbian is stigmatising in many settings, including the university context, and can lead to considerable personal and social consequences for lesbian students (Love Not Hate Campaign, 2016; Nyeck et al., 2019; Sutherland et al., 2016; Swarr, 2012). While all of the participants in this study openly identified themselves with the term 'lesbian', their accounts also constructed a world where they experience intolerance and disrespect on campus due to being labelled with this term. The label 'lesbian' was often constructed as socially deviant and unacceptable by others, and frequently elicited social disapproval. All of the participants expressed that being lesbian on campus produced high levels of stress. The participants' accounts presented significant evidence of public stigma toward the lesbian identity that occurred on campus, and tended to be in the form of verbal abuse, physical and sexual violence, psychological harm, physical and sexual threat, and social exclusion. It is of note that campus social gatherings and events were positioned as being the main sites of concern for targeting homosexual students, and

university staff members, such as academic staff, RMS staff and cleaning staff, were constructed as perpetuating homophobia on campus.

### **6.1.1 Goffman's (1963) social stigma**

The participants said that their identifying as lesbian was often met with significant negative social responses, such as verbal abuse, physical and sexual violence or threat. Their constructions of living with a lesbian identity are not dissimilar from Goffman's (1963/2014, p. 257) stigma theory, where an individual is stigmatised for having a "deeply discredited attribute". In the participants' accounts, the response of others to their identity is a negative one; their identity is constructed as 'bad'. This is reflected in the findings where participants construct the discourses that are used by the perpetrators to describe the homosexual identity, as being judgmental, critical, dismissive and rejecting. The participants position themselves as being rejected and dismissed, and position others as repulsed by their identity, an example of this was seen in Extract 2 where the participant positions the RMS staff as being repulsed by the mere proximity of lesbian students.

In the participants' accounts homosexuality is positioned by others as being aberrant, wrong, and deviant, which often results in their sexual identity being denied, undermined, or in need of redress. A succinct construction of the damaging consequences of having a stigmatised identity was presented in Extract 13. The description provided in Extract 13 was that stigma can be all-encompassing, and may affect the person "*as a being*" or "*as a whole*". This echoes what was argued by Yang et al. (2007, p. 1525) that the process of stigmatising, where a person has a stigmatised attribute, can be deeply discrediting and reduces the person from "a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one". The participants position themselves as having an attribute that is considered different to the "normals" in society (Goffman, 1963/2014, p. 257). This attribute is also constructed as being socially deviant, devalued and unacceptable; and in turn can be seen to create widespread social disapproval. This has been found in other studies, such as Bos et al. (2013), Flowerdew (2008), Pryor et al. (2012) and Roelen et al. (2020).

### **6.1.2 Challenges experienced**

An overarching theme that was identified in the data was the ‘challenges experienced’ on campus by the participants due to their sexual identities. Pryor and Reeder’s (2011) four manifestations of stigma were used as the sub-themes, which created the framework for analysis and for this discussion, viz. public stigma, self-stigma, stigma by association and structural stigma.

### ***6.1.2.1 Public stigma***

Bos et al. (2013) and Major and O’Brien (2005) refer to public stigma as a person’s negative social and psychological reaction to another person who is classified as having a stigmatised identity, and these negative responses come in multiple forms. All of the extracts presented in the Findings chapter could be placed under the public stigma section, as all forms of stigma involve public stigma. Similarly, Pryor and Reeder (2011) state that public stigma is at the core of their model, as it provides the foundation for all other types of stigma to occur. The participants’ accounts of their experiences indicate significant evidence of public stigma towards the lesbian identity on the university campus. The participants’ construction of public stigma towards the lesbian identity tended to be in the form of verbal abuse, physical and sexual violence, psychological harm, physical and sexual threat, and social exclusion. This is in line with Judge and Nel’s (2008) research that ‘hate crimes’ (i.e. overt and illegal forms of public stigma) are occurring in South African universities. According to the participants’ accounts of their experiences, lesbian students on the UKZN campus are targets for these prejudice-motivated crimes.

All participants reported experiencing public stigma and constructed public stigma as a common occurrence, as something participants experienced frequently. Referring to Extract 2, the participant constructs a situation where it is not unusual or controversial to express homophobic ideas, instead it is viewed as acceptable small talk, illustrating how homophobia is part of the ordinary, everyday customs on campus. In addition, in Extract 1, the participant presented herself at a campus social gathering. After disclosing her lesbian identity, she constructs various men and their responses to her as violent and threatening. This results in a threatening and dangerous situation, where she felt she needed to leave in order to protect herself. What was significant in this extract was that even though the participant presented her gender identity positively, and seemed self-assured in it, it was still met with judgement and the threat of violence. It is also

noteworthy, that at times the participants claim their sexual identity (such as in Extract 1), i.e. indicating a boldness of their positions, even though this is often met with resistance, and often in the form of violence. These findings are similar to those in the ‘Rose has Thorns’ survey and the study conducted by the ‘Gay Equality Project on homophobic violence in Johannesburg, both of which focused on how common public stigma, particularly in the form of violence, is for lesbians in South Africa (Love Not Hate Campaign, 2016; Naidoo & Karels, 2012; Rossiter, 2016).

### ***6.1.2.2 Self-stigma***

According to Bos et al. (2013), a stigmatised person who becomes aware of public stigma which is directed at them may become affected by self-stigma, therefore self-stigma refers to the negative impact of bearing a stigmatised identity. Bos et al. (2013) further state that a stigmatised person may feel concerned about the likely exposure to stigmatisation and internalise that stigma, leading to negative feelings and beliefs about oneself. The majority of participants expressed feeling negative feelings or beliefs about themselves due to internalising the stigma that they experienced from others due to their lesbian identities, however this was clearly indicated in Extract 3. In Extract 3, the participant constructs the stigma as affecting the way she thinks and feels about herself; she positions herself as questioning, dismissing and rejecting parts of her own identity, resulting in a negative self-worth. These findings are similar to those in the ‘OUT LGBT Well-being’ survey that revealed the potential psychological consequences that possible exposure to stigmatisation can produce, such as low self-esteem and poor self-confidence. Hence, this illustrates that in the context of the university setting public stigma can also produce self-stigma which results in negative psychological impacts for the stigmatised person.

### ***6.1.2.3 Stigma by association***

Pryor et al. (2012) refer to stigma by association as the stigma that affects those who are associated with the stigmatised person, such as family, friends, caregivers and acquaintances of those with stigmatized identities. The methodology of this research was not suited to studying stigma by association, as the participants’ families and friends were not interviewed directly, though, it is noteworthy that while this research was not intended to understand stigma by association it was

still present within the data set. More research is needed to understand the experiences of those associated with lesbian students and the possible consequences that result due to stigma by association. All participants in this study described experiencing stigma, it is therefore likely that those who are associated with the lesbian participants experience stigma by association in ways that are similar to the participants in Bogart et al.'s (2008) study. Bogart et al. (2008) examined the stigma by association for families living with a family member with HIV, where participants reported experiencing social isolation, employment and housing discrimination, rejection, avoidance and a lack of support from others, due to being associated with someone with HIV.

In extract 4, two participants constructed instances where they observed their family and friends behaving differently depending on the setting they were in, one participant positioned their behaviour as being due to the concern or fear around stigma by association. Family and friends of those stigmatized were constructed as accepting of the participants' sexual identities in a private setting (i.e. in the home), however their behaviours would change in another context, in a public setting. This illustrates, that even in cases where there is acceptance from family and friends, it may not be universal or total, instead it may have conditions or only apply in certain contexts. As outlined in the extract above, the participant's family members accept them in the home, though when those family members go out into society they hide that acceptance for fear of being stigmatised for accepting a homosexual family member.

It seems that for these participants, just as in Tati's (2009) research, the family faces the risk of being judged through association due to the effects of living in a homophobic society. This suggests that the dominant norms in society are homophobic, and this might be the reason why family members will not demonstrate their acceptance in public, for fear of being stigmatized themselves. What was also noteworthy in the data was that one participant positioned herself as being relieved or comforted at having a setting where she was accepted by her family and friends, even though this was only in a specific context. That the participant viewed partial or private acceptance as positive is indicative of how infrequent acceptance of lesbian student identities by their families is within this context.

The data seems to show that participants' family and friends had experienced stigma by association. It is possible that they might also have experienced negative effects related to that stigma, as has been noted in research by Bos et al. (2013) and Pryor et al. (1999) which highlighted these negative effects amongst family members of stigmatised individuals.

#### ***6.1.2.4 Structural stigma***

This section will look at participants experiences of structural stigma. Structural stigma recognizes stigma in the broader context and refers to how societal and cultural ideologies and institutions, such as governments and universities, maintain or worsen a stigmatised identity (Bos et al., 2013; Hatzenbuehler, 2016). The participants' constructions of their experiences indicate the presence of structural stigma within cultural norms and societal ideologies, as well as within the university institution.

##### *6.1.2.4.1 Structural stigma – Cultural norms and societal-level conditions*

In Extracts 5 and 6, the participants position men as constructing the lesbian identity as a choice, where this choice was positioned as the 'wrong' choice. Lubbe (2007) commented that heteronormativity in South Africa is the dominant social 'norm', and in contrast, according to Strebel et al. (2006), homosexuality is positioned as deviating from this 'norm'. Sutherland et al. (2016) found, in the SASAS study, that seven out of 10 South Africans view homosexuality as 'wrong'. The primary finding of this research, which is that lesbian students at UKZN experienced high levels of homophobia, is in line with Strebel et al. (2006) and Sutherland et al. (2016). In the participants' accounts, some men were constructed as positioning the lesbian identity as against the implicit social rules which govern behaviour, and lesbianism was not seen as a permissible behaviour. Instead, lesbianism was positioned as going against the patriarchal system which, as was stated by Sathiparsad et al. (2008), underpins heteronormativity. The findings in this study can be interpreted through Goffman's (1963/2014) theory, that society socially constructs the rules that govern behaviour and places particular traits into categories that are seen as normal or not normal. The men in these participants accounts appear to perceive themselves as powerful, and able to change a woman's sexual preferences.

Sathiparsad et al. (2008) argue that the patriarchal system constructs men as being assertive, dominant and aggressive. The participants constructed some men as positioning themselves as able to change a lesbian's sexual preference through sex, as the men's assumptions are constructed as: a woman would prefer a masculine sexual partner; and that sex would be better with a man, and men can make lesbians change to being straight. Jewkes and Morrell (2010) note that the dominant ideal of Black African manhood is toughness, strength and above average sexual prowess. The accounts of the participants indicate that many people they interact with adhere to these ideals. This was particularly evident in the participants constructions of the men's assumptions – that they were so skilled at sex that they would change a woman's sexual preferences.

In Extract 6, the participants' reality is positioned as being stressful, as she constructs these men as being powerful, threatening and coercive. This is reflected in the literature by Jewkes and Morrell (2010), who observe that there is an expectation that men should be in control of women and that men may use violence to exert their control. The participants experiences, particularly those where there is a threat of violence as a result of their sexual identities, may be instances in which the patriarchal norm, as outlined by Jewkes and Morrell (2010), is challenged by their lesbian identities. The participant also positions herself as feeling coerced and forced by these men, and she positions herself as trapped if she refuses what the man is offering. The participant's experiences in this instance illustrate Lubbe's (2007) claims that because of this patriarchal belief, lesbians feel undermined and unable to implement their own boundaries. This positions lesbians as being vulnerable and at greater risk of violence. This was clearly evident in Extract 6, where the participant positions herself as firmly refusing the man's offers by establishing a boundary and asserting her lesbian identity, however she positions the man's response as being dismissive and undermining, refusing to accept her statements, and further implying that he can change her through sex. In her construction of this engagement with men, she seems acutely aware that refusing their advances might bring about harm. The participants describe situations in which they were faced with deeply uncomfortable decisions, i.e. choosing between agreeing to the men's proposals or sexual violence. That these are the experiences of lesbian women at UKZN is significant, these kinds of experiences may cause trauma or emotional upset. The participants'

statements that threats of violence, and violence itself, are common is similar to findings in other studies conducted in South Africa, such as the 2015 ‘OUT LGBT Well-being survey’, the ‘Rose has Thorns’ survey, and the study conducted by the ‘Gay Equality Project’. All report high prevalence rates of violence, particularly sexual violence, against lesbians in South Africa due to their sexual identity challenging the heteronormative patriarchal society (Love Not Hate Campaign, 2016; Nyeck et al., 2019; Sutherland et al., 2016; Swarr, 2012).

The participants position these men as constructing the lesbian identity as aberrant and deviant. These findings indicate that these men position lesbians as women who are going against the norm. This is a similar finding to Lubbe’s (2007) research in which lesbians were constructed as offensive, and deviating from existing norms and traditions in South Africa. These findings are also in line with Mahomed and Trangoš’s (2016) findings that a significant proportion of participants in their survey viewed homosexuality negatively, believing that it undermines and violates the values and traditions of their community.

In Extract 5 and 6, the participants’ construction is of men who are threatened by lesbians, and who in turn react in a threatening way. The participants position these men as constructing the lesbian identity as being ‘bad’; their identity is constructed as wrong. Participants expressed discomfort and emotional upset at having their identities framed in this way. Lubbe (2007) suggests that as lesbian woman may represent a challenge to the unequal power dynamic between men and women in society, men might feel threatened. Considering men claim the more dominant roles and authoritative positions over women, this would then threaten men’s position as being superior to women (Lubbe, 2007).

#### *6.1.2.4.2 Structural stigma – gender nonconformity*

The participants were aware that those who were gender non-conforming in a way that was visually discernible were subject to much higher levels of discrimination. This correlates with Rossiter (2016) and Swarr’s (2012) explanations of how society differentiates between ‘feminine lesbians’ and ‘masculine lesbians’ (i.e. women who possess qualities that are perceived to be associated with men, according to societies gender norms). According to Goffman (1963/2014), Rossiter (2016) and Strebel et al. (2006), masculine lesbians who dress or carry themselves in ways that may mark

them as ‘masculine’, and who are therefore gender non-conforming, face a higher risk of discrimination and prejudice-motivated crimes. This is evident in Extract 7, where the participant constructs a situation that involves a masculine lesbian friend who becomes the target for homophobic assaults due to her masculine appearance. These findings are similar to findings in the ‘Rose has Thorns’ survey which reported that victims of sexual assault, physical assault or verbal abuse due to their sexual orientation were predominantly ‘masculine’ lesbian women (Love Not Hate Campaign, 2016; Naidoo & Karels, 2012; Rossiter, 2016). This also echoes findings from the SASAS survey which reported that masculine lesbians were more likely to fear for their safety than feminine lesbians (Nyeck et al., 2019).

#### *6.1.2.4.3 Structural stigma – University setting*

Although South Africa has progressive legislation regarding the protection of rights for sexual minorities, the UKZN campus was constructed as not upholding the constitution for its homosexual students. Reflected in the Findings chapter, particularly in Extract 11, the women in this study know what they are legally entitled to, they are aware that homophobic comments are prohibited by the constitution. However, their experiences demonstrate that they are frequently unable to protect themselves from homophobia as the dominant social norm at the university does not condone homosexual identities. For example, in Extract 10, an academic staff member of the university, a supervisor is constructed as perpetuating homophobia on campus through refusing to review a lesbian student’s work. This is significant as it illustrates the social climate on campus. In another extract, the participant demonstrates how people, including university staff members, may informally ‘police’ gender conformity on campus, for example in requiring proof of being female in order to have access to use the female bathrooms. The participants’ accounts suggest that a heteronormative and patriarchal culture dominates the UKZN campus context. This finding is similar to Kleinhans’s (2018) comment that university campuses reflect the broader social issues and prejudices that occur within South African society, such as heteronormativity and patriarchy (Mthembu, 2014; Nyeck et al., 2019; Tati, 2009).

It is of concern that the RMS staff, who are responsible for the safety and security of staff and students on campus, were constructed by the participants as being homophobic and acting in

discriminatory ways towards homosexual students. The RMS staff were constructed by the participants as lacking in knowledge regarding homosexuality; as being dismissive of serious claims made by lesbian students; and as being prejudice due to providing stigmatised justifications for their lack of response to serious claims. This illustrates how structural stigma is perpetuated by university employees, which is similar to Mavhandu-Mudzusi and Sandy's (2017) study. Mavhandu-Mudzusi and Sandy (2017) reported that university staff were frequent perpetrators of stigma. These findings align with heteronormative and patriarchal culture in South Africa, where men are constructed as taking on the powerful and dominant roles (Sathiparsad et al., 2008).

These findings expose how masculinity is constructed in our society, where masculinity is constructed as being assertive, dominant and aggressive. Hence, the expectations of what it means to be masculine are constructed as being able to fight back and defend oneself (Mthembu, 2014; Nyeck et al., 2019; Tati, 2009). In contrast, society's constructions of femininity is a position of being submissive, obedient and therefore, in need of protection (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010). In this study, lesbian women are constructed as having failed to obey implicit social rules, violating gender norms, and therefore, they are socially condemned. These findings also illustrate Strebel et al.'s (2006) claims that violating gender norms results in a stigmatised identity that evokes homophobia and a lowered social status, such as access to the RMS staff's protection on campus.

The participants in this study construct the UKZN campus as a high-risk site for violence, where verbal and physical violence often occurs for homosexual students. These findings are reflective of a number of recent studies revealing that homophobia is common in institutions of higher education in South Africa, and that violence towards homosexual students is not uncommon within South African universities (Arndt & De Bruin, 2006; Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2017; Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2017; Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017). One participant positioned campus social gatherings and events as being high risk locations for violence, particularly physical (i.e. assault) and sexual (i.e. rape) violence, towards homosexual students; and constructs these sites as designated places where lesbian students are targets for violence. This echoes Mavhandu-Mudzusi and Sandy's (2017) study which reported that LGBT students at a South African rural-based

university often experience hostile threats and physical violence, and some participants in their study were subjected to corrective rape practices.

Of the limited studies conducted at South African universities that indicate where discrimination occurs on campus, most studies, such as Jagessar (2015) and Munyuki and Vincent's (2017) research, focused on student residences, indicating that homophobia is common within university residences. This study did not ask about specific the locations of discriminatory events. However, what was significant was that campus social gatherings and events were positioned as being sites for targeting homosexual students, and that university staff members, such as academic staff, RMS staff and cleaning staff, were constructed as perpetuating homophobia on campus.

Although the university campus was constructed as being a site where homophobia occurs for lesbian students, it was also constructed as being a facilitator in providing assistance and support. The women in this study acknowledged that there are facilities available on campus that can help lesbian students, such as the various Forums under CHASU. This supports Mutambara's (2015) study, which reported that belonging to the LGBT Forum at UKZN made participants feel more supported and understood. However, these findings also revealed that the participants in this study position themselves as having to provide their own forms of protection and support on campus. The women in this study formed close bonds with other lesbian students ("*our lesbian cliques*") which created a sense of protection for them on campus. This also supports Mutambara's (2015) study, which reported similar findings of participants forming and being part of 'lesbian cliques' on campus. These 'lesbian cliques' consisted of other students who identified as lesbian, and this provided them with a sense of safety and protection. This study suggests that lesbian students at UKZN need to create their own means of support and protection against structural stigma experienced within the university setting.

## **6.2 Summation**

The purpose of this chapter was to examine the findings in relation to relevant literature and theory. This chapter first began by exploring Goffman's (1963/2014) social stigma theory in relation to the participants' constructions of their reality. This study found that the participants constructions

of living with a lesbian identity are similar to that of having a “deeply discredited attribute” (Goffman, 1963/2014, p. 257). Thereafter, Pryor and Reeder’s (2011) model was used as the framework for presenting the discussion of the findings in this chapter. It was evident from the participants accounts on ‘public stigma’ that there was significant evidence of public stigma on campus. Public stigma was expressed in various ways, such as verbal abuse, physical and sexual violence, psychological harm, physical and sexual threat, and social exclusion. As a result, all of the participants expressed that being lesbian on campus produced high levels of stress. Under the ‘self-stigma’ section a participant described internalising the stigma, which produced a feeling of negative self-worth. This illustrated how public stigma can produce self-stigma which can then result in negative psychological impacts for the stigmatised person. The ‘stigma by association’ section illustrated that acceptance from family and friends may be conditional or apply only in specific contexts. More research needs to be conducted on the experiences of those who are associated with lesbians. Under ‘structural stigma’ the main locations of concern were campus social gatherings and events, as homosexual students were often positioned as being targeted for homophobic attacks at these sites. Homophobic views and/or behaviours were constructed as being perpetuated on campus by university staff members, such as academic staff, RMS staff and cleaning staff. Although the university campus was constructed as being a site where homophobia occurs for lesbian students, it was also constructed as being a facilitator in providing assistance and support. This study noted that lesbian students at UKZN often create their own means of support and protection against structural stigma experienced within the university setting.

Overall, the discussion of the findings provide evidence that lesbian students face a variety of challenges on the UKZN campus, and that significant levels of homophobia were experienced by the participants. The next chapter will consider how the study answered the research questions and offers a review of the main findings.

## **Chapter 7: CONCLUSION**

### **7.1 Introduction**

The aim of this study was to explore and describe lesbian students' experiences at UKZN, in order to better understand the challenges that they may experience on campus as a result of stigmatised responses to their sexual orientation. The findings of this study are that lesbian students face a variety of challenges on the UKZN campus, and that significant levels of homophobia were experienced by the participants. This chapter summarises the research project and outlines the main findings. The strengths and limitations of the study and recommendations for university policy and further research are also discussed in this chapter.

### **7.2 Summary of the key findings**

As in the Discussion chapter, Pryor and Reeder's (2011) model will be used as the framework to present a summary of the key findings in this chapter. The key findings relating to Goffman's (1963/2014) social stigma theory and the participants' constructions of their experiences of having a stigmatised identity will be presented first. Then the challenges experienced by the participants (as a result of stigma they experienced in relation to their sexualities) will be presented using the framework provided by Pryor and Reeder's (2011) model. Broadly, this study aimed to explore lesbian students' experiences on campus at UKZN. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following research questions: Firstly, what were the experiences of lesbian students on campus? Secondly, what were the unique challenges related to their sexual identities that lesbian students face on campus?

#### **7.2.1 Goffman's (1963) social stigma**

Living with a lesbian identity on the UKZN campus was constructed by all the participants as being significantly stressful and echoed Goffman's (1963/2014, p. 257) definition of stigma as having "an attribute that is deeply discrediting". Due to homosexuality being constructed by others as deviant, this often resulted in damaging consequences for the lesbian students, resonating

with Yang et al.'s (2007, p. 1525) argument that the process of stigmatising reduces the person from "a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one".

### **7.2.2 Challenges experienced**

The primary theme emerging from the data was the broad range of challenges experienced by participants. Pryor and Reeder's (2011) four manifestations of stigma (public stigma, self-stigma, stigma by association and structural stigma) created the framework through which the participants' experiences have been explored and described. The four sub-themes have been used to outline the 'challenges experienced' on campus by the participants due to their sexual identities.

#### ***7.2.2.1 Public stigma***

All of the extracts presented in the Findings chapter could be placed under the public stigma section, as public stigma provides the foundation for all other types of stigma to occur. From the participants' accounts there was significant evidence of public stigma toward the lesbian identity that occurred on campus, this was often in the form of verbal abuse, physical and sexual violence, psychological harm, physical and sexual threat, and social exclusion. Public stigma was constructed as a common occurrence that was experienced frequently on the UKZN campus. It is of note that even when participants presented their gender identity positively it was still met with negative responses, such as the threat of violence. These findings illustrate that public stigma occurs on campus, particularly in the form of violence towards lesbian students due to their sexual orientation. These findings are in line with the findings of other studies, such as Naidoo and Karels (2012) and Rossiter (2016).

#### ***7.2.2.2 Self-stigma***

Self-stigma was reported by participants, manifesting in the form of decreased self-esteem. This study also found that forms of stigma interact, for example public stigma seemed to increase self-stigma. These findings are similar to those of the 'OUT LGBT Well-being' survey (Love Not Hate Campaign, 2016).

### ***7.2.2.3 Stigma by association***

As this study primarily examined lesbian students' experiences of stigma, this research was not well-suited to studying stigma by association. Studying stigma by association in detail would require interviewing the friends and family of lesbian students about their experiences. However, this research did provide some insights into stigma by association, as participants' friends and family were constructed as accepting, but this acceptance was expressed conditionally or only in certain contexts, such as in the privacy of the home environment. It seemed that their friends and family members took actions to avoid stigma by association. As many of the participants came from social settings that are culturally and religiously conservative, and there were frequent expressions of stigma, it is possible that stigma by association occurs frequently within South Africa – though this requires further investigation (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010).

### ***7.2.2.4 Structural stigma***

The participants' constructions of their experiences indicate the presence of structural stigma within the structures, norms and ideologies of the university context.

#### ***7.2.2.4.1 Structural stigma – Cultural norms and societal-level conditions***

The lesbian identity was often positioned by the men that participants encountered as deviating from the heteronormative and patriarchal expectation, which was constructed by the participants as being the dominant social norm on the UKZN campus. Participants constructed these men as being threatening, coercive and at times violent. Similarly, Sathiparsad et al. (2008) state that men are constructed in the patriarchal system as being assertive, dominant and aggressive. These men were constructed by the participants as positioning themselves as being powerful and able to change a lesbian's sexual identity through sex. The participants in this study positioned themselves as feeling coerced and forced by these men, as refusing the advances of these men left them vulnerable to potential harm and at risk of violence. These findings illustrate how lesbian students encounter threats of violence, and violence itself, as a result of their sexual identity challenging the heteronormative patriarchal norms dominant on the UKZN campus. This finding correlates

with a number of studies conducted in South Africa, such as the 2015 ‘OUT LGBT Well-being survey’, and the ‘Rose has Thorns’ survey and the study conducted by the ‘Gay Equality Project’ (Love Not Hate Campaign, 2016; Naidoo & Karels, 2012; Nyeck et al., 2019; Sutherland et al., 2016; Swarr, 2012).

#### *7.2.2.4.2 Structural stigma – gender nonconformity*

Lesbian students who were gender non-conforming, particularly those who were visually discernible as lesbian based on their appearance or comportment, were positioned as being subject to much higher levels of discrimination. These findings are supported by the ‘Rose has Thorns’ survey and from the SASAS survey (Love Not Hate Campaign, 2016; Naidoo & Karels, 2012).

#### *7.2.2.4.3 Structural stigma – University setting*

The participants constructed a number of instances where they illustrated the homophobic social climate on campus. The participants’ accounts position UKZN as not upholding the constitutional protections promised to all South African citizens, for its homosexual students. Instead UKZN was positioned as being a high-risk site for homophobic assault and violence, echoing a number of recent studies revealing that homophobia is common in institutions of higher learning in South Africa (Arndt & De Bruin, 2006; Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2017; Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Sandy, 2017; Naidu & Mutumbara, 2017). Certain academic and RMS staff were constructed as perpetuating homophobia on campus. This was illustrated through their participants’ recounting instances of discriminatory behaviours towards lesbian students. Certain university staff members were constructed as informally ‘policing’ gender conformity on campus. The RMS staff were positioned as being particularly concerning to the participants, as they are responsible for the safety and security of students on campus. However certain staff members were constructed by the participants as expressing homophobia and enacting a patriarchal culture within the university environment. Instead of protecting lesbian students, a specific RMS staff member was positioned, in a participants’ account, as being dismissive of, and prejudiced towards them. These findings are similar to Ellis (2009) and Mavhandu-Mudzusi and Sandy’s (2017) studies, which report that prejudiced views and/or behaviours can originate from university employees and academic staff.

It is of concern that campus social gatherings and events (“*parties*”) were positioned as being sites for targeting homosexual students, and these events were constructed as high-risk locations for violence, particularly physical (i.e. assault) and sexual (i.e. rape) violence, towards homosexual students. While there were numerous accounts of stigma being experienced on campus, UKZN was also constructed as providing assistance and support for homosexual students, mainly through Forums associated with CHASU. According to the participants’ accounts, they often create their own means of support and protection against stigma experienced within the university setting, by forming close bonds with other lesbian students (“*our lesbian cliques*”). These findings are supported by Mutambara’s (2015) study.

### **7.3 Strengths and limitations of the study**

While a qualitative descriptive research design was useful and appropriate for this study, as it allowed for a deeper exploration of participants’ experiences, this research methodology has both strengths and limitations which are considered below. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), there is no bias-free or value-free research design, no study is without biases, limitations and risks. Therefore, it is imperative that researchers seriously consider the ethical and methodological implications of a chosen methodology, and choose the method most suited to their research question, while also acknowledging the limitations of their study – in order for the methodology and findings to be accurately contextualised and understood. Price and Murnan (2004) argue that it is important to recognize the shortcomings of the study as this illustrates critical thinking about the research conducted, an understanding of the relevant literature surrounding the topic and an evaluation of the methods selected for the study. This provides a researcher with the opportunity to critically reflect on the study so as to improve their research skill. It also provides an opportunity to offer recommendations and suggestions that allow for further research to be conducted which may improve on or avoid the shortcomings of this study.

As mentioned in the Methodology chapter, this qualitative study was interpretive, and although this study employed established and effective methods used in qualitative research for the sampling procedures, the recruitment process, the data collection process, and the data analysis process, these methods must be understood in relation to the subjectivity of the researcher. As the researcher

is the main instrument of enquiry, the researchers' subjectivity and unconscious biases may affect the findings and outcomes of the study (Pham, 2018; Roulston & Shelton, 2015). The researcher is a white middle class, English-speaking female, whose cultural upbringing was different from the participants and this may have affected her interpretations during the research process. The participants' discourses are also not neutral or objective, as the data gathered in this study depends on a number of factors (such as the emotional tone in the room, the sense of trust and familiarity participants had with one another, that the focus group was conducted in participants' second or third language, participants' ability to reflect on their personal experiences, or participants' ability to effectively explain and communicate their subjective realities through the use of language) (Polkinghorne, 2005).

A potential limitation that affected dependability and transferability of this study, was that the recruitment process was not particularly successful, as the advert did not generate a sufficient number of participants. The researcher became aware of the challenges associated with recruiting large numbers of lesbian participants to represent various lesbian experiences on campus. This challenge may have had the effect of a reduced range of perspectives within this study's data set. In other words, this may have affected the findings of this study in terms of gaining wider perspectives that could have represented the larger lesbian population on campus. It is not known if the experiences of the lesbian students in this study are representative of the experiences of the majority of lesbian students at UKZN.

In order to recruit more participants, snowball sampling was employed which may have resulted in a bias in the selection of the participants, as participants who joined the study knew the identities of each other and were friends or in the same circle of friends as the participants. However, familiarity between the participants may have enhanced their level of comfort and increased their level of participation during the focus group, allowing for deeper and in-depth discussions. Hence, a strength of the study relating to transferability was that the six participants in this study provided rich and in-depth data, and were able to engage in the research topic and discussion points well.

This study was limited to a small sample on a single university campus. This study's findings were never intended to be generalised beyond the research site, instead the aim of this study was to provide a deeper and more thorough exploration of six lesbian students experiences at UKZN. A suggestion for further research, would be that studies include a larger and more diverse sample, with students from more than one university, in order to gain a greater understanding of lesbians' students experiences and challenges at tertiary institutions, and to compare their experiences across institutions in order to get a deeper understanding of the issues under examination.

Initially the study proposed to conduct two focus groups with a minimum of eight participants and with the same set of participants in both focus groups, to explore lesbian students' experiences at UKZN. Due to time constraints regarding participants' availability, only one focus group was conducted. This may have reduced the amount of data obtained from the participants, as conducting two focus groups may have produced more in-depth information regarding the research topic. Although data saturation may not have been achieved, a strength of the study which enhanced dependability was the richness and in-depth descriptions of participants' accounts obtained during the focus group setting. The use of the Auntie Stella material during the focus group setting was valuable, as it stimulated discussions.

In this study the researcher met the participants for the first time on the day of the focus group. There was not enough time to develop trusting relationships which may have limited participants sense of safety in the discussion. However, as mentioned, many of the participants were familiar with one another and this created the basis for trust in the discussion.

A strength of the study relating to credibility was that the data collection process (i.e. the focus group and participants' letters) enabled participants to discuss freely their experiences of being lesbian students on campus. Considering some of the discussion points were of a sensitive nature, such as participants' experiences of physical and sexual violence, the focus group setting allowed participants to share their experiences with each other and potentially gain insights and support from other participants. Credibility of the data was enhanced during the focus group setting by the researcher as participants were asked for clarifications of ideas and definitions of concepts, in order

to ensure accurate interpretations and analyses (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To further enhance credibility and guard against anecdotalism, all the data was included in the analysis (Silverman, 2006). The use of well-established qualitative research methods (such as the use of a focus group, open-ended focus group schedule, voice recording, Jeffersonian conventions for transcription) enhances credibility by ensuring that the data would be collected and analysed accurately.

The focus group was conducted in English; rather than in the participants first language, *isiZulu*. Therefore, the participants may have found it difficult to fully express themselves in English. It would have been easier for the participants to express themselves in their mother tongue, as at times it appeared to limit the depth of information gathered. A suggestion for further research, would be that the focus group be conducted in the participants' preferred language, in order to ensure a more rich and in-depth understanding of lesbians' students experiences at tertiary institutions.

## **7.4 Recommendations**

### **7.4.1 Policy recommendations**

As mentioned in the Introduction chapter, it is almost ten years after the Transformation Charter was first implemented at UKZN which declares that the university protects the human rights of all its students, including LGBT students, and prohibits any form of discrimination, including discrimination based on sexual orientation (UKZN, 2012). However, it is clear from this study that lesbian students face a variety of challenges on the UKZN campus due to their sexual identities. Furthermore, significant levels of homophobia were experienced by the participants in this study, which is often tolerated or normalised by others on campus. Therefore this study proposes that UKZN explicitly clarify and detail the rules and regulations of LGBT students on campus in their policy documents. These rules should be explained in detail to, and employed by, all university staff to create a campus that is free from the risk of discrimination, threat or violence for LGBT students. There should be appropriate legal and disciplinary steps taken against those who do not adhere to these rules. All university staff and students should be made aware of the diversity and

equality policy adopted by UKZN. Ensuring LGBT students' safety and wellbeing on campus should be a priority for the UKZN.

#### **7.4.2 Recommendations for further research**

This was a small study that focused on the experiences of lesbian students at UKZN. Therefore, there is a need for further investigation into the question of LGBT peoples' experiences at education institutions in South Africa. For example it would be of interest to conduct a similar research project with a larger sample, or a similar sample at another university, with students from more than one university. This would assist in gaining a better understanding of lesbian students' experiences and challenges at South African universities and whether the type of context the students are in, affects their experience in the university setting. Furthermore, this study proposes that more research needs to be conducted which focus on addressing challenges that minority groups, such as the LGBT community, face on South African university campuses, as the experiences of the women in this study indicate that they experience stigma frequently and this negatively affected their experiences of tertiary education. More research will assist in the development of appropriate and pro-active strategies and policies for tertiary education institutions. This will assist in addressing issues and improving the campus climate, with the aim of being more accepting and welcoming of its LGBT student population.

#### **7.5 Conclusion**

This study sought to explore the experiences of six female students, who self-identified as lesbian, of the challenges that they had experienced on campus due to their sexual orientation.

The findings of this research indicate that lesbian students at UKZN experience various challenges on campus due to their sexual identities. Significant levels of homophobia were experienced by the participants on the UKZN campus. From the participants' accounts there was significant evidence of stigma of a lesbian identity that occurred on campus, and this was experienced by lesbian students in the form of verbal abuse, physical and sexual violence, psychological harm, physical and sexual threat, and social exclusion. All of the participants expressed that being lesbian

on campus caused them high levels of stress. More research is recommended in addressing challenges that student minority groups, such as the LGBT community, face on campus. This is to ensure that appropriate university strategies and policies are developed in order to address issues and improve the campus environment for the student minority population.

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## Appendix 1: Registrar's permission to conduct the study on the UKZN campus – Gatekeeper's Letter



15 May 2018

Dr Mary van der Riet  
School of Applied Human Sciences  
College of Humanities  
Pietermaritzburg  
UKZN  
Email: [vanderriet@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:vanderriet@ukzn.ac.za)

Dear Dr van der Riet

### **RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), provided Ethical clearance has been obtained. We note the title of your research project is:

*"Promoting sexual and reproductive health amongst university student at UKZN".*

It is noted that you will be constituting your sample by conducting interviews and/or focus group discussions with students on the Pietermaritzburg campus.

Please ensure that the following appears on your notice/questionnaire:

- Ethical clearance number;
- Research title and details of the research, the researcher and the supervisor;
- Consent form is attached to the notice/questionnaire and to be signed by user before he/she fills in questionnaire;
- gatekeepers approval by the Registrar.

You are not authorized to contact staff and students using 'Microsoft Outlook' address book. Identity numbers and email addresses of individuals are not a matter of public record and are protected according to Section 14 of the South African Constitution, as well as the Protection of Public Information Act. For the release of such information over to yourself for research purposes, the University of KwaZulu-Natal will need express consent from the relevant data subjects. Data collected must be treated with due confidentiality and anonymity.

Yours sincerely

  
**MR SS MOKOENA**  
**REGISTRAR**

---

#### Office of the Registrar

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 8005/2206 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 7824/2204 Email: [registrar@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:registrar@ukzn.ac.za)

Website: [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)



1910 - 2010  
100 YEARS OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

## Appendix 2: Ethical Clearance Certificate – Supervisor



03 July 2017

**Dr Mary van der Riet (24839)**  
School of Applied Human Sciences - Psychology  
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Dr van der Riet,

**Protocol reference number: HSS/0445/017**

**Project title:** Promoting sexual and reproductive health amongst university students at UKZN.

### **Approval Notification – Full Committee Reviewed Protocol**

With regards to your response received to our letter of 15 June 2017, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

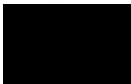
Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further 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.

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

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully



.....  
**Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)**

/ms

Cc Academic Leader Research: Dr Jean Steyn / Professor D Wassenaar  
Cc School Administrator: Ms Nondumiso Khanyile

---

**Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee**

**Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)**

**Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building**

**Postal Address:** Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000

**Telephone:** +27 (0) 31 260 3587/8350/4557 **Facsimile:** +27 (0) 31 260 4609 **Email:** [ximbap@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ximbap@ukzn.ac.za) / [snymanm@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:snymanm@ukzn.ac.za) / [mohunp@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mohunp@ukzn.ac.za)

**Website:** [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)



**100 YEARS OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE**

**Founding Campuses:** Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

## Appendix 3: Ethical Clearance Certificate – Student



4 February 2019

Ms Tarah Imelda Leonard (218056509)  
School of Applied Human Sciences – Psychology  
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Ms Leonard,

Protocol reference number : HSS/0684/018M

Project title: Lesbian students' experiences of challenges faced at a South African University

**Full Approval – Full Committee Reviewed Protocol**

In response to your application received 21 June 2018, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application 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.

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

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

Dr Shamila Naidoo (Deputy Chair)  
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

/pm

cc Supervisor: Dr Mary van der Riet  
cc Academic Leader Research: Dr Maud Mthembu  
cc School Administrator: Ms Priya Konan

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Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

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Website: [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)



Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

#### Appendix 4: Recruitment Advert



## **ATTENTION ALL STUDENTS**

**Would you be interested in participating in discussion about your experiences of being a female student who identifies as 'lesbian'?**

To take part in this Master's study, I am looking for:

- female students who classify themselves as lesbian
- who are 18 years or older
- from the University of KwaZulu-Natal on the PMB campus

We will be discussing in a focus group setting:

- the experiences of lesbian students on campus
- the challenges that lesbian students may face on campus
- how lesbian students may deal with these challenges on campus

**If you are interested in participating in this study or would like more information, please email me on: xxx**

**PLEASE NOTE – CONFIDENTIALITY IS GUARANTEED**

**I am looking for students to participate in a study!**

**Your contribution can make a difference!**

## **Appendix 5: Information Sheet**

### **INFORMATION SHEET**

Project title: Lesbian students' experiences of challenges faced at a South African university.

Greetings Student,

My name is Tarah Leonard from the University of KwaZulu-Natal Pietermaritzburg, Psychology Student (Masters, clinical psychology).

Email: xxx

Cell: xxx

- You are invited to participate in the following study: Lesbian students' experiences of challenges faced at a South African university.
- The aim and purpose of this research is to get a better understanding of the experiences and challenges that lesbian students encounter on campus at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Pietermaritzburg campus).
- This study potentially has indirect benefits for lesbian population as it aims to raise awareness amongst students of issues affecting this population
- This study will involve a group of lesbian students currently studying at UKZN (Pietermaritzburg campus) over the age of 18 years sharing their experiences and challenges with other lesbian students in a safe and accepting environment.
- The study will involve two focus groups, where you will be involved in a group discussion with other participants.
- The focus groups will be held on two different days at a venue in the Psychology building on Golf Road in Scottsville, Pietermaritzburg. The exact venue will be decided at a later stage and you will be informed of this directly. You will need to be available on both days, each day you will need be available for a maximum of two hours. You will need to provide your own transport to the venue. Confidentiality is limited in a focus group setting; therefore, you will need to restrict what you say to what you are comfortable sharing in public. You will be requested to preserve the confidentiality of other participants.
- Participation in the study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the project (without providing any reasons) at any time.
- If you experience uncomfortable feelings, such as anxiety or distress, due to the sensitive nature of the study, please inform me immediately or as soon as you are able to, so that I can refer you to counselling services provided by the Child and Family Centre at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus.
- Participants will be provided with a R30 voucher for the university coffee shop, to compensate them for the time they have given to the study.
- You are welcome to contact me anytime during and after the research process if you have any questions or concerns regarding any area of the study.

- Your name will be changed to protect your identity and any information that would make you identifiable will not be revealed. Data will be used in this study for my dissertation, and may be used in conference presentations, and research articles. The data may be used for future studies.
- All focus group sessions will be transcribed for research analysis purposes and recordings will be kept on the researchers' laptop in an encrypted (password protected) folder and will be disposed of after a period of 5 years as per requirement and the data will only be available to the researcher, the supervisor of the dissertation and examiners.
- Disposal will occur through shredding of all written material and through careful removal of the software on required laptops.
- Feedback regarding the outcome of the study and results of the research will be made available in writing via email to you.
- Subsequent dissemination of the research findings may be in the form of a finished dissertation which is accessible on the internet, possible publications and possible conference presentations.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number HSS/0684/018M ).

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at cell: xxx; email: xxx or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

**HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

If you are interested in participating or should you have any questions, please contact me via email:  
xxx

## Appendix 6: Permission to use Auntie Stella Cards - TARSC

### Appendix 4 MOU with TARSC

**Memorandum of Understanding  
Between  
Training and Research Support Centre, Zimbabwe  
and  
Department of Psychology, Rhodes University  
School of Applied Human Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal  
South Africa**

This agreement serves as a Memorandum of Understanding between the Training and Research Support Centre (TARSC) located in Harare, Zimbabwe and the Department of Psychology, Faculty of Humanities at Rhodes University (RU) and the Discipline of Psychology, School of Applied Human Sciences at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) (hereafter called the Research Team), both based in South Africa. It outlines conditions by which TARSC will co-operate with RU and UKZN in the translation of the reproductive health pack 'Auntie Stella: Teenagers talk about sex, life and relationships' into isiZulu and isiXhosa for use as hard copy and in the web provision of the translated materials.

The Principal Investigator and contact person for the South Africa partners to this agreement is Prof. Jacqueline Akhurst, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Humanities, Rhodes University, and Honorary Research Professor, School of Applied Human Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal (where Dr Mary van der Riet is the chief collaborator).

This Memorandum is in line with TARSC policy on materials, including copyright policies.

TARSC declares that it is entitled to use the 'Auntie Stella' material for the purpose of this co-operation, in particular to reproduce, disseminate or publicly communicate it either in whole or in part, including their storage by means of electronic data processing and electronic dissemination in multi-media form, furthermore to carry out adjustments, and translations. TARSC declares that it is also entitled to assign or grant rights of use to the Research Team.

#### A. CONDITIONS OF ADAPTATION AND TRANSLATION

1. TARSC gives permission to the Research Team to adapt and translate into isiZulu and isiXhosa the 'Auntie Stella' material (to adapt and translate a select number of the 42 question and answer cards, and to adapt if and where appropriate the Facilitator's and Adaptation Guide and two information sheets), but only for non-profit purposes.
2. TARSC retains full copyright over the 'Auntie Stella' material, including the translated version. All copyright provisions on the original version will apply to the translated version. The translated version will in writing acknowledge TARSC as the copyright holder and will include TARSC's logo and institutional address on the front cover of the translated version.
3. The Research Team shall be acknowledged on the inside cover and back cover of the material. Full acknowledgement shall include the co-operating institutions' logos and contact information.
4. The isiZulu and isiXhosa versions of 'Auntie Stella' will be uploaded as a PDF file onto the TARSC website ([www.tarsc.org](http://www.tarsc.org)) with a url link to the partners' websites and with acknowledgements to the Research Team for their contribution in translating the material.

5. Any use of the 'Auntie Stella' letters on the Research Team websites shall be partial (i.e. no permission is given for the full set of letters or material to be used) and shall clearly refer to TARSC authorship and make links to the TARSC website for the full materials.
6. The Research Team can put the isiZulu and isiXhosa version of 'Auntie Stella' on CDROM for free distribution, on condition that the correct acknowledgement, as provided for in point 2 above, is followed.
7. Ten copies of the final isiZulu and isiXhosa versions, whether hard copy or CDROM, must be sent to TARSC within one month after production and will be lodged with the TARSC library, electronic copy with the web administrator and a copy sent to the Zimbabwe National Archives.
8. While it is recognized that the Research Team will need to adapt the content of the 'Auntie Stella' material to meet conditions of users in South Africa, the overall format (Question Card, Talking Points, Answer Card and Action Points) and spirit of its content will remain as per the original version. In the event of disagreement on adaptation, TARSC's word is binding in line with conditions of copyright.
9. Final approval of the content and design (including use of graphics, front and back covers) has to be given in writing by a TARSC Programme Manager and/or Director before distribution.

#### **B. DISTRIBUTION AND MONITORING**

1. The Research Team will have shared rights with TARSC to distribute the isiZulu and isiXhosa versions of 'Auntie Stella' in South Africa, on condition that distribution is only for non-profit purposes. Any costs recovered on the distribution of the materials shall not exceed the costs of production and shall be applied to costs of further print runs or further development of participatory materials by TARSC. The Research Team will not apply any charges on the materials without reaching a separate and explicit mutual agreement with TARSC on the charges, the management and application of funds collected.
2. TARSC retains the right to distribute the isiZulu and isiXhosa versions through its own distribution channels in and outside of South Africa.
3. The Research Team shall not give the impression in any way that they produced the original version of 'Auntie Stella', or take any communications in relation to production and content, or project any role in production other than that of translator of the material. All such communications are to be referred to TARSC.
4. The Research Team is liable to ensure compliance with laws of the countries it is operating in and bring to TARSC's attention any legal provisions that may affect distribution prior to agreement to distribute.
5. TARSC and any member of the Research Team will notify each other if either party intends to evaluate use of the isiZulu and isiXhosa versions of 'Auntie Stella'. Where possible, and by mutual agreement, they will work in collaboration in monitoring use of the isiZulu and isiXhosa version of 'Auntie Stella'.
6. The Research Team will provide TARSC with user comments and experiences, share evaluation findings or other information relating to the 'Auntie Stella' material, and provide user statistics such as the number and characteristics of users.
7. The Research Team will provide acknowledgement of TARSC's copyright of 'Auntie Stella' in any reports about or evaluations of its work relating to the use of this material.

C. FINANCIAL AND OTHER COMMITMENTS

1. The Research Team will fund translation of a select number of 'Auntie Stella' cards; the selection of cards will be at the discretion of the Research Team.
2. TARSC will provide technical input into adaptation, and provide all graphics from the English version. This role will be reimbursed via a one-off payment to TARSC of R10 000.
3. TARSC will absorb costs for uploading the pdf files of the isiZulu and isiXhosa version onto the 'Auntie Stella' website.
4. TARSC and the Research Team will each be responsible for their own distribution costs.
5. Any other costs arising will be distributed as agreed by both parties and in line with the principles set out in this agreement.
6. TARSC and the Research Team will come to a separate financial agreement should the Research Team request a training of trainers workshop in the use and monitoring of the 'Auntie Stella' pack.
7. This MOU covers the adaptation, translation and trialling of a select number of 'Auntie Stella' cards into isiZulu and isiXhosa for use with university students. A separate MOU will cover design and printing of the cards and more widespread trialling and distribution. This second phase is dependent on the procurement of additional funds by the Research Team.

Signed:



Dr. Niki Jazdowska  
Director  
Training and Research Support Centre  
Harare, Zimbabwe

Date: 18 March 2016



Prof Jacqueline Akhurst  
Assoc Professor in Psychology  
Dept of Psychology, Faculty of Humanities  
Rhodes University

Date: 18 March 2016



Dr. Mary van der Riet  
Senior Lecturer

School of Applied Human Sciences  
Discipline of Psychology  
University of KwaZulu-Natal

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ 16 March 2016 \_\_\_\_\_

#### APPENDIX: PROPOSED METHODOLOGY FOR TRANSLATION

Prepared by members of the Research Team

1. The research team will select about 30 cards related to youth sexuality, relationships and risk, and STI's.
2. Masters level students will use a back-translation technique to translate the cards from English into isiZulu and isiXhosa.
  - 2.1 This technique means one person will translate the cards into the identified language. Another person will translate these translations back into English. The research team will then review the two English versions and assess the discrepancies. Re-translation of the cards will take place until there is an adequate 'fit' between the English version and the first language version.
3. The research team will consider the relevance of the content of each card, and make adjustments to names of persons, place names, local slang terms.
  - 3.1 The research team will also consider the relevance of the content of the response to each card (the facilitators 'answer')
4. These translated and adapted cards will be piloted with a group of honours level (4th year) Psychology students, and or with undergraduate students whose first language is isiZulu, or isiXhosa. We will conduct two groups – a group of male students with a male facilitator and another group of female students with a female facilitator.
  - 4.1 These focus groups will be recorded. The discussion will proceed with the following steps
    - 4.1.1 First the focus group will be conducted as if the cards are being used in a conventional 'Auntie Stella' discussion group
    - 4.1.2. The focus group members will then be asked to comment on the translation of the cards. We will work through each card and consider any issues with this group of first language speakers.
    - 4.1.3 Simultaneously, with each card, the group will discuss the relevance of the content of the cards, place names, local slang terms etc.
    - 4.1.4 In addition to this, the focus group will be asked to comment on the facilitator's response to the cards (i.e. the 'answer'), and make suggestions about relevance, contextually-specific material.

## **Appendix 7: Auntie Stella Question and Answer Card Number 34**

Auntie Stella Cards (Retried February 15, 2018, from <http://www.tarsc.org/auntiestella/index.php/>)



**Auntie Stella**

Teenagers talk about sex, life and relationships

QUESTION

### **34. I'm gay - will anyone love me?**

Theme: Sex and relationships

#### **Dear Auntie Stella**

I'm 16 years old and I have a terrible problem. I can only fall in love with other girls. I don't like boys at all. When I was in Form One I had a boyfriend so that I would be like the other girls but I didn't even want him to kiss me, so we broke up.

I'm afraid and ashamed to tell anyone. My parents would beat me and chase me away. I can't talk to anyone at church because the pastor says that men who like men, and women who like women (we are called gays but I feel so sad!) are Satanic and evil. My friends wouldn't understand - they already laugh at me because I don't wear dresses or have a boyfriend.

What is wrong with me? I don't want to be different from everyone else. I hate feeling so alone. Sometimes I think about going to a phone box and calling any number, just so I can talk to someone about how I feel. All I think about is finding someone to love, but I've never even met another girl like me. Please help me. I'm so lonely and unhappy.

**Alice**

#### **TALKING POINTS**

- Do you think there are young people in your community like Alice, who like people of the same sex?
- Do they have to hide their feelings? Why? If you're gay or have a gay friend and would like to talk about it, tell the group about your or your friend's experiences.
- Alice is afraid that everyone will reject her if they find out she's gay. Is this true? How do you think your family and friends would react if you told them you were gay?
- What advice would you give Alice? Should she tell anyone? What else can she do?

**QUIZ:** Gay people

Which statements are facts and which are opinions?

- 1 It is wrong to have sex with someone of the same sex.
- 2 There are gay people in every society all over the world.
- 3 The constitutions of some countries in southern Africa support the rights of gay people.
- 4 Gay people will harm our children.

- Why is it important to know the difference between facts and opinions?



**Auntie Stella**

Teenagers talk about sex, life and relationships

**ANSWER**

- **34. I'm gay - will anyone love me?**

- Theme: Sex and relationships

- **Dear Alice**

- There is nothing wrong with being gay. People who say it goes against their culture or religion don't understand. Do not feel ashamed about it.
- The first step is to accept who you are. Talk to someone who can help you be more confident. You are not alone. Gay people exist in all societies. If you hide your feelings because you're afraid of other people laughing at you, others probably do the same.

So the second step is to find other gay people. It isn't hard: ask, listen, read newspapers and magazines. Most major cities have gay organisations. Contact them. You'll feel good when you meet people who feel the same as you!

- Also, many gays find that their family and friends don't reject them. In private, people often understand and accept. Remember, when you tell people something like this, wait until they're relaxed and practise your 'speech' before to give you confidence. Some pastors are more tolerant than yours. They feel that if God created gays, the church should accept them.
- So, don't feel so bad.
- Good luck with finding someone to love!

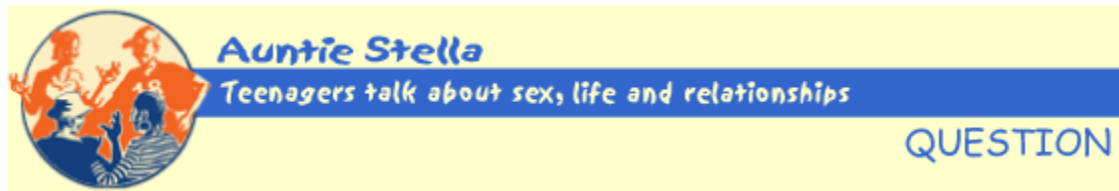
- **Auntie Stella**

### ACTION POINTS

**ANSWERS:** Gay people quiz

- 1 and 4 are opinions, 2 and 3 are facts.
- Do you agree with Auntie Stella's reply? Which of your ideas come from actually knowing gay people, and which ideas are from what people around you say?
- Find out which organisations give advice and support to gay people. Ask someone from there to come and talk to your group and answer your questions. You can write questions if you're shy to ask them directly.
- Find out about your country's constitution and laws. For example, does the constitution say that there must be 'no discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation'? This means that gays must be treated like everybody else, by law. For example, a gay person can join the police, be a teacher or a mayor, like anyone else. Have a debate about this.

## **Appendix 8: Adapted Auntie Stella Question and Answer Card Number 34**



### **34. I'm gay - will anyone love me?**

Theme: Sex and relationships

#### **Dear Auntie Stella**

I'm 18 years old and I have a terrible problem. I can only fall in love with other girls. I don't like boys at all. When I was in school I had a boyfriend so that I would be like the other girls but I didn't even want him to kiss me, so we broke up.

I'm afraid and ashamed to tell anyone. My parents would beat me and chase me away. I can't talk to anyone at church because the pastor says that men who like men, and women who like women (we are called gays but I feel so sad!) are Satanic and evil. My friends wouldn't understand - they already laugh at me because I don't wear dresses or have a boyfriend.

What is wrong with me? I don't want to be different from everyone else. I hate feeling so alone. Sometimes I think about going to a phone box and calling any number, just so I can talk to someone about how I feel. All I think about is finding someone to love, but I've never even met another girl like me. Please help me. I'm so lonely and unhappy.

#### **Ayanda**

#### **TALKING POINTS**

- Do you think there are young people in your community like Ayanda, who like people of the same sex?
- Do they have to hide their feelings? Why? If you're gay or have a gay friend and would like to talk about it, tell the group about your or your friend's experiences.
- Ayanda is afraid that everyone will reject her if they find out she's gay. Is this true? How have your family or friends reacted to you telling them you are gay? Or, how do you think your family and friends would react if you told them you were gay?
- What advice would you give Ayanda? Should she tell anyone? What else can she do?



**Auntie Stella**

Teenagers talk about sex, life and relationships

**ANSWER**

---

### 34. I'm gay - will anyone love me?

---

Theme: Sex and relationships

---

**Dear Ayanda**

There is nothing wrong with being gay. People who say it goes against their culture or religion don't understand. Do not feel ashamed about it.

The first step is to accept who you are. Talk to someone who can help you be more confident. You are not alone. Gay people exist in all societies. If you hide your feelings because you're afraid of other people laughing at you, others probably do the same.

So the second step is to find other gay people. It isn't hard: ask, listen, read newspapers and magazines. Most major cities have gay organisations. Contact them. You'll feel good when you meet people who feel the same as you!

Also, many gays find that their family and friends don't reject them. In private, people often understand and accept. Remember, when you tell people something like this, wait until they're relaxed and practise your 'speech' before to give you confidence. Some pastors are more tolerant than yours. They feel that if God created gays, the church should accept them.

So, don't feel so bad.

Good luck with finding someone to love!

**Auntie Stella**

#### ACTION POINTS

- Do you agree with Auntie Stella's reply? Which of your ideas come from being gay, and which ideas are from what people around you say?
- Do you know of any organisations on campus that give advice and support to gay people? What are some of the issues they encounter and deal with?
- Do you know what your country's constitution and laws are regarding gay people's rights? For example, does the constitution say that there must be 'no discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation'? This means that gays must be treated like everybody else, by law. For example, a gay person can join the police, be a teacher or a mayor, like anyone else. Have a debate about this.

## **Appendix 9: Semi-structured Focus Group Schedule**

Semi-structured group interview schedule:

- How do lesbian students describe their experiences as being a lesbian student on campus?
- Have lesbian students ever felt unloved for being lesbian?
- What are some of the challenges that lesbian students may face on campus due to their sexual orientation?
- How do lesbian students cope and deal with the challenges pertaining to sexual identity on campus?
- How do lesbian students manage stigma and discrimination due to their sexual orientation on campus?
- What are other non-sexual identity difficulties that lesbian students experience on campus and how do they deal with these challenges?
- What are some of the barriers and/or strong negative reactions that lesbian students may face on campus and how might they deal with this?
- What identity management strategies (i.e. counterfeiting, avoidance, integration, or varied strategies) are lesbian students more likely to adhere to on campus and why?
- What advice in relation to identity management strategies would lesbian students give to other lesbian students starting university and why?
- What support networks are available on campus for lesbian students?
- Are these support networks equipped in dealing with sexual identity challenges and why?

Additional topics that may emerge:

- What do students think and feel about South Africa's constitution surrounding no discrimination on grounds of sexuality?
- Do lesbian students feel that students and staff members adhere to the legislation at UKZN?

## **Appendix 10: Informed Consent**

### **CONSENT**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have been informed about the study entitled 'Lesbian students' experiences of challenges faced at a South African university' by Tarah Leonard.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

I have been informed about any available compensation or medical treatment if injury occurs to me as a result of study-related procedures. I will be provided with a R30 voucher for the university coffee shop, to compensate them for the time they have given to the study.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at cell: xxx; email: xxx.

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

#### **HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

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Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

I hereby provide consent:

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

## **Appendix 11: Audio Recording Consent**

### **CONSENT FOR AUDIO RECORDING**

In addition to the informed consent, I, \_\_\_\_\_, hereby agree to the audio recording of the focus group discussions for the purpose of transcription/data capturing. I understand that pseudonyms will be used to protect me identity. I am aware that no personally identifying information or recording concerning me will be released in any form. I understand that the recordings will be stored securely.

I hereby provide consent:

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

## **Appendix 12: Jefferson Transcription System**

Jefferson transcription system (Retrieved September 16, 2018, from <http://www.pages.ucsd.edu/~johnson/COGS102B/JeffersonianNotation.doc> and <http://www.staff.lboro.ac.uk/~ssjap/transcription/transcription.htm>)

Jeffersonian Transcription Notation includes the following symbols:

<b>Symbol</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Use</b>
[ text ]	Brackets	Indicates the start and end points of overlapping speech. They are aligned to mark the precise position of overlap as in the example.
=	Equal Sign	Indicates the break and subsequent continuation of a single interrupted utterance.
(# of seconds)	Timed Pause	A number in parentheses indicates the time, in seconds, of a pause in speech. If they are not part of a particular speaker's talk they should be on a new line. If in doubt use a new line.
(.)	Micropause	A brief pause, hearable but too short to measure, usually less than 0.2 seconds.
. or ↓	Period or Down Arrow	Indicates falling pitch.
? or ↑	Question Mark or Up Arrow	Indicates rising pitch.
,	Comma	Indicates a temporary rise or fall in intonation.
-	Hyphen	Indicates an abrupt halt or interruption in utterance.
>text<	Greater than / Less than symbols	Indicates that the enclosed speech was delivered more rapidly than usual for the speaker.
<text>	Less than / Greater than symbols	Indicates that the enclosed speech was delivered more slowly than usual for the speaker.
°	Degree symbol	Indicates whisper or reduced volume speech.

ALL CAPS	Capitalized text	Indicates shouted or increased volume speech.
<u>underline</u>	Underlined text	Indicates the speaker is emphasizing or stressing the speech.
te:::xt	Colon(s)	Indicates prolongation of an utterance. Colons show degrees of elongation of the prior sound; the more colons, the more elongation.
(hhh)		Audible exhalation
? or (.hhh)	High Dot	Audible inhalation
( text )	Parentheses	Speech which is unclear or in doubt in the transcript.
(( <i>italic text</i> ))	Double Parentheses	Annotation of non-verbal activity. Additional comments from the transcriber, e.g. about features of context or delivery.
Heh heh		Voiced laughter

## Appendix 13: Child and Family Centre Letter



12 March 2018

### **To whom it may concern**

This letter serves to provide the assurance that should any research participant interviewed by Ms Tarah Leonard (Psychology masters student) require psychological assistance as a result of any distress arising from the research project titled: **“Lesbian students’ experiences of challenges faced at a South African university”**, the service will be provided by Psychology Masters students and/or intern psychologists at the Child and Family Centre, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus. It is acknowledged that Ms Leonard’s project is under the supervision of Dr Mary van der Riet.

**The rate per session is R200.** Participants who cannot afford the consultation fee will be referred to Student Support Services within their respective Colleges.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Phindile L. Mayaba  
Director: Child and Family Centre  
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Pietermaritzburg Campus

### **CHILD AND FAMILY CENTRE**

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