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**Primary school and the construction of transgender identities: views  
from learners**

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## **SUPERVISORS' STATEMENT**

As the candidate's supervisor, I agree to the submission of this dissertation.

**Signed:** 

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**Date: 11 December 2019**

## **CO-SUPERVISOR'S STATEMENT**

As the candidate's co-supervisor, I agree to the submission of this dissertation.

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**Date: 05 March 2020**

## DECLARATION

I, Laaiqah Syed, hereby declare that:

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# GLOSSARY

## 1. English words

Bi-phobia – fear of bisexuals.

Bisexual – an individual who may have a physical, emotional and /or romantic attraction to someone of the same sex.

Cis-gender – individuals who identify with the gender they're assigned at birth.

Cis-normative – individuals who identify with the gender they're assigned at birth.

Gay – individuals who are attracted to people of the same sex.

Gender – status of an individual either as man or woman, boy or girl.

Gender binary – recognizes only two genders i.e. male or female and the behaviour associated with each gender.

Gender-non-conforming – individuals whose gender identity is different from the conventional.

Hetero-normative – a world view that promotes heterosexuality as a norm.

Heterosexual – individuals attracted to people of the opposite sex.

Homophobia – fear of people attracted to the same sex.

Homosexuality – individuals attracted to people of the same sex.

Intersex – a person born with a combination of male and female characteristics.

Lesbian – female who is attracted to another female.

LGBTQI – lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex.

Queer – individuals whose sexual orientation is not heterosexual.

Sexually diverse – all diversities of sex characteristics, sexual orientation and gender identities without the need to specify each of the identities, behaviours or characteristics.

Sexual orientation – the gender or sexual identity that an individual is attracted to

Transgender (trans) – a person whose personal identity and gender identity does not correspond with their birth sex.

**Glossary adapted from <http://www.glaad.org/reference/transgender>**



## 2. IsiZulu

Isiphebe – derogatory word ‘whore’

Isitabane – derogatory term used to refer to gays and lesbian

Indoda emadodeni – man among men

Haibo – exclamation (slang) no!

Inkonkoni – derogatory word for gays and lesbians

Inkotsane – young miners who were married to older miners and expected to perform wifely duties

Isi-kay – this is more of a colloquial expression referring to gays and lesbians

AmaKhokho – soccer boots

Intshebe – beard

Malume – uncle

Nje – slang for exactly

Skemas – transgender men

uMakhelwane – neighbour

Inkosikazi – wife

Sangoma – traditional healer

Shisanyama – braai/ barbeque

Uyihlazo – embarrassment

Awufuzanga mina – you don’t take after me

Hamba lay’khaya asilidingi ihlazo Kulomndeni – go – we don’t need you in this family

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## **ABSTRACT**

This phenomenological qualitative study examines the learners' understanding of transgender identities in a primary school. My study focuses on how 12 to 15 year-old girls and boys make meaning of the term transgender and the factors that shape their understanding of the concept. The research site is an urban primary school, Mbali Primary (pseudonym) which is located in Sydenham, Durban, in the province KwaZulu-Natal. My methodology within this study was aimed at investigating the lived experiences and opinions of particular individuals who made up my sample group. The sample group comprised a mixed group of learners from grades 6 and 7, ranging in ages from 12 to 15 years. I conducted 34 semi-structured interviews and eight focus group discussions. The findings reveal that there is an interrelation between societal ideologies and learners' understanding of the term transgender. There is a distinct convergence of heteronormativity, power relations and traditional gender binaries. In this study it was evident that the majority of participants held negative attitudes towards non-conforming identities. Incidentally, participants who were closely acquainted with non-conforming identities demonstrated favourable attitudes. Television and social media were influential in the way in which participants made meaning of transgender identities. They encouraged positive attitudes towards non-conforming identities. The findings indicated that the school curriculum did not provide adequate scope in terms of sexuality and gender. This creates a lack of awareness which perpetuates into transphobia and the marginalisation of non-conforming identities.

The findings provide insight into the position of transgender learners within schools and societies and the reasons that some children are reluctant to disclose their sexual orientation or identity. It will also become more evident why many heterosexual learners are reluctant to interact with transgender identities. This study concludes by recommending amendments to school policies, ways to improve school functionality as well as general interventions to promote tolerance of learners irrespective of their transgender orientation.





## **Okungabonakali**

Lesi sifundo esimangaliso, esifanelekile sihlaziya ukuqonda kwabafundi mayelana nabantu abazibona bengama transjenda, kwzikolezamabanga aphantsi (primary school. Ucwangingo lami lubhekene nendlela amantombazane, nabafana abaneminyaka eyi-12 kuyela kwiminyaka eyi-15 ukhuthi babona ukhutileligama elithi transjenda lisho ukuthini, nezimo ezinomthelela kwindlela abaqonda ngayo. Le ndawo yophenyo isikole esisedolobheni, iMbali Primary esith lakala eSydenham, Ethekwini esifundazweni sakwaZulu- Natal. Indlela engiyisebenzile kuloluphenyo beluqoke ekphenyeni indlela abantuabaphila ngayo nabacabanga ngayongabantu kwiqembulesampuli. Iqembu lami lesampuli belinhlange nezingane ezifundo amabanga ayisthupha namabanga esikhombisa, kusukel kwiminyaka eyi-12 iyela kwi-15. Ngahlola izinixoxo ezihlelwe kancane ezingama-34 nezi-8 ezaziyizinxoxo ezigxila kumagembu. Kulelphenyo impumela ikhumbisa ukuthi kunokuhlangana phakathi kwemibono yezinhlalo nendlela abafundi abaqond ngayo leligamaelithi transjenda. Kunokuhlangana okuhlukile ngokwamukela indlela isintu sibheka ubulili, ubudlelwano obunamandla, kanye nezithiyo zesintu ngubulili. Ucwangingo lami luveze ukuthi iningi labantu ababamba iqhaza bane mqondo engemihle ngokungahambisani ngobunikazi. Ababamba iqhaza ngokungaqondile kutholakale behlangene kahkulu nokungahambisani kobunikazi. Umabona kude kanye nobucwepheshe kwamanje budlala iqhaza elikhulu kwindlela abantu ababambaiqhaza bachaza ngobunikazi be-transjenda. Bagqugquzela indlela yokubuka izinto enhle ngobunikazi okungahambisani. Uphenyo luveze ukhuthi ikharikkhulamu yesikole ayivezi ulwazi olukhulu ngobulili. Lokhu kudala ukuswela ukuqhaphela okuthuthukisa ukwesaba amatransjenda nokubhekelwa phansi ubunikazi obungahambisani.

Imiphumela yalolu cwangingo ikhanyisa ngendima izigane ezitransjenda eziyidlalayo ezikoleni nasiphakathini kanye nesizathu sokuba kungani abanye abantwana kusanzimaukwamukela indlela abayoyo. Kuzocaca ukhuthi kunganiabantu abathandanyo ngobulili obungafani bengabaza ukzwana nokwamukela amatransjenda. Lolu owangingo luvala ngokutusa izindlela zokushintsha imigomo yesikolenezindlela zokukwenza kangcono indlela isikole esiqhuba ngayo. Kanye kanye nongenelelo ngokwezikole ukuze kususwe ukuthiabafundi babekezelane kunganakwanukuthi bangabantuab amatransjenda.

## Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

### 1.1 Introduction



*“I’m an activist, model, and I also happen to be transgender,” she says. Van der Burg’s career has created opportunities for self-expression, celebration, and pride. “I think fashion is a great place to showcase the differences people have, including my own.”*

***Elle van der Burg believes being the face of change isn’t enough – not when other transgender people still face discrimination (beautiffulness.co.za).***

Elle van der Burg is a South African transgender model and activist who has been captivating social media and the modelling catwalks since the age of fifteen. She uses the fashion industry to showcase under-represented and often dismissed expressions of non-conforming genders and sexualities. Despite the challenges, controversy and

discrimination faced by non-conforming and sexually diverse individuals, Elle has featured in *Cosmopolitan* magazine, South Africa.

Sexually diverse identities, which include people identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) are often marginalised, stigmatised and rarely acknowledged. Their basic human rights are openly violated and many are perceived by the heterosexual majority as subordinate and inferior (Lytle, Vaughan, Rodriguez & Shmerfer, 2014). Transgender refers to individuals who possess an affirmed gender identity which differs to their biological sex. Moreover, it describes people whose gender identity, expression, or behaviour contradict the socially and culturally defined norms of the biological sex (Adelson, 2012) they are born with. Although there is an increasing number of transgender learners in schools, the term transgender is still ignored, misunderstood and incorrectly used (Ringrose et al., 2018).

Within the school context, transgender youth face challenges and discrimination that undermine their abilities, progress and social position in schools and society daily (Francis, 2017; Msibi, 2012; Abreu et al., 2016). Discrimination against transgender individuals is referred to as transphobia which is a violation of their human rights and requires urgent attention (Martino & Cumming-Polvin, 2018). Due to the discomfort of the feeling that they are trapped in the wrong body, some transgender identities choose to remodel their bodies through gender reassignment surgery or hormone treatment to best suit their ideal gender (Ndelu, 2017).

Incidents of children who attempt to find protection and promote their legal rights due to their sexual orientation or gender identity whilst growing up in homes and communities have been reported (Kennedy & Helen, 2010). In this study, I explore how learners respond to questions about transgender and how they make meaning of transgender. My aim is to produce knowledge aimed at the creation of supportive schooling environments that include all genders and sexualities.

A phenomenological qualitative study approach was used to examine primary school learners' and how they make meaning of the term transgender through individual semi-structured interviews as well as focus group discussions. Photo elicitation i.e. the use of illustrations also formed part of the discussions.

This chapter begins with a background to the study. Thereafter, the rationale for conducting this study and the theories which frame this study are documented, followed by descriptions of the study location, aims and objectives, critical questions and methodology. Lastly, I provide an outline of the chapters within this dissertation.

## **1.2 Background to the study**

*“Now I am truly myself...I’ve taken a lot of crap in my life,” she says.*

*“It’s unfair for people to judge you on face value.” (YOU, 2018).*

I begin with a recent 2018 article published in a popular South African magazine called *YOU*. This article takes us to Boksburg, Gauteng, South Africa which is home to 25-year-old Ryanne, who was once known as Ryan. For 22 years she felt trapped in a male body she knew did not belong to her, as she identified as a girl. She considers her entire childhood a living hell, as she was a victim of bullying and discrimination. Ryanne relates her life story in the hope that she may inspire others.

According to the Report of The Civil and Political and Socio-Economic Rights (The African Human Rights Law Journal, 2016) the rights for equality based on gender and sexual orientation are clear. Moreover, the South African Constitution (1996) states that every South African citizen is entitled to equality and freedom of speech. Unlike other African countries, the South African Constitution (1996) contains a Bill of Rights that assures all of equality. As gender and sexualities are social constructions non-conforming identities are often misunderstood and ignored. Additionally, violence and discrimination against same-sex sexualities, intersex persons and transgender persons persist. According to Equaldex, an LGBTQI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex) rights

website, 73 countries, mainly in Asia, the Middle East and Africa, still regard homosexuality as an illegal activity (Hutt, 2018).

Research around transgender issues, both nationally and internationally, is minimal. South African academics and the government have evaded and simply ignored the importance of addressing non-normative sexualities. This is due to many South African's still understanding gender along cis-normative lines (May, 2016). Cis-normative is an assumption that all human beings have a gender identity that matches the sex they are born with. Many societies are rigid in their notions and constructions of gender and hence anything other than the norm (heterosexuality) is considered as unnatural (Eckert & McConnell, 2014). Kennedy and Hellen (2010) claim that the most marginalised and excluded group are transgender children. In April 2016, South Africa submitted a report to the African Commissions of Human and Peoples' Rights focusing on the challenges of gender and sexually diverse identities and their struggle to be heard and sufficiently dealt with by South Africans and the law.

According to Bockting et al., (2016) pervasive stigma and discrimination attached to gender non-conformity affects the mental health and wellbeing of transgender identities across their lifespan. The number of children identifying as transgender is on the increase. According to Zeeman, Aranda, Sheriff and Cocking (2017) the system that sustains the norm i.e. heteronormativity, renders the lives of lesbians, gays, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) people invisible (Butler, 1990, 1999). In another article (Abrahams, 2019), mother Erica Maison and son Corey watched a documentary based on the life of Jazz Jennings, aged 11, a transgender person who was assigned male at birth. They had no idea that their lives would change. It was at this point that mom and son realised that they were trapped in foreign bodies. This realisation then got them embarking on a transformation that now has them identifying as Eric and Corey, a transformation from mother and son, to father and daughter. It is estimated that one in 100 babies are born with bodies that differ in some way from standard male or female (Blackless, Charuvastra, Derryck, Sterling, Lauzanne & Lee, 2000). The number of teenagers and children with gender diversities who are referred to clinics that specialise in

treatment for transgender identities is increasing each year (Alberse, De Vries, Elzinga & Steensma, 2019).

Chung (2016) claims that trans-phobia is much higher among males than females. She further states that cis-normative men i.e. individuals (males) who identify with the gender they are assigned to at birth are the main perpetrators of violence against transgender identities. Currently gender and sexual orientation are stereotypical reinforcers of privilege and power. The accepted forms of sexuality (gender binary), are regarded as good, acceptable and normal. If individuals identify as transgender then society shuns them and they are labeled abnormal, bad and even peculiar. Chung (2016) further states that because transgender individuals challenge the normative gender binary, they are often targeted and discriminated against. This discrimination is predominantly conducted by male-dominated societies. Hegemonic notions of masculinity lead to boys wanting to conform to the norm and hence, they subordinate those who adopt sexually diverse identities.



**Figure 1: Cartoon depicting society and its inability to embrace the concept of sexual diversity (cartoonstock.com)**

The school is a significant tool in promoting resilience as well as facilitating emotional and social development into adulthood. In most instances, transgender children will enroll as their affirmed gender, others may undergo surgical transformation whilst at the school (Miller, Mayo & Lugg, 2018). However, teachers face difficulty when dealing with sexuality education that focuses on transgender adolescents, due to a lack of training and legislation to support sexually diverse learners in schools (Riggs & Bartholomaeus, 2018). According to Mangin (2018) if a school has more than 143 children, the chances are that the school will have at least one transgender child registered. Schools could set the stage for transformation by writing policies that can guide educators' actions. Jones et al., (2018) further claim that although rights to equal education were granted to sexually diverse learners, amendments regarding their basic needs were not addressed. Sexually diverse learners are still subjected to gender-segregated facilities such as toilets and physical training (PT) change-rooms. According to Ringrose et al., (2018) the discrimination against an individual based on his/her sexuality is illegal.

In the United States, laws and policies in some areas are aimed at implementing transformation. They are encouraging teachers, policy makers and learners to collaborate with communities to implement change (Miller, Lugg & Mayo, 2017). Being transgender today and within a school setting can lead to overt and covert instances of discrimination, harassment and violence such as verbal harassment, physical harassment, physical assault, property stolen and vandalized, mean rumors and lies spread through graffiti, texting and Facebook (Ringrose et al., 2018, p. 7). These are just some of the harsh actions that sexually diverse learners experience. School hallways, change-rooms and playgrounds become constant battlefields that transgender learners need to endure every day that they are at school. Transgender learners within a school become victims of bullying, name-calling and discrimination. Learners with sexually diverse identities are taunted because they fail to fit in with normative behaviour. Their sexual orientation leaves them vulnerable to the biased attitudes of other learners who still conform to gender binaries. The recipient dreads coming to school and often resorts to self-harm, addiction problems and suicide (Thoreson, 2016).



Transgender abuse is often unreported because the victim is afraid of further abuse or discrimination, due to the misconceptions and insufficient knowledge of transgender identities. Every individual should be allowed the freedom of speech and expression according to the Report of The Civil and Political and Socio-Economic Rights (Moyo, 2016). Despite having this freedom, many transgender individuals still conceal their identity due to the stigma attached to it.

The South African education system is referred to as inclusive which refers to the embracement of people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalised. The South African education system talks of inclusivity so vastly, but are we really inclusive? Children are often severely traumatised that their only solution, becomes suicide.

South Africa's Bill of Rights, Chapter 2, section 9 (3) and (4) affirms that *“The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth.”*

*“No person may unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on more grounds in terms of sub-section(3). National legislation must be enacted to prevent or prohibit unfair discrimination.”*

Despite policies that have been constituted (section 9 of the Constitution, p. 6) transgender identities are still frowned upon. Dominant conceptualisations of sexuality have hindered societies from moving beyond the very narrow boundaries of bias. School policies and acts are vague and do not address specific gender issues. Policy makers need to make informed amendments to policies so that gender identities are more recognised. South Africa needs to urgently revisit its school policies and make clear provisions for sexually diverse genders (Francis, 2017).

Transformation in our South African schools begins with teachers and learners, however, trans-phobia, which is a deliberate dislike of, or prejudice against, transgender identities, is not an issue that has been sufficiently examined in South Africa, especially in primary schools. Bhana (2012) states that teachers' attitudes towards homophobic learners create challenges for the process of transformation. In Bhana's (2014) study, she focused on the social and cultural influences of teachers' ideologies and their responses to sexuality. Their lack of understanding of the term, transgender, prevents them from acting justly and enabling sexual equality. The attitudes of the teacher, influences the environment of the classroom and the other learners who are in contact with children who may identify as sexually diverse. Bhana (2014) highlighted the importance of including teachers in research studies to further understand heteronormativity as teachers are the fundamental instruments used in a classroom to influence learners. When teachers realise their role in integrating and including sexually diverse identities, real transformation will be possible. Teachers can use their capacity as facilitators in the class to propagate and teach the acceptance of children who are diverse in nature (Bhana, 2012).

Francis (2017) maintain that schools are important not only because they are places of learning but also because they can facilitate holistic development. If teachers are properly trained, they can be instrumental in the gradual transformation of negative attitudes towards sexually diverse LGBTQI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex) identities (Butler et al., 1990). Social transformation and acceptance of transgender children will impact greatly on their lives. Transgender children will then embrace their identities confidently and this will impact on their mental health and overall development.

The aim of my study was therefore to examine how learners' make meaning of the term transgender. My aim was to empower and motivate learners and policy makers to tolerate transgender identities and to also affirm, accept and celebrate their sexuality. Our primary responsibility is to accept, integrate, interact and include all non-conforming identities as it is their human right. My critical questions were aimed at examining how learners make

meaning of transgender identities and determining the factors that influenced learners' understanding of transgender identities.

### **1.3 Rationale**

The motivation for my interest in this topic stems from personal experience. Each year, I mentor the grade 7 girls through discussion about etiquette, poise and female topics. In 2018, I was perturbed to note that I had two sexually diverse learners in my grade 7 class. This proved quite a challenge and I found myself belittling and constantly trying to change these two learners. I had no idea or experience on how to treat, tolerate and integrate or how to react to these learners. I often found myself frustrated because they were non-conforming to my ideologies. It took me a whole year to realise that the problem lay with me as these two learners were just being themselves. I then decided that as a teacher my mindset needed to be more flexible by accepting and being open to the reality that gender and sexually diverse identities exist. Additionally, I understood that transphobia and gender justice within the education system require urgent attention (Martino & Cumming-Polvin, 2018). Policies should be broadened to include the voices of transgender learners as trans-specific education could influence the position of transgender learners within learning institutions and society. With an increasing number of transgender learners within our schooling environment, comes the need to generate knowledge and a comprehensive understanding about transgender and non-binary learners. In most settings, the voices of transgender learners are not recognised (Ingrey, 2018). Their basic human rights are violated when their basic needs are not acknowledged.

Despite the availability of the washrooms and bathrooms, transgender learners are still reluctant to use them for fear of being teased and harassed (Davies, Vipond & King, 2017). Amid surviving the everyday school challenges, the simple task of using a bathroom becomes yet another challenge with presents a daunting experience in transgender learners' lives. Facilities in schools should be inclusive and school buildings should not reinforce norms about gender and sexuality. Signs on change rooms and toilet doors should accommodate the transgender learner (Herriot, Burns & Young, 2018). Terms and language used to refer to transgender and sexually diverse learners is another problem within the functionality of schools (Msibi, 2012). Pronouns and general terms

used can be offensive and even hurtful. (Martino & Cumming-Polvin, 2018) highlight the fact that the lack of trans-affirmative policies in schools, results in a continued limitation of ensuring gender democratisation. Policies should recognise transgender learners to allow for their inclusion within institutions of learning.

According to Francis (2017) gender non-conforming learners experience severe homophobia and transphobia. This experience affects the well-being of the transgender child. They begin to feel rejected and their confidence and mental health are severely affected. Due to the discrimination, harassment and hate speech, learners play truant and even resort to suicide (Msibi, 2012). Their position thus becomes one of subordination within schools and society in general (Bhana & Myeza, 2018).

#### **1.4 Theories**

This study drew on Connell's (1987) social constructionist theory as well as her theory of masculinities (1995). Judith Butler's Queer theory (1999) was also used to interpret the findings. According to Connell (1987) gender is a social construct as most individuals are born believing that they are either boy or girl based on their biological disposition. Connell's masculinities theory is the dominant theory dealing with male masculinity and its impact on gender issues (Wedgewood, 2011). In her theory, she focuses on the concept of hegemonic masculinity and how people behave according to societal norms. This behaviour best serves men and positions them as dominant with women being subordinate. Her theories demonstrate gender hierarchies which are directly related to power where male dominance and female subordination is produced and performed. Consequently, this leads to power struggles and is the source of grave inequalities.

#### **1.5 Aims and Objectives**

**The aims and objectives of this study are:**

- 1.5.1 To explore how grade 6 and grade 7 learners make meaning of transgender identities.

1.5.2 To determine the factors that influence learners' construction of the term transgender identities.

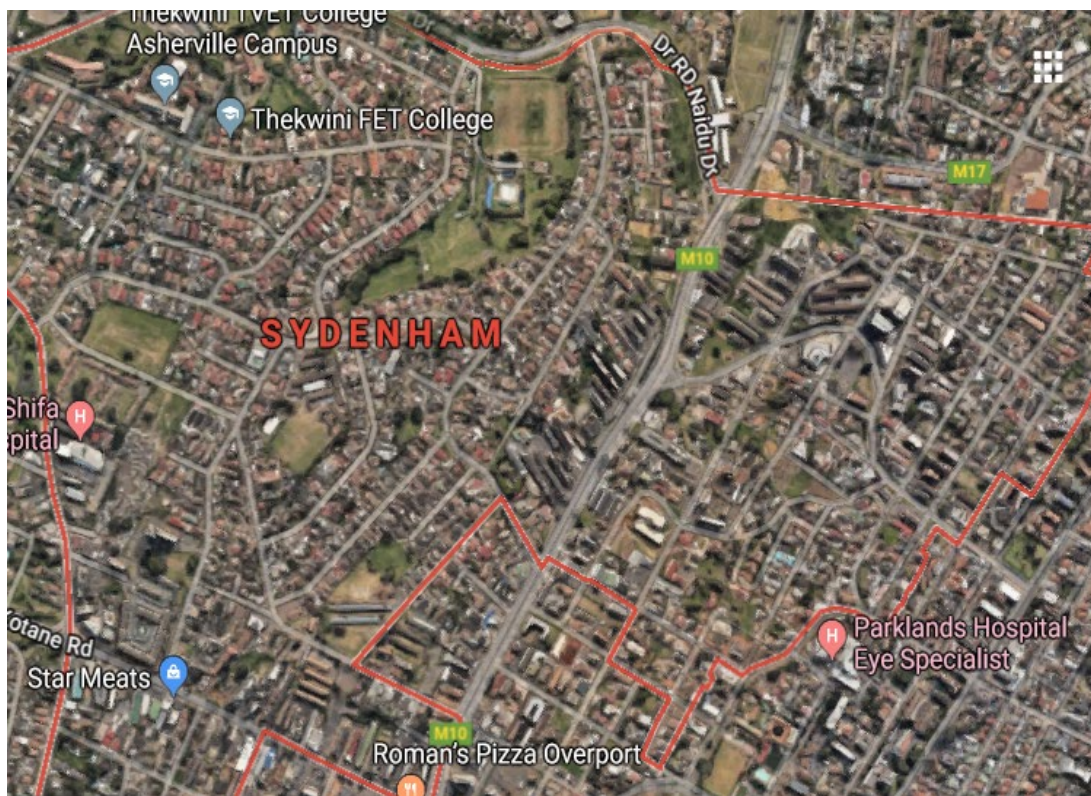
## 1.6 Critical Questions

**My key research questions are as follows:**

1.6.1 How do grade 6 and grade 7 learners make meaning of transgender identities?

1.6.2 What are the factors that shape learners' understanding of transgender identities?

## 1.7 Location of the Study



**Figure 2: Map of Location - Mbali Primary School ([www.maplandia.com](http://www.maplandia.com))**

This study was carried out at Mbali Primary School (pseudonym) within the centrally situated suburb of Sydenham, which is located in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Sydenham has a population of 17 835 people. Learners who attend the school hail from surrounding suburbs as well as peri-urban areas in and around Durban. All learners are from middle- to lower-income groups. The school has an academic staff complement of 41 teachers (five males and 36 females). Of these staff members, eight are black African, 18 Indian and 15 coloured. Mbali Primary is a Quintile 5 school which means that the school is dependent on school fees.

## **1. Research Methods**

This section contains a summary of the process as this will be comprehensively discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis.

### **1.8.1 Research Design**

In this study, I critically analyse how learners make meaning of transgender identities by using a qualitative approach. This approach is commonly used to gather knowledge of human experiences that will later be transcribed and analysed (Cresswell, 2017). This qualitative study was situated within the interpretivist paradigm. The interpretivist paradigm allows researchers to collect authentic data from participants' (primary school learners') views and opinions of a phenomenon (transgender identities) based on their experiences and interpretations (Thanh & Thanh, 2015; Dean, 2018), hence, its relevance to this study.

#### *1.8.1.1 Sampling*

My study included a purposeful sample of 30 grade 6 and 7 primary school learners. This sampling strategy was employed to ensure a good composition of opinions, experiences and expectations and to ensure that data saturation was achieved (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

### *1.8.1.2 Data Collection Instruments*

As this study required rich data, more than one data collection instrument was used. I conducted 20 interviews (semi-structured) and five focus group discussions (FGDs). Each discussion comprised a photo elicitation component which lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. The use of photo elicitation allowed for prompts to stimulate discussion and allowed for the linking of everyday experiences and perceptions to the phenomenon (transgender) under study (Leonard & McKnight, 2015). The rich data collected allowed me to determine a background to my study which was useful in highlighting ideologies and societal assumptions (Hofstee, 2018). All learners were continually reminded that participation was voluntary, and they could exit the study at any stage if they so wished.

### *1.8.1.3 Data Analysis*

To correctly and adequately make sense of the data from the participants' lens, a thematic approach to analysis was used. The emphasis was on examining, pinpointing and recording common patterns of data (Javadi & Zarea, 2016). All the information gathered was then transcribed verbatim. Additionally, the expertise of two supervisors was regularly sourced to ensure the analysis was correct.

## **1.9 Validity, Reliability and Rigour**

In qualitative research, ensuring ethical rigour is paramount (Pelzang & Hutchinson, 2018). Trustworthiness, credibility and dependability constitute a rigorous qualitative study.

### **1.9.1 Trustworthiness**

To ensure trustworthiness in the context of this study, all interviews and discussions were duly audio-recorded. Triangulation, which includes various data collection instruments, was also employed to ensure trustworthiness (Hadi, 2016).



### 1.9.2 Credibility

A study's credibility is achieved through use of various strategies to improve the quality of data collected. In this study, triangulation and reflexivity assisted with credibility (Anney, 2014).

### 1.9.3 Dependability

Dependability entails the assessment of the data collected and findings to ensure that it is correct. In this study, dependability will be achieved by using thematic analysis to manually identify themes and patterns, code and analyse the transcripts (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

### 1.9.4 Reflexivity

Researchers are advised to remain objective during the research process (Berger, 2015). To ensure objectivity and to establish learner's understandings in my findings, I adopted an unbiased stance during the data collection process through daily reflection, introspection and the use of a reflexive diary.

### 1.9.5 Data Management

All recordings and transcripts are stored in a lockable cupboard for the next five years, the researcher and her supervisors having access thereto.

### 1.9.6 Ethics

The collection of data began as soon as I was in receipt of the principal's approval. Ethical clearance had been granted by the University of KwaZulu-Natal and permission received from the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

## 1.10 Overview of Chapters

**Chapter One** presents an introduction to this study through the background, incorporated theories, international and national findings based on transgender issues and developments and thereafter my rationale for conducting this study. The aims and objectives are highlighted, followed by the details of the location of my study as well as methodological approaches. Chapter One concludes with an overview of each chapter and a conclusion.

**Chapter Two** focuses on the theoretical framework for this study which includes Connell's theory of masculinities and power (1987) and Judith Butler's Queer theory (1999). These two theories provide insight into the societal norms which influence the behaviour and responses of society towards individuals who identify with non-conforming identities.

**Chapter Three** presents the literature review based on transgender identities. Here, different perspectives of researchers are examined based on studies and findings regarding transgender identities within schools and how they are perceived and understood by other learners.

**Chapter Four** examines the methodological approaches implemented in my study. The following elements are discussed: research design, location of study, data collection as well as sampling methods. A brief overview of data analysis, methods of achieving validity and trustworthiness and ethical considerations are also included.

**Chapter Five** focuses on data analysis. All data from focus group discussions and interviews are the opinions of participants which included their personal opinions and experiences on how they made sense of the term transgender identities. This information was transcribed and presented in the form of themes, which were later analysed.

**Chapter Six** includes a summary of the study and all-important findings are documented therein. It also includes recommendations and interventions that may be implemented to ensure the integration and inclusion of all transgender learners.

### **1.11 Conclusion**

In this chapter the term transgender was investigated from a South African and an international perspective. My rationale for conducting this study as well as the aims and objectives, critical question, location of study and methodology were also included. As stated by Jobson (2012), the lack of information based on transgender identities has many implications. Policies are incorrectly drawn up or implemented and hence, the basic rights and potential of transgender learners are jeopardised. Sexually diverse identities are undermined by the actions and terms used by the uninformed majority in general. Most learners identifying as transgender cannot openly talk, or confess, to people in their lives about the trauma and injustices they may experience for fear of negative responses. These responses in many instances lack compassion and acceptance by society in general. Bearing in mind the effects of our orthodox societies and their views on transgender identities, this study serves to remedy the position of transgender identities in schools and inevitably within society.

The following chapter will outline the theoretical frameworks adopted in this study.

## **Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Chapter Two presents the theoretical framework used to conceptualise how grade 6 and 7 boys and girls construct transgender identities. Two theories assist in unpacking grade 6 and 7 learners' construction of transgender identities. These theories are Connell's (1995) theory of masculinities and gender and Judith Butler's Queer theory (1990) which highlight how sexuality and gender expression are socially and culturally constructed rather than naturally unfold. Additionally, they detail the relationship between socially constructed knowledge and hegemonic masculinities, sexuality and gender expression. I begin by theorising perspectives of gender identity and sexuality, thereafter I present Connell's theory of gender and masculinity, and, lastly, I look into Butler's Queer theory and how gender is actually fluid.

As Butler states (2004) "categorisation has its place and cannot be reduced to forms of anatomical essentialism". Thus, learners should be respected and granted the freedom to exist within non-conforming bodies. According to Connell (2005) gender may be understood by reviewing the gender system that is made up of the categorical theory, role or sex role theory as well as the gender relations theory. This system elaborates on how gender relations also bring about inequalities. It highlights the distinct way people define gender based on biological make up. Its focus is primarily on the normative roles and position of individuals in society. This system fails to address the real existence of transgender identities and their role and presence within our societies.

### **2.2 Theoretical perspective on gender identity and sexuality**

Theory is used to explain a specific phenomenon and refers to a system that provides answers to questions by associating different features in a process to explain specific problems (Hofstee, 2006). Studies have specific theoretical frameworks which reflect a way of viewing the social world. The theory of gender as a social construct is based on

each person's feelings and behaviour related to cultural expectations of a person's biological sex (Connell, 2005). Society is governed by hegemonic perceptions on sexuality and gender. These perceptions are in turn influenced by cultural and religious norms (Bhana, 2014). Children initially learn about gender and sexualities in their homes, from family members, through interpersonal relationships and community engagements and programmes (Salgam, 2014). This is reinforced when they go to school where they develop intellectual and social skills, form social networks and learn about their gender and sexualities. Social norms such as culture and religion promote gender stereotypes and roles that result in tension around sexuality (Bhana, 2014). This is due to transgender individuals being expected to conform to social constructions of traditional gender roles and expressions (Bateman, 2011).

Connell (2002) infers that gender is all about one's relationship with one's body. She goes on to deliberate on the normative ideals that society pins onto gender i.e. the specific hairstyles, the buttoning of shirts on different sides, the specific chores, general duties and jobs assigned to specific genders. Despite criticism from women's liberation movements, society and the business world continue exercising their stereotypical ideologies based on gender roles. Girls are encouraged to nurture children and develop domestic skills that will enable them to become home executives. Boys are encouraged to adopt electrical skills and abilities that will enable them to earn a living to sustain a household. At school and on the playgrounds, boys want to claim power (Swain, 2006). They strut about the field barging into the girls' games or lunch circles. Evidently this is learned behaviour from adults, within the home environment. Their patterns of socialisation display their exposure to sex roles and how they've learned to interact with dominance and sometimes hatred.

“Sex inequality takes the form of gender: moving as a relation between people, it takes the form of sexuality. Gender emerges as the congealed form of the sexualisation of inequality between men and women” (Butler, 1999, p. xii). Butler contends that the gender hierarchy is a fundamental component that produces gender. She argues that “gay” identities are marginalised in the workplace because they do not fit the gendered norms

accepted by society. According to Butler (1999) gender is ambiguous. It can possess characteristics of non-normative practices whilst at the same time possessing traits of normative practice too. Butler also looks at the heterosexual matrix that endorses femininity as a desire for men and masculinity as a desire for women. It speaks of how people are socialised to be heteronormative; anything outside the norm is unacceptable thus resulting in marginalisation (Marcus, 2013). Butler thus endorses that gender and sexuality are linked.

### 2.3 Connell’s Gender Theory

In theorising gender, Connell (1987) examines the space occupied by gays and women within heteronormative society amidst sexual politics. She makes mention of the social structure that places heterosexual men in a privileged position. Connell draws on arguments from women’s liberation movements that women are constantly oppressed due to their position in society. “Social reproduction” has created a false notion that women, based on biological characteristics, should be in a subordinate position.

GENDER SYSTEM		
<p><b>1. Categorical Theory</b></p> <p>* the focus is on the biological differences between males and females.</p>	<p><b>2. Role /Sex role theory</b></p> <p>* how one's society influences the learned roles played by women and men.</p>	<p><b>3. Gender Relations</b></p> <p>* everyday specific functions assigned to male and female identities.</p>

**Figure 3: Table depicting the Gender System**

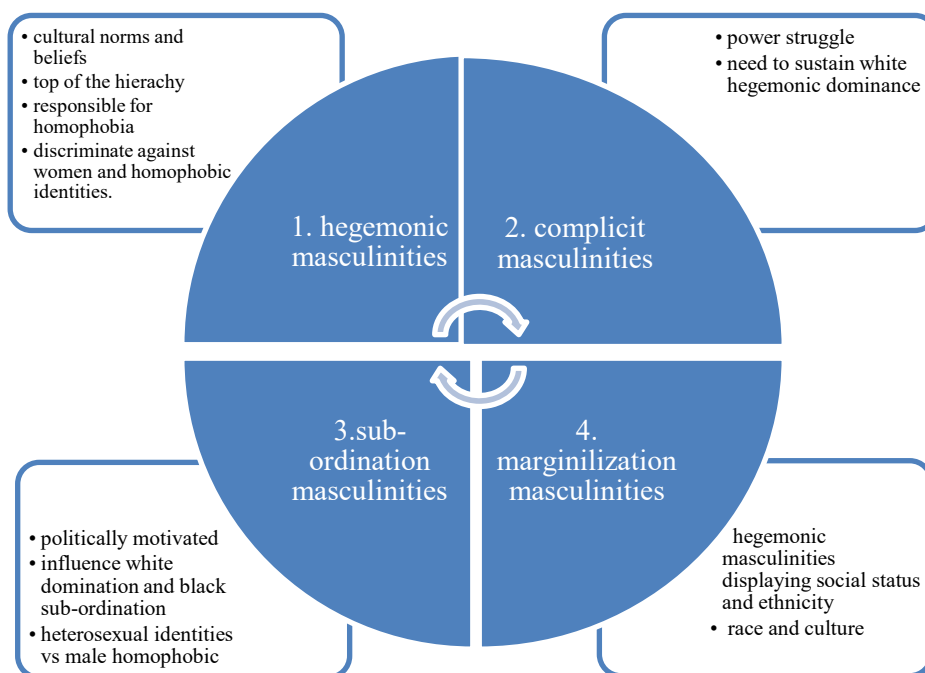
The categorical theory as illustrated above in the gender system focuses on male domination and the subsequent result of inequalities between men and women. This social differentiation based on categories is evident in the inequalities in educational opportunities, income brackets, health and job opportunities. Women and gays are

marginalised. The notion that men should lead a family and that all families should be nuclear creates an arena of subordination and domination.

The sex role socialisation theory refers to the repositioning of normative biological assumptions i.e. the stereotypical expectations of human behaviour based on “gender”. Men and women performing actions specific to their sex: woman’s role or man’s role. This theory links social structure with the development of personality. Schools and home environments shape this learned ‘role’ which is also influenced by social circles (Swain, 2004). Consequently, this socialisation hinders the construction of gender and sexuality in fluid ways as it suggests a fixed construct of gender.

## 2.4 Masculinity, Gender Relations and Power

According to Connell (2005), masculinity cannot be defined on its own (unitary masculinity). This is because multiple versions of masculinities exist. Connell’s theory of masculinity suggests that the term masculinity is multifaceted. Connell (1995) identifies four different types of masculinities. They are: hegemonic masculinities, complicit masculinities, subordination masculinities and marginalisation masculinities.



#### **Figure 4: Pie chart depicting the four different types of masculinity**

According to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), hegemonic masculinity is a concept that involves gender as well as the subordinate masculinities in comparison to its dominant form. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) as well as Jewkes, Morrell, Hearn, Lundqvist, Blackbeard, Lindegger, Quayle, Sikweyiya and Gottzen (2015) mention that the different levels of masculinity stem from homosexuality and the discriminatory experiences that men have due to their homosexual traits. These acts of discrimination were perpetuated by heterosexual men. According to Connell (2002) and Barrientos, Catalan, Segovia and Gomez (2010) hegemonic masculinities are influenced by cultural norms and beliefs. This type of masculinity is at the top of the hierarchy and it is responsible for the homophobia. This masculinity focuses on power and relates to how hegemonic masculinities discriminate against women and subordinate masculinities.

The last masculinity, marginalisation masculinities, involves hegemonic masculinities displaying dominance based on social status and ethnicity where race and culture determine one's position in society with regards to land, education and business opportunities within a market. A lot of men who embrace social power do not exemplify a perfect masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) "Men can adopt hegemonic masculinity when it is desirable, but the same men can distance themselves strategically from hegemonic masculinity at other moments" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 841). Masculinity does not only refer to the caliber of man but also the manner in which men point themselves in informal repetition (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Hence, gender may now be categorised as being fluid in nature because it is ever changing. The changes are dependent on the cultural contexts and school influences (Pettersson, 2018). "The structure of masculinity is influenced by homophobia and this is measured by the determination of homosexuality as a still sexual group, cultural views of homosexuality and its associated feminine styles and levels of denial of homosexuality" (Haywood & Mac an Ghail, 2012, p. 581). Masculinity is used to determine the space and controlling system of gender that is based on sex/gender binaries. Singh (2017) deliberates that masculinities are a product of one's personal social structure. It requires an understanding



of class, race and one's social context. One's social hierarchy within a community determines one's power status in general.

Power structures are built on gender relations and positions. These positions legitimise male dominance that is reinforced by a patriarchal system that encourages hegemonic masculinity (Johanasson & Ottemo, 2015). Previously, power and differences were vital in gay issues, which increased the investigations of male domination (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). However, some researchers saw 'gay bashings' (assault of homosexuals) and muggings resulting from gender stereotypes: the masculinities' hierarchies contributing to homosexuals' experiences and heterosexual men's abuse. Many men resist the fact that the term sexuality is now expanding. They become angered and use religious and cultural traditional norms and convictions that place the man in a privileged position to justify their dominance in relationships and society (Bhana, 2014).

According to Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) gender and power focus on a group that dominates: hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity was known as a habit that was only accepting of men's power over women. Heterosexual women perceive hegemony as powerful identity. Moreover, hegemonic masculinities are not only about violence, but are supported by power which means dominance is promoted and supported by culture and institutions in patriarchal gender systems (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Some theorists believe that gender differences are historical, but gender dominance can change (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Culture and social norms also influence gender violence as some men use their power to perform violently as society expects that men are strong (Jewkes et al., 2015). Most males are physically stronger than females and, within the school context, boys can cause harm to girls and weaker boys, physically or emotionally. Men and boys perpetrate more violence than women. Additionally, the dominance of male power is a critical component of violence, due to the performance of hegemonic masculinity (Bhana, 2012). Accordingly, Morrell, Jewkes and Lindegger (2012) purport that domination and violence are promoted by male power. Within a South African context, transphobia is indoctrinated by numerous cultural norms as articulated by a study that Bhana (2014)

conducted. The study highlighted that cultural norms dominate and create an environment where violence and intolerance of gender and sexual diversity is administered to non-traditional gendered individuals.

## 2.5 Butler's Queer Theory

*“If one is a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pre-gendered “person” transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historic contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate “gender” from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained”* (Butler, 1999, p. 6).

Queer theory refers to theory which primarily focuses on gender and sexuality. It uses gender and sexuality to understand human differences, introduces it within learning contexts to ‘unsilence’ non-conforming gender and sexual identities, and values which challenge society. Queer theory was shaped through gender and sexuality studies by illustrating that sexuality and gender are socially and culturally created and abjected (Butler, 1999).

Butler (1999) defines gender as something performed. She further argues that there is no rule in any book that stipulates that women should be the only ones allowed to wear red nail polish or dresses. She goes on to argue, just like Connell, (2002) that gender is fluid. In other words, she argues that gender is constantly changing according to one's personal situation and social environment. “Labelling someone man or woman is a social decision” (Eckhert & McConnell-Ginet, 2014 p. 1). Butler draws on the work of Foucault who argues that our identities are bound within social and political powers (Butler, 1999, p. 6).

Queer theory proposes that power is created by an individual's culture. It pledges that power is a social construct that either perpetuates dominance or oppression.

Subsequently, power changes fluidly over persons as they relate to each other. People, who are in power, oppress those who are not in power and dominate situations based on their position of authority (Carr, Hagai, & Zurbruggen, 2015). Moreover, Jagose (1996) contends that Queer theory challenges feminism and gender by conflating gays and lesbians with socially constructed gender and sexual identities. Additionally, queer identities include gay, lesbian, cross-dressers, gender ambiguous and sexual anomalies. Hence, reasons for the inclusion of a queer theoretical lens is its inclusion of transgender identities, to interrogate whether a heteronormative and non-conformative school environment exists and how school learners understand the gender diverse construction of transgender. Additionally, reasons are whether learners' understandings of transgender are reinforced by the dominant heteronormative lens or if the school environment embraces, respects, promotes or excludes non-conforming sexual and gender identities like transgender and if sexual and gender equality is prevalent within the school. Jagose (1996, p.3 ) explains queer as,

Gestures or analytical models which dramatise incoherencies in the allegedly stable relation between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire resisting the model of stability which claims heterosexuality as its origin, when it is more properly its effect, queer focuses on mismatches between sex, gender and desire.

Furthermore, queer theory is an appropriate and constructive instrument that can be used to understand the differences and consistencies of social groups and the power relations that are part of people's experience (Carlin, 2011). Queer theory has no political agenda or motives in the material world. Queer theory is about making decisions that defy social and sexual norms (Greteman, 2017).

People are either categorised as men or women and there are those who may not conform (Riggs & Treharne, 2017). According to Butler (1999, p. 10),

When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes an artifice with the consequence the man and

masculinity might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have included the two theories that outline my research. Connell's theories of masculinities and gender in addition to Butler's Queer theory that form the basis of my study. This chapter also discusses the heterosexual matrix as well as power struggles that take place within schools. Raewynn Connell's (1995) belief is that viewpoints concerning maleness or manliness are not permanent; instead they are frequently transforming and corresponding to the social setting. Additionally, Judith Butler (1999) and Sloop (2012) also declare that gender is fluid and performative and acquires meaning through culturally accepted practices such as appearance, manner of speaking and romantic coupling. This study explores the social construction of masculinity, gender performativity and fluidity and sexual orientation. Schools seem to regulate the sexual attraction to the opposite sex and sexual role standardisation in contrast to the marginalisation of unconventional sexual orientations (DePalma & Jennet, 2012). I therefore seek to extract grade 6 and 7 girls' and boys' understandings or perceptions regarding transgender identities. An additional motive for the chosen theories being used in this study is that constructions of masculinity shape young people's notions and experiences of sexuality (Bhana, 2012). In the following chapter I review literature of masculinities and same-sex sexuality from various local and global contexts.

## Chapter Three: Literature Review

### 3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I addressed the relationship between Judith Butler's Queer theory in relation to Raewyn Connell's theory of masculinity and gender. I showed how sexuality and gender expressions are socially and culturally constructed rather than naturally produced. Additionally, I illustrated the relationship between socially constructed knowledge and hegemonic masculinities, and sexuality and gender expression. In this chapter, I will commence with short illustrations of international and local personalities to contextualise transgender identities and other non-conforming and sexually diverse identities. I will then provide a historical background, define the term transgender, followed by the position of transgender identities within schools and societies and lastly provide the relevance for a need to include and acknowledge transgender identities.

Bruce Jenner (Appendix 1), a retired American Olympian athlete, achieved fame by winning a gold medal for United States of America (USA) in 1976 at the Montreal Olympic Games. After several failed relationships and marriages, Bruce married Kris Kardashian and participated in the reality television series, *Keeping up with the Kardashians*. Although Bruce Jenner exuded confidence and success in the public arena due to his athletic prowess, however, in his private life he "...suffered from gender dysphoria since childhood". In April 2015, Bruce publicly declared that he was a transwoman as he had transitioned from Bruce Jenner to Caitlyn Jenner. In January 2017, she "underwent sex reassignment surgery..." (Macleans, 2017, p. 1). Caitlyn Jenner's struggles with sexuality and gender identification are penned in her memoir, *The Secrets of My Life*, wherein she states,

*"I am going to live authentically for the first time in my life... I am going to have an enthusiasm for life that I have not had in 39 years since the Olympics, almost two-thirds of my life"* (Macleans, 2017, p. 1).

Caitlyn's memoir reflects on the mental anguish and obstacles that transgender people experience and struggle with during their transformation. She also speaks about the perceptions of transgenderism and relates how liberated and free she finally felt after her surgery (Jancelewicz, 2017).

Non-conforming and diverse sexualities are not exclusive to the American context, but within the South African context, many well-known and lesser known individuals identify as being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI). The media has also publicised non-conforming and diverse sexualities. Examples of these include Toya Delaize (lesbian), Somizi Mhlongo (gay), Vuyo Ngcukana (bisexual), Elle van der Berg (transgender), Caster Semenya (intersex) and Sibabalwe Gcilitshana (queer), the first openly queer woman participant in the 2019 Miss South Africa contest (Appendix 1).

Caster Semenya, South Africa's Olympic Gold Medalist has been declared by Time Magazine (2019) as one of the 100 influential people globally. Semenya, an athlete who is intersex, is now a world-famous icon (Eye-witness News, 2019, p. 1). Despite the huge challenges faced by transgender and sexually diverse people globally, Semenya now features as an influential icon despite her sexual orientation, making headlines (Eye-witness News, 2019, p.1). Semenya does not fit into the normative gender binary with an acceptable biological definition of either male or female. Society then refuses to accept such identities, hence, forcing them to conform to the static constructions that society dictates. A considerable portion of society is so set in their ideologies that sexually diverse identities, like Semenya's, are openly discriminated against. Despite her authentic natural potential, she is expected to suppress her natural potential by medicating herself to reduce her natural testosterone levels (Levitt, 2019). However, after much controversy and discourse she now ranks as a global icon (Eye-witness News, 2019, p.1).

Although, the illustrations above depict more renowned personalities and individuals who identify as non-conforming, cognisance must be taken that individuals from all walks of

life, ages, creeds, races, and economic status identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (Moore, 2017).

### **3.2 Historical Background**

Foucault argues that “homosexuality is not necessarily a modern formation because while there were previously same-sex sex acts; there was no corresponding category of identification” (Jagose, 1996, p. 10). In her book, ‘Queer Theory’ Jagose (1996) aims to situate queer theory in the history and evolution of sexuality and sexual categories. Jagose (1996) further draws on Foucault’s argument that same-sex sex acts were frowned upon by civil law and from religious points of view. They were regarded as highly contagious. These acts were regarded as sinful and loathsome as individuals identifying as a homosexual were identified as a species. According to Jagose (1996) it is difficult to pinpoint the exact inception of it all.

In the year 1897, Magnus Hirschfield, a German neurologist founded the Scientific Humanitarian Committee (SHC). This committee was responsible for the establishment of the concept of a ‘third sex’. The aim of this body was to give recognition to the ‘congenital nature of Homosexuality’ (Jagose, 1996, p. 23). There was a need to formerly introduce a non-conforming gender identity. Magnus Hirschfield integrated and developed on Karl Ulrich’s model. He understood homosexuality as a ‘third sex’ - a combination of physiological components of femininity and masculinity. The SHC dauntlessly emphasised the non-toxic nature of homosexuality and how unnecessary criminalisation based on it was. Karl Ulrich was the very first researcher to formulate a scientific theory based on homosexuality in the years 1864 to 1865 (Kennedy, 1997). Being a homosexual himself, spurred him on as a lawyer who was dismissed due to his sexual orientation. This got him researching and becoming the first researcher to formulate a theory on homosexuality.

Later in 1929, Lily Glibe established the Glibe Memorial Methodist church in San Francisco in the United States of America (USA). The church aimed to create a fellowship of worshippers which incorporated the needy. By the 1950s, the congregation

had dwindled but the church continued to run on an endowment from the Glibe Family Trust. By the early 1960s, the church had established the Council of Religion and the Homosexual (CRH). This was a fundamental turning point in history, a church in support of homosexuality. By 1966, Glibe Memorial, under the pastorship of Reverend Cecil Williams, continued to be the voice of the marginalised communities and transformation by openly supporting gay and lesbian initiatives. According to Skyler (2008), Glibe Memorial became one of the most famous liberal churches in all time and gained support from celebrities and stars like Maya Angelou, Oprah Winfrey and Bill Clinton, to name but a few.

Stryker (2008) goes on to state that by the 1960s and 1970s this period was referred to as “The big Science period of transgender history” (Jagose, 1996, p. 93). During this period a youth orientated rebellion began resulting in it becoming the most militant phase of the transgender movement as transgender people were readily rioting and canvassing for social change as illustrated in the pictures below.

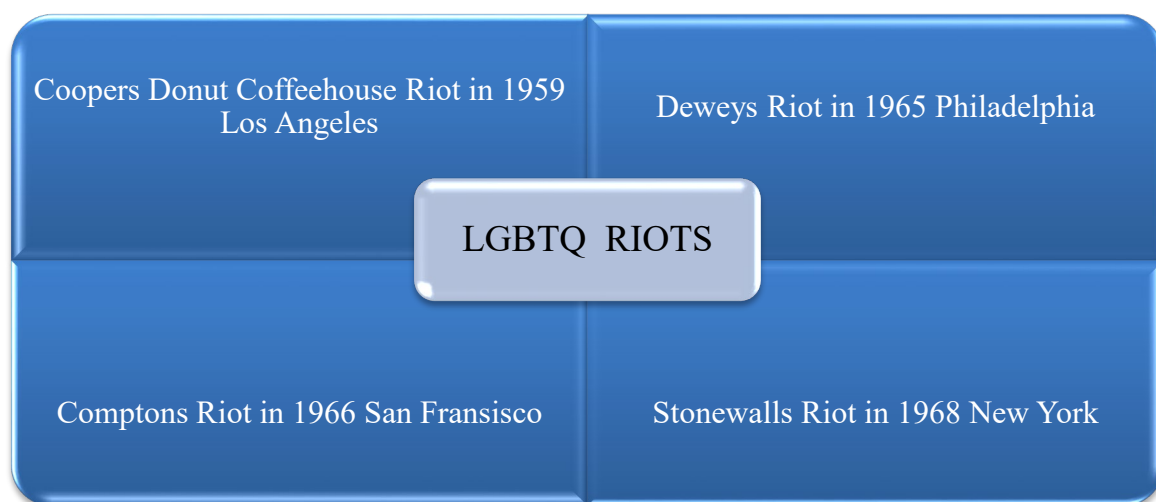


**Figure 5: The Stonewell Riot and The Compton Riot (newsweek.com)**

The 1959 Coopers Coffee House riot in Los Angeles saw police, during their routine arbitration, requesting transgender people to produce identity documents (ID) which matched their sexual orientation (Stryker, 2008). In retaliation, transgender people rebelled and resisted by throwing high heels at the police. Additionally, in 1965, Dewey,



the owner of a restaurant and coffee bar, refused to serve anyone wearing non-conformist clothes which resulted in the Dewey Riot taking place in Philadelphia with transgender people, lesbians and gays taking to the streets in protest. In 1966, the Compton Cafeteria riot in San Francisco occurred when the manager became frustrated with some noisy drag queens that were not buying anything and called in the police. The drag queens retaliated by throwing a cup of coffee into the face of a policeman and later all the drag queens beat up the policemen with heavy heels, purses and bottles (Miller, Mayo & Lugg, 2018). This signified the beginning of the gay liberation with individuals being encouraged to be bold and come out, thereby claiming their proper identities (Msibi, 2014; Piantato, 2016). However, by the 1970s popular culture was slowly undergoing a transformation. Unisex fashion was now quite common, women wore more masculine clothes and men could wear their hair a little longer without being frowned upon (Stryker, 2008). The general culture was transforming. People were now also more confident about their political status and did not hesitate to take to the streets in protest. By the 1990s, Judith Butler was boldly challenging the nature of identity. Her Queer theory argued that gender was ever changing and came up with the idea that gender was fluid (Butler, 1999).



**Figure 6: Some Gay Liberation Riots in the United States**

Within Africa, same-sex relations are even less tolerated. However, this did not mean that sexually diverse identities were free from prejudices and becoming victims of violence (Jobson, Theron, Kaggwa & Kim, 2012). In Willard Wallers' (1932) famous book "The Sociology of Teaching" he categorised homosexuality as something contagious. Wallers went on to warn against having homosexual teachers as they might be a negative influence and encourage heteronormative learners to follow the path of homosexuality. It is evident that in this era homosexuality was viewed negatively, almost like an abomination (Msibi, 2014).

In many African countries homosexuals and lesbians are reluctant to be open about their sexual orientation (Reygan & Francis, 2015). These areas are still very influenced by cultural laws and ideologies. Of the 54 African states, only 32 acknowledge sexually diverse identities (Human Rights Watch, 2019). According to Msibi (2011) evidence confirming same-sex relations depicted in Bushmen caves is another confirmation that same-sex relations have been in existence for a long, long time. During the Gold Rush in the year 1886, migrant laborers were attracted from all around South Africa. Men travelled to the 'City of Gold' (Gauteng) in search of better opportunities for themselves and left their families behind. Working on these mines came with a price as the migrant workers lived in compounds, in isolation, away from wives and families. To fill these voids men resorted to having a marriage that was known as an 'inkotsane' (young miners who were 'married' to older miners and expected to perform wifely duties) (Msibi, 2011, p. 64). These young men, called 'skesanas' (transgender men) who were effeminate in nature were then expected to have sexual relationships with older men, filling in for their wives and performing wifely duties (Msibi, 2011, p. 65; Pushparagavan, 2014).

The 1960s and 1970s saw Africa in its entirety becoming decolonised and moving towards independence (Pushparagavan, 2014). South Africa was in a political shift. LGBTIQI activists capitalised on this opportunity to join in the struggle and identify with the mass of people experiencing oppression and exclusion. According to Van der Merwe, (2015, p. 1) in the 1980s there was a secret club called "The Phoenix Society". It was an LGBTIQI club. Sexually diverse people looked forward to having a night out at these

secret clubs where they could be who they really were without being judged or ridiculed. The 1980s also saw the beginning of gay and lesbian movements. These movements strategically positioned their activists. These activists formed alliances with other political groups and argued that they were fighting a similar battle, one of oppression, discrimination and exclusion. These political alliances resulted in the rights of sexually diverse people being included in the constitution (De Ru, 2013; Monakali, 2017). South Africa is thus considered as the most progressive in terms of constitutional protection granted to sexually diverse people.

### **3.3 Defining Transgender**

The word “transgender” is loosely used and refers to people who are born as a particular gender but feel uncomfortable as that gender and wish to change their bodies to suit the gender they find comfort in, through gender reassignment surgery and/or hormone treatment (Eckert & McConnel-Ginet, 2014; Buchanan & McDougall, 2016; Ndelu, 2017). Most transgender people become aware of their sexual orientation at an early age. They also realise that they are different. Oppressing their identity for too long a period can manifest in a multitude of problems. According to the gender binary there can only be two genders, male or female.

Transgender falls into the LGBTQI category (Orthy, 2018). The number of learners identifying as transgender in schools is on the increase (DePalma & Jennett, 2012, Jobson et al, 2012, Potgieter & Reygan, 2012; Bockting, Coleman, Deutsch, Guillamon, Meyer, Meyer, Reisner, Sevelius & Ettner, 2016; Bragg, Jackson, Ringrose & Renold, 2018; Mangin, 2018, Miller et al, 2018,). Most people become aware of their sexual orientation by the age of three (DePalma & Jennett, 2012 Kennedy & Helen, 2010; Mangin, 2018). Most children discover their sexuality in primary school. Despite this, the term transgender has either been ignored or misunderstood for too long (Stryker, 2008, Kennedy & Helen, 2010, Bhana, 2012; Francis, 2012; Msibi, 2012; Bhana, 2014; Gowen & Winges-Yanez, 2014; Malo-Juvera, 2016; Shah et al, 2018). According to Zeeman, Aranda, Sherriff and Cocking (2017) the system that sustains heteronormativity renders

the lives of LGBTQI people as invisible. Children are assigned genders that may not necessarily fit in with what they feel like internally (Kennedy & Helen, 2010). There is a great lack of resources and information addressing issues based on transgender identities (Msibi, 2011; Bhana, 2012). In unpacking the term transgender I will look at three specific areas that will help define it: biological and physiological, psychological and sociological.

### 3.3.1 Biological and Physiological Makeup

When a baby is born and the baby fails to fit into common biological categories, an endocrinal and surgical manipulation is administered to ensure that the baby adheres to a dichotomous female or male prototype (Eckert & McConnel, 2014). This surgery focuses on biologically categorising the baby according to a specific sex and gender but no consideration is assigned to the baby's psychological makeup i.e. which category the baby's brain falls into (Zimmerman & Shuhaiber, 2013; Eckert & McConnel, 2014). The biology of a person explains the physical sexual make up of an individual i.e. the specific sexual organ related to each gender, a vagina for a girl and penis for a boy (Khan-Orthy, 2018). These organs biologically set an individual into a particular gender binary. Biological aspects further refer to the genetics and endocrinology of a person. The hormones governed by the endocrinal system directly impact on the way in which transgender identities feel. According to research done by Khan-Orthy (2018) chromosomes and hormones are assigned to everybody at birth; however, they do not necessarily match with the physical and sexual makeup of the body.

### 3.3.2 Psychological Arguments

The psychological aspect refers to the mind and mentality of an individual. However, as stated earlier, the biology of the body may not necessarily match the psychology of the body with a transgender male possessing female sexual organs yet having the mindset of a man, hence, identifying as a male. One may wonder why my three-year-old son is more comfortable playing with a doll and his sister's tea set rather than with a truck or dad's

mechanical tools (Kennedy & Helen, 2010; Zimmerman & Shuhaiber, 2013). This is merely due to the psychological inclination that drives the child.

### 3.3.3 Sociological Explanations

Sociology is influenced by one's environment. Transgender identities are reluctant to portray their true identities in public for fear of hate crimes and discrimination (Stryker, 2008; DePalma & Jennet, 2012). According to Van der Merwe (2015) transgender identities live as one gender in the day and conform to another at night. In broad daylight they portray the gender binary, following the normative sex roles as dictated by society. At night, however, they are able to dress in high heels and feminine underwear and frocks satisfying their natural instincts. When the world was asleep they could now transcend and transform into their true identities (Van Der Merwe, 2015) with no one to judge or ridicule them so they are able to be who they want to be. Dressing up, and portraying the characters they are comfortable in, gives them a sense of satisfaction.

### 3.4 Homophobic and Transphobic Discrimination in Society

It is a fact that a transgender child's experience may very well affect them into their adulthood (Kennedy & Helen, 2010). Children are very intuitive and aware that their differences are not socially and culturally accepted (Kennedy & Helen, 2010). The gender binary refers specifically to an individual's classification of sex and gender, either male (masculine) or female (feminine). Cultural and societal acknowledgement and acceptance of these identities are more positive than identities that may be a combination of both (Khan-Orthy, 2018). Homophobia and transphobia in society present themselves in the form of homophobic or transphobic discrimination, violence and basic disrespect (DePalma & Jennette, 2012). Transphobia is a subtle way of exercising hegemonic masculinity. It is a calculated means of executing heteronormativity. These transphobic attacks affect everyone: the mindset and attitudes of sexually diverse identities as well as heteronormative learners. With the increase in the number of transgender identities, also comes an increase in the acts of violence and discrimination (Jobson et al., 2012).

According to Khan-Orthy (2018) in Bangladesh, a state in India, society fails to acknowledge transgender identities as part of their communities. Due to marginalisation, their propitious job opportunities become almost non-existent. They are subjected to harsh demands due to societal constructs that dictate normative social and cultural binaries. These transgender individuals then become dancers and singers as the only means of generating income. They are called ‘Hijrah’ and perform to earn a minimal income (Khan-Orthy, 2018, p. 7). Correspondingly, in Pakistan a similar scenario unfolds. Due to cultural and societal norms, transgender identities are literally compelled to vacate their homes because of the victimisation and exclusion they experience from family and society (Shah et al., 2018). In Pakistan the individual identifying as transgender is then left homeless and it is during this time of desperation that he or she may find rudimentary accommodation in places called “Chelas” (brothels) (Shah et al., 2018, p. 2). Here they are expected to dance and perform sexual acts on strange men who visit “Chelas” for a fee. The money goes to a ‘guru’ who then gives them a minimal portion as a stipend. These transgender identities do not know where they fit into society. Their documentation requires specific sexual categorisation and they begin to feel completely left out, almost without even an identity (Khan-Orthy, 2018). They are however labelled as being backward, degraded and ostracised by the very same society that resulted in their economic crippling. Society then questions the trajectory of young children who may not conform to the normative gender binary. These situations are questionable as heterosexual adults cannot perceive how a child as little as six years can choose a sexually diverse identity (Mangin, 2010).

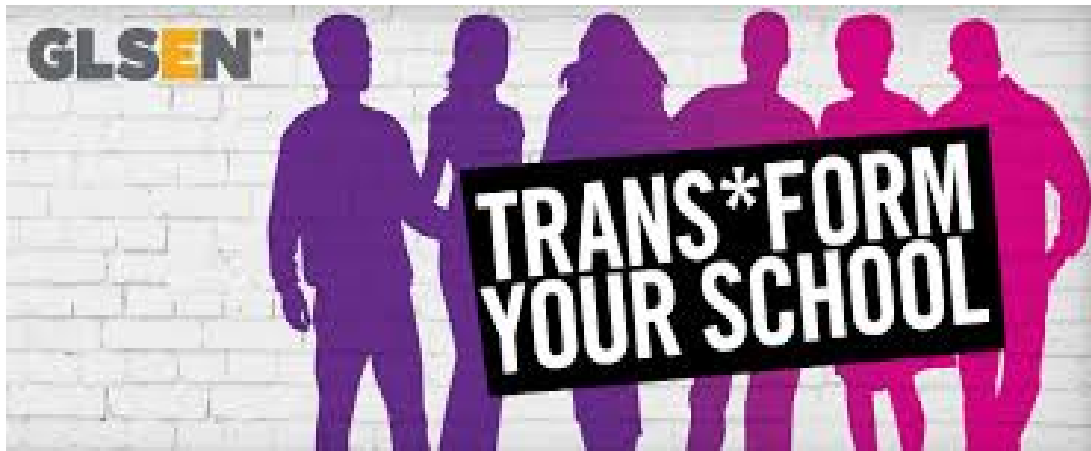
### **3.5 Transgender identities and the school context**

According to Martino and Cumming-Potvin (2018) there is a dire need to address gender democratisation in schools. Schools promote a very gendered environment (Jones et al., 2017). Bartholomeus and Riggs (2017) contend that transgender learners often have negative experiences. There are many incidents where children are growing up in homes and communities that attempt to find protection and promote their legal rights, in respect of their sexual orientation or gender identity (Kennedy & Helen, 2010). In the United

Kingdom, primary school teachers have rallied together to encourage equality in terms of rights and opportunities afforded to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) learners (DePalma & Jennette, 2012). According to the Human Rights Watch document (2011) there is a wide gap between the ideals stipulated by the constitution and the public's attitudes and behaviour towards sexually diverse identities.

Sexually diverse identities are often marginalised, stigmatised and rarely acknowledged (Stryker, 2008; Kennedy & Helen, 2010; Bhana, 2012; Francis, 2012; Msibi, 2012; Bhana, 2014; Gowen & Wings-Yanez, 2014; Malo-Juvera, 2016; Shah, Rashid, Alif, Hyder, Bin Fawad, Muzaffar, Rehman, Anjum, Bin Mehzar, Haider, Hasan & Shukar, 2018). Their basic human rights are openly violated and they are perceived by the heterosexual majority as subordinate and inferior. A study conducted by Bhana (2014) highlighted that sexuality is culturally constructed and gendered. Societies have struggled for decades to move beyond discrimination yet gender still remains a very sensitive topic that is viewed unjustly. In addition, Bhana (2014) argues that perpetrators of acts of violence and abuse are influenced by heteronormative expectations and gender binaries stipulated by a patriarchal social structure. Bhana (2014) further mentions that within South Africa the democracy and the ability to exercise one's individual desires is an important matter since the injustices and prejudices posed by apartheid regime. Transphobia refers to the violation of the human rights, social well-being and dignity of transgender identities (Divan, Cortez, Smelyanskaya & Keatley, 2016). Transphobia impacts negatively on the emotional, mental, physical and financial status of transgender identities. It is thus an important human rights issue and needs critical attention (Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2018).

### **3.6 Transphobia and Transphobic Discrimination in School**



**Figure 7: Poster discouraging transphobia in schools (facebook.com)**

Transgender youth face challenges that undermine their abilities and social position in schools and society in general daily (Msibi, 2012; Abreu, Black, & Fedewa, 2016; Francis, 2017). The school has an important role to play in promoting resilience and facilitating social and emotional development into adulthood. Schools with a population of more than 143 children are almost certain to have at least one transgender child (Mangin, 2018). Learners identifying as transgender are often marginalised within the school environment. Paechter (2017) found that learners are indoctrinated with heterosexual norms from early childhood. Boys and girls are obligated to dress in a gender-specific uniform, physical training (PT) activities in school are structured to cater specifically either for girls or boys, drama lessons include roles for either girls or boys (Gulgoz, Gomez, DeMeules, & Olson, 2018). No consideration is given to that learner who may identify other than the norm. These learners are marginalised by being totally excluded from normal activities within the school environment (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014). The stigma attached to transgender identities creates emotional problems, i.e. depression and mental illnesses (Bockting et al., 2016). Despite the legal framework (South African Constitution, 2016; Human Rights Report, 2019) affording children sexual rights and the right to indulge in sexual activities, the contemporary approach to researching young people's own conceptualisations of sexuality and gender remains restricted (Strode, 2015). Hence, there is an increased interest in knowledge and



understandings of transgender identities (Bockting et al., 2016; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2018). This informed knowledge will promote a democratised education system in schools that will impact on the overall development of our country. I will now go on to examine the policies within society in general and schools and how they implement inclusivity.

### 3.6.1 School Law and Policies

South Africa is recognised as one of the most progressive countries in Africa in terms of constitutional protection for people with sexually diverse identities. Our constitution recognises and protects the interests of sexually diverse identities with equal rights (Msibi, 2011; Potgieter & Reygan, 2012; Bhana, 2014). Despite legislation, South African schools still remain very transphobic (Richardson, 2004; Bhana, 2012; Msibi, 2012). Transphobia and gender equality within the education system require urgent attention (Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2018). These are human rights issues and need to be addressed to allow for the sanctioning of trans specific education. The term minority is often used when referring to LGBTQI identities, not referring to numbers but rather in terms of their accessibility to social rights and justice. Martino and Cumming-Potvin (2018) reveal that the lack of trans-affirmative policies in school results in a continued limitation in terms of ensuring gender democratisation. Policies should include voices of transgender learners. Bhana (2012) outlines that the Department of Education is clear about human rights and equality as important components to facilitate educational transformation. Transgender learners need to be considered in terms of facilities and specific language use as well as an inclusive curriculum that acknowledges and teaches about sexually diverse identities.

In 2013, Namibia endorsed its sector policy based on inclusive education. This document ensures a fair and just education system that promotes democracy (Buchanan & McDougall, 2016). According to Mangin (2018) school policies and practices can profoundly affect children whose gender identities do not match their sex assigned at birth. According to Kennedy and Helen (2010) schools fail to support transgender

learners. Transgender learners are labelled as problematic and troublesome because they oppose the gender binary.

The constitution and school policies in some areas encourage students, teachers, social leaders and community members to collaborate on transgender student success and educational diversity. According to Miller, Mayo and Lugg (2018) some of the changes in schools are occurring very slowly, however in most schools the curriculum focuses primarily on heteronormative ideologies (Potgieter & Reygan, 2012). Sexual education has been mandated as a compulsory topic for Life Orientation (L.O.) (Bhana, 2014). The inclusion of sexual education in the school curriculum will grant learners insight on how to deal with and respond to social problems e.g. social inequalities and gender transformation (Shefer & Macleod, 2015). During Life Orientation lessons, comprehensive and relevant content will be presented to learners. This information will create informed learners as well as competent and caring educators who will be equipped to manage the class and their responses as well as provide support for those learners who may want to make any personal disclosures (Tucker et al., 2016). Learners will develop normative constructions of gender transformation and non-conforming gender identities (Shefer & Macleod, 2015). It will contribute to a wider community practice, as learners will be taught values and collaborative skills during L.O. to enter society. These values to establish healthy relationships and exhibit tolerance are a requirement to enable transformation within our societies. The topic, however, is often evaded or skimmed through with no real information that will enlighten learners about transgender and sexually diverse identities. Many teachers are still influenced by their dominant normative expectations of gender. Many teachers are sceptical as they believe that promoting tolerance and equity may endorse a specific lifestyle and encourage vulnerable young adults to adopt a sexually diverse identity. South African society still understands gender along cis-normative lines and follows a biological determinist model of gender identities and gender expressions (May, 2016).

According to Gowen and Wings-Yanez (2014) children form their identities in school. Sexuality education at schools is one strategy that could be implemented to prevent

unhealthy behaviour that is sexually motivated but rather encourage acceptance (Potgieter & Reygan, 2012). Information in the form of text books, workbooks, worksheets and journals needs to be restructured and processed ensuring the inclusion of LGBTQI identities as these are rarely represented in textbooks (Potgieter & Reygan, 2012; Malo-Juvera, 2016). Moreover, teachers often evade or minimise sections within the curriculum that focus on sexuality and sexual diversity as they are embarrassed to discuss such issues (Francis, 2012).

A study carried out in the United States of America (USA) revealed that young people have requested help in understanding transgender identities better to enable them to lend support to transgender identities (Miller et al., 2018). The Ronald Reagan presidential administration received LGBTQI identities callously and coldly whilst President Bill Clinton and Barak Obama embraced the idea of equal social justice and human rights, during their reign, with the 'Title IX of higher education act of 1972'. This act compelled the US government to protect and enforce rights with regards to sexuality and gender identity. However, Clinton and Obama's successor, President Trump and his cabinet, have again discriminated against LGBTQI identities by withdrawing their predecessors' legislation resulting in confusion concerning the rights and protection of transgender identities (Miller et al., 2018; Spencer, 2019). According to Mangin (2018) the 'Title IX' prohibited any form of sexual discrimination in schools and ensured the acceptance and acknowledgement of transgender identities.

In the United Kingdom (UK), LGBTQI and education still remain unaddressed. Teachers have taken it upon themselves to collaborate and network to share ideas on how to encourage equal rights and opportunities for all learners (DePalma & Jennett, 2012). Policies are passed to guide teachers' actions and functionality at school. These supportive gender policies focus on the language used when addressing transgender learners, the school's dress code, separated sex facilities and activities and broadly cover basic human rights and violations. Oregon, in the United States, is one state where curriculum and policies ensue that all facets of education meet the needs of all learners (Gowen & Wings-Yanez, 2014).

Education is a key factor that allows for any individual to grow emotionally, financially as well as intellectually. Even though learners may be heterosexual and conform to the normative gender binary, it is important for the concept to be included in curriculum because these learners may have family or friends who are sexually diverse by nature (Gowen & Wings-Yanez, 2014). Khan-Orthy (2018) emphasises that having no recognition from legal authorities and government leads to the marginalisation of many transgender individuals who consequently fall into a deprived community. They are then labelled 'backward' by a society that failed to support them as normal members of the society and remain ostracised and degraded due to their sexual orientation.

Rights and responsibilities should be clearly noted. Social surveys (Human Rights Watch document, 2011) conclude that there is a wide gap between the ideals stipulated by the constitution and real public attitudes and behaviour towards sexually diverse identities. These attitudes spread over the broader spectrum of unnecessary hate, discrimination, prejudices and violence perpetrated against such identities. Constitutional protection is meaningless for sexually diverse identities due to the state's inability to enforce the laws passed (Human Rights Watch document, 2011). In having such policy implemented the rate of bullying at schools will be reduced as more learners will become aware of what it is and how to respect and deal with LGBTQI personalities (Gowen & Wings-Yanez, 2014).

### 3.6.2 Transphobic Experiences at School

In South Africa, schools are transphobic (Msibi, 2012). Bhana, (2012) examined teachers' perceptions on homophobia and found that there were three main interrelated constructions via which sexuality was viewed. These are as follows: religious prohibitions, lack of curriculum and silencing homophobia. Homophobia in schools is an important means of understanding the position of sexually diverse learners and it is an invaluable instrument to promote awareness based on sexual inequalities. According to Shah et al., (2018) peer victimisation is a huge problem at schools. Sexually diverse

learners' position is much more vulnerable hence, the need to analyse the cultural position of adolescent experiences of being sexually biased (Gegenfurtner & Gebhardt, 2017). LGBTQI learners feel isolated, excluded and marginalised because of the manner in which schools handle their sexual orientation (Bhana, 2014). This discrimination and intolerance towards sexually diverse learners stirs up incidents of gender violence at school. These episodes of homophobia affect them greatly, as they experience higher levels of bullying and harassment due to their sexual orientation (Reygan & Francis, 2015). These negative attitudes towards sexually diverse learners results in poor performance in their schoolwork as well as the inability to socialise to their optimal levels.

### *3.6.2.1 Gender Violence*

Gender violence is endemic in all societies and is purportedly produced and reproduced through negotiation of relationships and power dynamics between men and women (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). With violent attacks on transgender identities on the increase it seems as if transphobia is being legitimised (Judge, 2015). Adam and Coltrane (2005) highlighted that the ways in which boys are raised in many societies support and promote a masculine personality and encourage such behaviour. Boys belonging to marginalised masculinities (homosexual) are teased at school because they do not conform to conventional hegemonic norms and standards. According to Connell, (2002) by the time learners are at least 10 years old, they begin to use homophobic insults. Words such as "fag" are commonly thrown around as boys start becoming more expressive about their hostility towards non-conformist sexuality (Youdell, 2004).

Masculinities' implications on society reflect that power and changes are plotted within gender, social and cultural differences. The school is a place where social inequalities are heightened and to some extent promoted through physical and symbolic violence (Haywood & Mac an Ghail, 2012). The friendships of boys may appear intimate, but some researchers consider these friendships and relationships as driven by hegemonic masculinities. According to Swain, (2004) boys' masculinities are defined by what they

can do with their bodies. Peer groups within schools are the main arenas wherein masculinities are constructed and influenced. Boys yearn to gain popularity, within heterosexual masculinity, and adopt the masculinity that will elevate their social status. Their ultimate aim is to be in a position of power. Boys will therefore aspire to join the football or rugby team as football and rugby are sports that embody heterosexual masculinities. This position allows them an opportunity to “show off” their physique, fashion sense and, of course, their ability to dominate the field. Boys who achieve this will be in the spotlight and become a favourite among fellow learners as well as teachers and parents. Swain (2006) draws on Judith Butler (1990) whose argument is that identities are a product of actions i.e. what is done to and by a body. Swain (2006) refers to masculinity as being dynamic and ever changing. I will now look at how bullying, language and negative attitudes of teachers and learners affect transgender identities.

#### *3.6.2.2 Bullying, Language and Negative Attitudes*

Bullying is an international pandemic that dehumanises and mars learners emotionally (Gowen & Wings-Yanez, 2014). Gender bullying is rife in senior primary and high school as children become more aware of their bodies and their sexual preferences and those of other individuals during this period (Brown, 2017; Crissman, 2019). Children also become more observant and aware of other children and their sexual preferences. It is during this time that children begin to identify those who do not conform to normative gender binaries. These non-conforming children become the victims of gender bullying. With the increase in the number of learners identifying as sexually diverse, homophobic bullying creates greater psychological distress than normal bullying. Depression, low self-esteem and lack of confidence are resultant effects of these homophobic acts of bullying. Malo-Juvera, (2016) recommends that, because bullying is most prevalent in senior primary and high school, efforts should be made to teach heteronormative learners in the early years of schooling about tolerance and acceptance.

Homophobic language is another major problem at schools. Derogatory terms such as ‘moffie’ (an effeminate male), ‘he/she’ and ‘isitabane’ (an isiZulu term referring to gays

and lesbian with a very derogatory connotation) (Msibi, 2012; p. 523) are used to humiliate and belittle non-conforming gender identities (Malo-Juvera, 2016; Brown, 2017; Khan-Orthy, 2018). Disregarded and left unaddressed, these practices then perpetuate and continue as an acceptable practice (DePalma & Jennett, 2012, Malo-Juvera, 2016). The use of appropriate pronouns when referring to sexually diverse identities can also become a sensitive topic (Airton, 2018) hence, the use of appropriate language should always be ensured. The incorrect use of pronouns and terms can become a sensitive issue. The use of inappropriate words makes transgender learners feel excluded, humiliated or disrespected. Schools then become sites where discrimination against transgender learners becomes a reality.

Inclusivity should be implemented in all areas e.g. public and school washrooms and bathrooms where transgender learners and identities are excluded. All bathroom and washroom facilities are either labeled 'Boy' or 'Girl'. Transgender learners are once again excluded and ignored due to a lack of consideration for basic needs (Jones et al., 2018). Physical training (PT) lessons and stipulated uniforms are another way in which sexually diverse learners are ignored. These are generally specifically designed to accommodate either boy or girl identities with no consideration being given to sexually diverse learners. Transgender learners then internalise their oppression and develop other problems stemming from this inability of freedom of expression (Kennedy & Helen, 2010).

According to DePalma and Jennett (2012) it has been established that homophobia and transphobia are cultural constructs hence, they are so easily promoted in schools. All societies are shaped by ideologies passed down by cultural influences. The recent popularity of memes, a form of humour via social media, has also become a subtle form of displaying transphobia (Spencer, 2019). Media has become a huge platform of an almost silent perpetrator of bullying. False accusations, fabricated stories and negative comments are often posted on social media. Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook are just a few of the social media sites that are popularly used. Victims are humiliated,

degraded and often marginalised on social media and can lead to depression, a lower self-esteem and suicide.

### *3.6.2.3 Teachers and Transphobia*

Teachers play a vital role in changing the culture within one's school. They are role models who are instrumental in shaping attitudes to, and knowledge of, transgender identities. When schools aim to promote inclusivity they have a moral duty to serve all, irrespective of race, caste, creed and sexual orientation. They should explore ways in which to create inclusive environments to accommodate and allow for transgender learners to develop to their full capacity and flourish (Mangin, 2018). Teachers are as guilty as hetero-normative learners in practicing homophobic discrimination (Malo-Juvera, 2016). Culture and societal norms are so entrenched in their mindsets that many fail to realise the seriousness of their bias and negative attitudes towards transgender learners. Problems experienced by transgender learners must be addressed by the teacher so that the problem does not continue and become one that is perpetuated. Schools which have supportive teachers and principals are also confronted with challenges arising from the parents or fellow school mates (Mangin, 2018). Unfortunately, most transgender learners continue to feel marginalised and excluded, resulting in suppressed identities and unfulfilled adults.

## **3.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter the term transgender was unpacked. I looked at the timeline of LGBTQI identities and the slow emergence of transgender identities via youth-orientated rebellion. Transgender identities gained the confidence to dress as they wish and form social clubs that represent their true identities (Stryker, 2008). Despite continued rejection from society, sexually diverse identities have persevered and continued in their struggle to gain recognition within society. In recent years, legislation is slowly beginning to acknowledge transgender identities in granting them the right to the freedom of choice



and policy that supports democratisation and trans-inclusivity (Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2018).

It is concluded that the primary goal of education should be to develop individuals holistically. Discrimination against, and marginalisation of, sexually diverse identities leads to poor mental health as well as impacts negatively on their overall wellbeing (Bockting et al., 2016). The question that then arises is: how do we encourage holistic growth when at primary and secondary school levels inclusivity and discrimination against sexually diverse identities is blatant (Potgieter & Reygan, 2012)? Schools are encouraged to include sexuality education in their curriculum (Bockting et al., 2016). There is a dire need to address subjugated and difficult knowledge such as controversial subjects like sexuality and sex education (Davies & Robinson, 2013). This will create awareness within learning, hence, creating a generation of learners who are aware of the trajectory surrounding sexually diverse identities. With the increase in the number of transgender identities, comes the need to promote and facilitate the inclusion, integration and tolerance of their needs (Bockting et al., 2016). The recognition of non-conforming families also needs to be addressed (Davies & Robinson, 2013) since families make up a big part of all our lives. Society needs to acknowledge and tolerate non-conforming families and avoid rendering them invisible. In the next chapter, I will the outline the research methods and data collection instruments employed to gather and analyse data in this study.

## **Chapter Four: Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, a literature review on the construction and perceptions of transgender identities in the primary school was presented. In this chapter, I outline how this study was executed. I will present an overview of the research design and methodology used to explore the concept of transgender identities and how it is viewed by grade 6 and 7 learners, in a primary school. I will begin by describing the research design, followed by the context of the study, data collection methods, data analysis, trustworthiness, ethical consideration and finally the limitations of the study.

### **4.2 Research Design**

Drawing from Cresswell (2017), research may be defined as a logical sequence connecting thick data to a study's research questions and conclusion. Research affords the researcher an opportunity to tap into the perceptions of their participants and gather authentic data based on human experience (Cresswell, 2017). It may also be seen as the blueprint of the study. The research design is also constantly revised as new data may be gathered. According to Cohen et al., (2011) situations are fluid and ever changing. They cannot be considered as static and fixed. Behaviour and events evolve over time and they are greatly influenced by the context. It is imperative that situations are examined through the eyes of participants and not through the eyes of the researcher. The table below illustrates a summary of the research design used in this study.

<b>Research Design</b>				
<b>Research Site</b>	<b>Research Design</b>	<b>Methodology, Instruments, and Sampling</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Duration of Interviews / Focus group discussions</b>
<p><b>Location:</b></p> <p>Primary school in Sydenham.</p> <p>Urban area Population of area: 17835</p> <p>School population: 1274 learners</p> <p>Socio-economic quintile: Quintile 5 school.</p>	<p><b>Approach:</b></p> <p>Phenomenological qualitative design with interpretivist paradigm.</p> <p>Thematic method of analysis.</p>	<p><b>Research Instruments:</b></p> <p>34, 7 to 20 minute semi- structured interviews and 8 focus group discussions consisting of 5 - 6 learners.</p> <p>Sampling: purposive sampling method. 34 participants consisting 34 learners ranging in ages from 12 to 15 years.</p> <p>Drawings: representing their feelings in the form of illustrations.</p> <p>Mixed race and gender learners from middle to lower income socio-economic group.</p> <p>Purposive sampling.</p>	<p><b>Participants:</b></p> <p>Learners = 34</p> <p>Gender Male - 11 Female - 23</p> <p>Race African - 30 coloured - 4</p>	<p><b>Duration:</b></p> <p>All interviews were approximately 7 to 20 minutes.</p> <p>Focus group discussions were approximately 35 to 45 minutes long.</p>
<p>This is the school I teach at. I will have access to participants for study.</p>	<p>This approach will help us understand the subjective world of human experiences.</p>	<p>Interviews, focus group discussions and drawings will ensure authentic data. 34 participants to ensure rich data that reaches saturation point.</p>	<p>A mixed group of participants to ensure a wide range of responses and a diversity of perspectives.</p>	<p>This time frame will enable proper conversation to allow for data collection.</p>

**Table 1: Illustrating the research design**

#### 4.2.1 Qualitative research and interpretivist paradigm

This study is a phenomenological qualitative study aimed at gathering authentic reliable information. This qualitative study is situated within the interpretivist paradigm to examine how learners make sense of transgender identities.

According to scholars such as Cresswell (2017) and Flick (2014), phenomenological qualitative research can be defined as a means of inquiry into social behaviour. It exposes the researcher to multiple realities. Qualitative research can be classified as contextual, involving people and their position within a time and place (Dodgson, 2019). Information collected was related to the situational circumstances of all participants. All individuals have differing backgrounds and hail from different socio-economic backgrounds. Their position within this environment influences their perceptions and ideals. A qualitative approach adopts an inductive method of gathering information. In an inductive approach, meaning is established from the patterns within the gathered information (Flick, 2014; Taylor et al., 2016).

Qualitative researchers adopt a post-positivist belief system in that the researcher seeks multiple perspectives from participants instead of a single reality (Cohen et al., 2011; Cresswell, 2017). A post-positivist approach reflects historical, social and situational context. It reflects realities of the society in which the phenomena exist (Cohen et al., 2011). This then results in a multiple level of data analysis for rigour. In a qualitative research approach social constructivism within an interpretivist paradigm is employed. Here an understanding of the world wherein participants interact and live is sought. The aim of the researcher is to establish subjectivity of experiences in relation to a specific topic. The main focus is to gather thick data from participants and their personal opinion with regards to the situation.

When using the interpretivist paradigm with qualitative methods, researchers look for views and opinions of individuals based on personal experiences. The interpretivist approach looks at self-reflection and the manner in which the research may be conducted.

The interpretivist paradigm allows for the collection of authentic data. It focuses on the individual and is used to understand the personalised world of the different human experiences (Cohen et al., 2011). In this study, learners shared their personal experiences, feelings and opinions on transgender identities. This is regarded as rich data in terms of reality, rather than statistics (Thanh & Thanh, 2015).

According to Cohen et al., (2011) the approach will be used to gather, transcribe and analyse data. This information will then be used to make informed amendments to policies with regards to curriculum and functionality of schools. Children occupy an important position in society, hence, they can be used as instruments to facilitate a change in mind-set. As stated by Mangin (2018), functionality and school policies can impact greatly on the sexually diverse child. I hope to create a greater awareness about the phenomenon of transgender within schools and more specifically among learners as many are still influenced by social constructs.

#### **4.3 Location and context of the study**

This study was conducted in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa in a suburb called Sydenham. Mbali Primary School (pseudonym) was the site of my study. Learners who attend the school hail from other surrounding suburbs as well as peri-urban areas in and around Durban, namely Kwa-Mashu, Chesterville, Hammarsdale, Inanda, Newlands East, Ntuzuma, Umlazi, Bluff, Mayville, Bonella, Sherwood, Westville, Cleremont, Illovo, Amanzimtoti, Overport and Sydenham. Mbali Primary School was established in the year 1975. Father Charles Hugo, who was a Parish Priest of St. Anne's Church situated on Randles Road, was the inspiration for the establishment of this school. This school is a multi-cultural public school with learners from middle- to lower-income groups. The table below is a representation of the population at Mbali Primary School.

<b>Mbali Primary School Population</b>	
<b>Total school population</b>	1274 learners
<b>Number of learners according to race and gender</b>	1113 black African (518 males and 595 females) 124 coloured (65 males and 59 females) 34 Indian (18 males and 16 females) 3 white (1 male and 2 females)
<b>Number of teachers according to race and gender</b>	41 teachers (5 males and 36 female) 8 black African (1 male and 7 females) 18 Indian (4 males and 14 females) 15 coloured (1 male and 14 females)

**Table 2: Population of Mbali Primary**

Mbali Primary is situated on a main road within the suburb, hence, it has over the years, gained a great deal of popularity due to its accessibility apart from other advantages. Learners at Mbali Primary often develop eloquence and a very good command of the English language. The school focuses on developing good language skills. From my observation over the past 13 years, admissions for Mbali Primary are often very chaotic as parents queue from as early as 02h00 to secure a spot at the front of the line. Parents are eager to have well-spoken children and their belief is that attending Mbali Primary will ensure an elitist accent (good command of the English language). Mbali Primary is a quintile 4 school. This means that the school is dependent on the school fees.

Sydenham is a former coloured suburb designated as such during the apartheid era (Group Areas Act of 1950) that is five minutes away from the city centre. The community is one of middle-class residents. Most residents are employed. They occupy spaces in the business sector as owners, professionals and government employees. The homes in the suburb are well established, streets and parks are well maintained and the area is a semi-business area where one may easily find supermarkets, take-away outlets, salons, banks and the post office. Streets are tarred and public transport is safe and easily accessible (eThekweni Municipality, 2011).

The culture of the school is undergoing a slow transformation due to the population dynamics. The code of conduct has recently been reviewed and amendments have been made e.g. rules pertaining to hairstyles. As a grade 7 English teacher at the school, I have made many observations. In recent years it has become evident that the number of non-conforming gender identities is on the increase. With the emergence of a constitutional democracy so too dawns the emergence of bold and brazen youth (Ilyayambwa, 2012). Children are now able to construct themselves depending on their own feelings. They have the agency to make meaning of their identities. It is obvious that children too, are no longer afraid to express their identities despite discrimination and poor reception from fellow learners as well as teachers.

Mbali Primary has a Foundation Phase made up of grades Reception 0 to 3. The Foundation Phase (F.P.) comprises 14 classes - four units each of grades 1, 2, 3 and two units of grade R. The Foundation Phase has only one male teacher in grade 3. All other Foundation Phase teachers are females. They are supervised by two Heads of Department (HODs). The F.P. has their own playfield that has a jungle gym, sand pit and a quadrangle. The senior primary (S.P.) is made up of grades 4 to 7. Each grade has four units. The S.P. has a separate playfield as well as a netball field and two astro-turfs. There is also a separate quadrangle that is used for weekly assemblies that are held on Monday and Friday mornings. Reading is a very important activity at Mbali Primary school. Every Wednesday morning, school commences ten minutes earlier than normal. We promote our DEAR programme (Drop Everything And Read). In this time, learners are compelled to sit still and engage in reading.

Learners at the school have a great interest in soccer. Extra-curricular soccer training takes place every Saturday morning. A parent from the community volunteers as the coach. Mbali Primary also has a functional library with a librarian. Learners are allocated time each week per grade to visit the library and borrow books. The library also has a computer laboratory with 30 computers. All S.P. classes are allocated an hour each week to visit and use the computer laboratory to develop their computer skills since many of our learners do not have computers in their homes. School commences each morning at

7h55 and ends at 14h00. There is a 20-minute break at 9h55 and another break from 12h15 to 12h30. Mbali Primary stresses a neat and tidy environment, healthy eating habits and good hygiene. Learners are discouraged from buying unhealthy snacks but rather encouraged to eat fruit, peanuts and health bars which are sold at the school tuck-shop. We also have a lunch-club that provides healthy sandwiches to all learners who may require a meal.

Athletics meetings are held each year in the second term (second quarter of the school year). This event is earmarked as a very important event since many of our learners attain first position in their races when competing against learners from other schools. Our learners are budding athletes who often make it to the zonal level where all schools within the area participate to identify the best athlete in long- and short-distance track events, long jump, high jump and shot-putt within that specific zone.

Learners are also exposed to fieldtrips and excursions (outings outside of the school premises e.g. visit to the zoo, amusement parks and even the theatre). Grade 7 learners are always eager to join the fieldtrip which entails a long road-trip on a bus and a two-night sleep-over at an environmental retreat. This fieldtrip is a tradition at Mbali Primary and grade 7 learners have been taking this fieldtrip to the same resort (now called Berg Venture) for the past 28 years. Here they enjoy team-building activities such as raft building, tree-climbing, zip-lining, horse riding, a potjie cook-out and abseiling activities. This event marks the highlight of the seniors' final year in primary school. These outings require a great deal of planning as well as safety procedures. Firstly an application is tendered to the Department of Education (DOE) containing the signatures of the school governing body (SGB) which is made up of parents, teachers and the principal. Preparations for the outing only begin after approval is granted by the DOE. Consent and indemnity forms are then sent out to parents and once signed learners are assured a spot on the list. During all outings learners are accompanied by their form teachers and at least one member of the school management team (SMT). Mbali Primary constantly aims to develop their learners holistically -artistically, socially, academically, financially and emotionally.



## 4.4 Methodology

This methodology section will consist of three sub-sections: sampling; data collection and research instruments; and validity and trustworthiness.

### 4.4.1 Sampling

This study primarily focuses on how grade 6 and 7 learners construct transgender identities, and how they make meaning of transgender identities. In this study, I explore the learners' understanding of the term transgender. My study includes a purposeful sampling approach i.e. a strategy used by researchers to gather unique and varying perspectives from participants (Robinson, 2014). Learners were used in this sampling to talk about their understanding of how they construct transgender identities, what influences their understanding and what requires further addressing.

### 4.4.2 Recruitment of sample

I visited all grade 6 and grade 7 classes, after having consulted with the form teachers. This was done in about five minutes. I visited each class during the registration period, so that teaching time was not disrupted. I then told the learners about my study and the topic. They were invited to join the study if they wished to. All interested participants were invited to attend a short information meeting during the break in a classroom wherein I briefly introduced the study to the learners and outlined the conditions and rules. I then emphasised the ethics surrounding this project and highlighted the sensitivity of the topic and the confidential aspect of it and mainly that it was voluntary. I informed them that they could only participate after their parents/guardians had signed consent forms and they had signed assent forms and both forms had been returned to me. Interested learners were then given a few days to think about their participation in the study. All interested learners wrote down and ticked their names on an attendance register form. They were free to either take time to think about it or collect a copy of the consent and assent forms immediately. I decided to accept as many forms as I received as I knew that some learners

were not going to be consistent. When forms were signed, learners were admitted into the study. In having a sample of 30 and more participants I aimed to ensure that my data reached saturation point.

Children in grade 6 and 7 often range between the ages of 12 and 15. Children between these ages are bold and articulate and they are very aware of their sexual status (DePalma & Jennett, 2012; Alberse, De Vries, Elzinga & Steensma, 2019). Many enjoy topics related to sexuality as it forms a big part of the formal school curriculum such as sexual reproduction in Natural Science. Children in this age category have a wider range of vocabulary, thereby allowing for rich discussion. Learners were chosen firstly, based on their interest in the topic and enthusiasm to participate voluntarily. Secondly, I used an essential criteria list to select participants, based on time, approval from parents and eligibility. Learners formed part of this sampling to allow for me to learn about the learner, how they understand transgender, what influences their understanding and what requires further addressing.

Teachers are key elements to learning. They are catalysts who can be instrumental in the change that is direly needed in schools. In this study, learners revealed the areas that need addressing in terms of teachers accommodating sexually diverse identities within the class. It then became possible to highlight the areas in which further development and training are required to facilitate the inclusivity we speak of. This will then create an ideal environment in which learning can take place. According to Cohen et al., (2011) schools are sites where heterosexuality is encouraged or even compulsory. How then do we prevent a homophobic future when schools and communities are still thriving on indoctrination and normative ideals of the past? Children occupy an important position in society as they will evolve into our communities and societies of the future, hence they can be used as instruments to facilitate a change in mindset (Davies & Robinson, 2013).

I hoped to create a greater awareness about the phenomenon of transgender within schools and more specifically among learners as many are influenced by social constructs. This information will be used to make informed amendments to policies with

regards to curriculum and functionality of schools. This study is a phenomenological qualitative study aimed at gathering authentic information that is reliable and real.

The purposive sampling included 34 grade 6 and 7 learners who voluntarily chose to participate in the study with the consent of parents/guardians. There were 34 learners who were recruited to ensure that my data reached saturation point and to allow for the collection of rich data. Grade 6 and 7 learners were chosen as children in these grades are aware of their sexual orientation (Trautner, Ruble, Cyphers, Kirsten, Behrendt & Hartman, 2005). Many enjoy these topics as they are experiencing hormonal changes and are going through puberty.

A total sample of 34 participants, including 11 boys and 23 girls, aged between 12 to 15 years old, participated in eight focus group discussions which preceded the interviews. This was to ensure that a good composition of opinions, experiences and expectations was brought to the fore. In the next section, I discuss the methods utilised to collect data.

#### 4.4.3 Data Collection and Research Instruments

Data collection began as soon as ethical clearance was granted by the Department of Education and the University of KwaZulu-Natal (See Appendix A). Permission from the school principal was received and parental/guardian signed consent forms and learners' signed assent forms were returned. According to Flick (2014), the need for ethical clearance is to safeguard and protect the participant during and after the process of data collection as well as to safeguard all data collected. My data collection instruments included eight focus group discussions (FGD) and 34 one-on-one semi-structured interviews with learners (Appendix H). The interviews and focus group discussions were chosen as instruments to gather authentic information which may be useful in highlighting learners' ideologies and societal assumptions (Hofstee, 2018). The focus group discussions were complemented with photo elicitation (use of pictures during interviews) (Appendix E) and a vignette (story) to aid discussion (Appendix F). The interviews were complemented with pictures (photo elicitation).

Photo elicitation is the use of pictures during the process of interviews and focus group discussions. Collier (1957) emphasises that graphic images serve as visual aids and assist participants who may lack fluency in a language. These images probe participants about specific aspects concerning the topic. They create a better understanding for the participants' spontaneous responses. They serve as a guide to direct the participant towards specific aspects based on the topic and prevent discussions and interviews from moving off the topic.

As the term transgender is not as common as the terms gay or lesbian, I started off my discussion by firstly making reference to pictures of individuals who identify as non-conforming genders and sexualities such as gays, lesbians, intersex and bisexual and then slowly channelled the discussion to transgender identities. Popular individuals who are currently trending on social media platforms were used. Many learners are familiar with celebrities and they are aware of their status and fashion sense and many seek to emulate them. In using icons who are currently trending such as Somizi, Caster Semenya, Toya Delaize and Vuyo Ngcukana, who plays a bisexual character, Schumacher, on the a DSTV channel called Mzansi, I manoeuvred from the known (gays, lesbians, intersex and bisexual) to the not so common or unknown 'transgender'. Learners were also asked to draw pictures, if they wished, to illustrate their understanding of the term transgender.

#### *4.4.3.1 Focus Group Discussions*

The focus group discussions (FGDs) (Appendix G) began with photo elicitation and then led on to story-telling (vignette) as learners respond enthusiastically when exposed to visual or audio aids (Collier, 1957). According to Collier (1957) the use of pictures and aids allows for the information being collected to be more concrete and, as the illustrations serve as a guide, to ensure questions are more directed. The composition of the eight groups was as follows: four of the first six groups, were mixed groups with grade 6 and 7 girls and boys and two of the six groups were made up of six grade 7 girls each. Some participants were more eager than others, hence, their participation in more than one FGD. These two groups were fun to work with and I had two sessions of

discussions with them as they were great participants who did not have any reservations about providing honest and interesting answers. The two remaining groups were made up of five learners each. These were mixed groups made up of grade 6 and 7 boys and girls. Learners were requested to group themselves into groups of five or six. In doing so, learners chose a group that they felt most comfortable in. This allowed for the freedom of speech and expression and ensured an in-depth composition of opinions, experiences and expectations. In doing this, I found that they did not feel inhibited to speak openly as they were comfortable in each other's company. My focus group discussions were held early each morning at 6:30 am. Many of the learners travel to school with 'malume' (isiZulu word meaning uncle) who bring them to school very early. I had the support of parents who agreed to bring learners as early as 6h00. There were days when I had some learners waiting enthusiastically outside my class eager for the next discussion. Despite allocating a time frame of between 30 to 50 minutes, some of the focus group discussions lasted a mere seven minutes.

Some of the learners had little to say on transgender identities whilst others had more. These FGDs were conducted in a private classroom. The classroom was away from the playfield and this allowed for privacy during focus group discussions (FGDs) and interviews. The atmosphere was calm and quiet and learners were fresh and alert. The morning discussions were really enjoyable as I also became more familiar with the grade 6 participants who now found comfort in congregating in front of my classroom.

The eight focus group discussions were made up of approximately six participants in each group and began with story-telling (vignette), followed by a discussion based on the story/vignette guided by specific questions. The story was an introduction to the discussion. Learners listened closely and shared their opinions about the story. The focus group discussions preceded the interviews as prospective interviewees were then identified during the focus group discussion. Translation of questions was not required because learners at Mbali Primary School are fluent English speakers.

#### 4.4.3.2 Drawings

During our FGD learners were asked to present their thoughts in the form of pictures. Drawings provide a fun and interesting means of gathering data. The drawings allow for the transmission of information for those who may not know how to communicate an opinion (Mayaba & Wood, 2015). This method of data collection was not used extensively in this study as not all learners were willing to draw pictures.

#### Details of the Focus Group Discussions: Participants only in FGD

No.	Names (pseudonym)	Age	Gender	Race	Home Language	Area where child lives
1.	Nomfundo	12	F	A	Isizulu	Chesterville
2.	Siziwe	12	F	A	IsiZulu	Sherwood
3.	Stacey	12	F	A	IsiZulu	Chesterville
4.	Susan	12	F	C	English	Newlands east
5.	Mark	12	M	C	English	Newlands east
6.	Zolas	13	F	A	Isizulu	Mayville
7.	Amahle	14	F	A	Isizulu	Mayville
8.	Brett	12	M	C	English	Sydenham
9.	Bongani	12	M	A	Isizulu	Chesterville
10.	Sibahle	12	F	A	Isizulu	Chesterville
11.	Zamile	15	M	A	IsiZulu	Kwamashu
12.	Sena	12	F	A	Isizulu	Mayville
13.	Stabile	12	F	A	Isizulu	Wyebank
14.	Zina	15	F	A	Isizulu	Mayville
15.	Pam	12	F	A	Isizulu	Clermont
16.	Sizwe	12	M	A	Isizulu	Mayville

**Table 3: Learners who participated in only focus group discussions**

## Details of focus group discussions

No.	No. of participants	Names of participants	Duration of interview
1.	6	Sindy, Tyra, Asanda, Chuku, Petunia, Busi	45:12min
2.	6	Gloria, Luya, Nomfundo, Senaye, Cassandra, Siziwe	44:05min
3.	6	Stacey, Susan, Mark, Simon, Zola, Amahle	40:32min
4.	6	Brett, Bongani, Sanelisiwe, Sibahle, Samkelo, Brian	42:12min
5.	6	Anele, Amahle, Sinesipho, Shaun, Alfred, Zamile	38:32min
6.	6	Lumka, Sena, Tabile, Zina, Pam, Gugu	46:03min
7.	5	Ben, Siphon, Tyra, Sindy, Busi	38:02min
8.	5	Tyra, Petunia, Shanai, Asanda, Chuku	37:21min

**Table 4: Learners who participated in FGDs and interviews**

### 4.4.3.3 Semi-structured interviews

According to Cohen et al., (2011) interviews are very important in a qualitative study. They are used to explore views, opinions and ideals of participants. Interviews offer an in-depth understanding of social issues that may be influenced by cultural, socio-economic and historical background (Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008). They encourage rich descriptions of topics (Di Cacco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The semi-structured interviews are used to confirm key findings that may emerge in discussion. Additionally, interviews enable the discovery of data that may not have even been thought of. They allow for the collection of rich data. They allow the topic to be explored by pursuing ideas and responses in a detailed manner thereby creating an understanding of complex social issues (Di Cacco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Gill et al., 2008). The individual semi-structured interviews were carried out in a private classroom which was away from the playfield. This ensured privacy during FGDs and interviews. During the data collection process, 34 semi-structured interviews were carried out. Each interview was approximately seven to 20 minutes long.





### Details of Participants in the Semi-structured Interviews

No.	Name (pseudonym)	Age.	Gender.	Race.	Area where child lives.	First language	Duration of interview
1.	Gugu	13	Trans	A	Mayville	IsiZulu	14:17min
2.	Brian	13	M	A	Clermont	IsiZulu	8:10min
3.	Sipho	12	M	A	Mayville	IsiZulu	7:54min
4.	Samkelo	13	M	A	Mayville	IsiZulu	8:06 min
5.	Mpho	12	M	A	Ridgeview	IsiZulu	9:04min
6.	Linda	13	F	A	Kwa-Mashu	IsiZulu	8:01min
7.	Fatima	12	F	C	Sydenham	English	7:07min
8.	Sindy	13	F	A	Chesterville	Isizulu	9:06min
9.	Clara	12	F	A	Chesterville	Isizulu	7:10min
10.	Ben	13	M	A	Mayville	Isizulu	9:08min
11.	Simon	13	M	A	Sherwood	Isizulu	10:08min
12.	Alfred	13	M	A	Mayville	Isizulu	7:09min
13.	Gloria	12	F	A	Mayville	Isizulu	10:09min
14.	Shanai	12	F	C	Newlands East	English	6:35min

15.	Thabo	14	M	A	Kwa-Mashu	Isizulu	8:20min
16.	Tabani	12	M	C	Newlands East	English	9:09min
17.	Shau	13	M	C	Newlands East	English	5:09min
18.	Sanelisiwe	13	F	A	Pinetown	Isizulu	12:38min
19.	Buhle	13	F	A	Kwa-Mashu	IsiXhosa	17:20min
20.	Anele	14	M	A	Illovo	Isizulu	8:03min
21.	Asanda	12	F	A	Sherwood	Isizulu	7:18min
22.	Chuku	12	F	A	Bonella	Isizulu	16:39min
23.	Senaye	12	F	A	Inanda	Isizulu	8:40min
24.	Pertunia	12	F	A	Sherwood	IsiZulu	11:09min
25.	Tyra	13	F	A	Chesterville	English	18:32min
26.	Amahle	13	F	A	Clermont	Isizulu	12:09min
27.	Cassandra	13	F	A	Bonella	IsiZulu	21:02min
28.	Fezeka	13	F	A	Kwa-Mashu	IsiZulu	11:10min
29.	Ethaniel	14	M	A	Overport	English	17:20min
30.	Busi	13	F	A	Ridgeview	Isizulu	13:09min

31.	Lumka	13	F	A	Westville	Isizulu	17:24min
32.	Sinesipho	13	F	A	Mayville	IsiZulu	14:40min
33.	Luya	13	F	A	Sydenham	Isizulu	17:29min
34.	Sena	12	F	A	Mayville	Isizulu	12:35min

**Table 5: Details of participants interviewed**

#### *4.4.3.4 Observations*

Observations were also utilised to collect data. Taylor et al., (2016) claim that observations conducted in qualitative studies are used to make sense of human behaviour. During my ground duty days i.e. days allocated to teachers on specific days to intermingle on the playfield and quadrangle ensuring that accidents and conflict situations are minimal, I was able to observe the authentic behaviour of all the children in general. My presence did not disturb the true behaviour of the children as they were unaware of my observation. I noted their behaviour in a diary and this observation helped me identify prospective candidates who could join my sample for data collection. I was able to identify their mannerisms and interaction with fellow mates on the field. During my observation I had identified a few learners who I was very interested in interviewing, however, many were not keen to join my study.

#### **4.5 Data analysis**

In this study, I used a qualitative thematic approach to analyse all data collected. A thematic analysis approach involves the identification of themes through codes i.e. common patterns that say something about the concept being researched (Braun &

Clarke, 2017; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017; Neuendorf, 2019). The emphasis was on examining, pinpointing and recording common patterns of data.



**Figure 8: The six steps of coding (Braun & Clarke, 2017)**

Di Cacco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), Baxter and Jack (2008) and Nowell, Norris, White and Moules (2017) emphasise that data analysis should take place simultaneously with data collection. Audio recordings are an excellent tool to capture data during FGDs and interviews (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Information gathered was transcribed verbatim. Braun & Clarke (2017) suggest that transcriptions assist all researchers familiarise themselves with data they have collected. Other researchers maintain that transcriptions should begin as soon as possible (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Katleen, Guest & Namey, 2005). These transcriptions form an essential part of the data collection process. I used Butler's queer theory (1990) and Connell's theories of masculinities and gender (1995) to analyse the data collected.

## 4.6 Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, ensuring trustworthiness is essential (Pelzang et al., 2018). In this study, all information was audio-recorded. This information was transcribed by a certified transcriber and verified by the participants themselves. At the onset of conducting this study, I firstly sought permission from the main gatekeeper, the school principal (Appendix B), Parents signed formal permission forms and learners who participated signed assent forms (Appendix C and Appendix D). Data collection for my study was conducted after gaining ethical clearance from the UKZN ethics department and the Department of Education.

Transferability, credibility, dependability and confirmability are the four principles that make up a qualitative study. To ensure transferability, thick descriptions and detailed findings were relayed. Purposeful sampling also aided in ensuring transferability (Anney, 2014). Rich information was collected. Triangulation was used to ensure credibility. Similar questions were asked in different ways hereby ensuring authentic data. Interviews were transcribed and presented to participants to verify and confirm their opinions, allowing for credibility and confirmability. To strengthen validity, transcripts from interviews and FGD's were made available to all participants so they could validate all the content (Korstjen & Moser, 2018). Audio recordings were done to confirm authenticity of information from participants ensuring dependability and validity of data. According to Korstjen and Moser (2018), dependability also entails consistency where the process needs to be in-depth and in line with the method and process of the study. McMillan and Schumacher (2014) verify that this method of capturing data is a reliable method of ensuring that information will be transcribed correctly. The interviews and focus group discussions were based on participants' personal experiences and opinions. Learners would use their own lives and share their experiences and encounters with transgender or non-conforming identities. My study aims to produce objectivity, actuality and accuracy of findings. Names and identities were changed to allow for anonymity. The name of the school is also confidential. According to Cypress (2017) qualitative studies are very in-depth as they follow a prescribed set of patterns. Pelzang & Hutchinson

(2018) state that in a qualitative study validity and reliability is important to ensure that results are authentic. To ensure this, information was recorded during private interviews and focus group discussions and transcribed verbatim. Cypress (2017) claims that rigour is the same as validity and reliability. Reliability and rigour need to be established during the study and at the end of the study.

#### **4.7 Reflexivity**

Reflexivity entails two very important practices - being reflective (being cognitive) and also critically reflecting (going back to experiences, feelings and attitudes one may have had). The researcher is required to carefully evaluate his or her positionality (how one's identity influences one's understanding of the concept). The exercising of reflexivity in any study ensures transparency of the study in relation to the opinions of all participants (Bishops & Shepherd, 2011; Molintas & Caricativo, 2017; Rosenbluh, 2017; Dodgson, 2019). I considered myself an insider during this process of data collection since I had known these learners for at least eight months. I had already acquired a position in their lives. We had an established relationship where I knew how to approach and get across to them. I also consider myself an outsider because I was not part of the communities that they hailed from. I could not necessarily identify with their experiences in their communities since our lived environments and backgrounds were different (Rosenbluh, 2017). During my data collection at Mbali Primary, I deliberately dressed in a more casual way to engage learners in a discussion around their interests in order to break down power relations so that they were comfortable to talk to me. I made a concerted effort to not dress up formally with formal slacks, formal coats or high heels. By wearing the school tracksuit or jeans and casual sweaters with sneakers, I attempted to counteract any power dynamics that may have existed. My dress code influenced the manner in which the learners viewed me. I no longer assumed a role of authority so I did not pose any intimidation. During the process of data collection, we were seated in a circle for focus group discussions. Alternatively, we just sat down next to each other on the carpeted floor. As Berger (2015) specified that researchers are advised to remain objective during the process of the interview, I tried to limit my input in the discussions

by allowing the learners the freedom to take the lead during the discussion. The participants were encouraged to speak out about their understanding of the term transgender. I guided the discussion if it was going astray. In using objective methods such as careful wording of questions and words used, allowing for discussion to flow without interrupting, allowing learners to speak openly by displaying friendly body language and facial expressions, I surrendered control during the discussion to establish truth in findings. I did however probe if I found an interesting point or if I found that the discussion was becoming chaotic. I also stepped in when code-switching was taking place to remind learners that our discussion was in English. To ensure a focused discussion I provided direction but steered away from leading the discussion. According to Attia and Edge (2017) and Korstjens and Moser (2018) the researcher needs to consciously exclude and extricate him or herself from the situation in order to correctly theorise what happens during the data collection process. The classroom was very cosy and allowed for enjoyable intimate discussions. I did not shy away from enjoying and sharing in the laughs with the learners as some discussions were quite funny. This helped create a more open and relaxed relationship with the participating learners (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwich, 2008). I seated myself among the learners during our discussions. I did not occupy a seat in front of the participants. We formed a circle and I sat within the circle to create a flow so that it was clear that we were all on the same level during the discussion. It was to indicate that I was not leading the discussion but, rather, a part of the discussion. All questions were simple and asked one at a time to avoid confusing the learners. The grade 7 learners were already comfortable with me as I was already seeing them every day for an hour since I am their English teacher. The grade 6 learners were shy at first but warmed up to the discussion.

Coming from an orthodox Indian Muslim background we are taught from a very young age that men should be men, men act as men should and vice versa. Islam does not support or encourage transgender identities since our Holy Qur'an has stipulated very clearly that he, who may identify as any other than Allah has decreed, shall be cursed. I continually reminded myself that my study is an important one since it will help address issues that will make a difference to transgender learners and teachers like me in the

future. I was desperately seeking out ways in which I could become a better teacher to transgender learners in the future. Subsequently, during my study I found that I became a victim of harassment for having acquired an interest in the topic transgender. In fact there was even a point in time when I was accused of being or becoming a lesbian myself due to my exposure to the mass of information concerning transgender identities. I found that I did not disclose my topic as confidently, if at all. I persisted nevertheless despite much criticism and found that the interaction with the learners during my data collection did help me gain greater understanding about how they understood the term transgender. Transgender identities may face a great deal of emotional turmoil as many are caught up in a vicious cycle that originated in our communities and societies. This cycle propagates the gender binary that compels one to perform roles that are heteronormative and anything other than that is frowned upon or criticised.

#### **4.8 Ethical Considerations**

Focus group discussions and interviews began after ethical clearance was granted by both the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the Department of Education. The principal of Mbali Primary School was informed a week before I began field work. He was made aware of the procedure and he was also informed that consent and assent forms were available for his perusal to reassure him that all ethical considerations were adhered to. I also made him aware of the time during which interviews were going to take place. No learner was admitted into my group until consent and assent forms were returned. Flick (2014) outlines the need for ethical clearance very clearly. He stresses the need for informed consent as this procedure will avoid the misuse of information during data collection. It will also ensure that all participants are safe and it avoids any harm coming to participants. Learners were constantly reminded during interviews that they were free to exit the group if and when they chose to. At our first meeting after collection of signed forms, rules and conditions pertaining to the discussions and interviews were discussed. Here, learners were urged that all our discussions and information revealed during the discussions was highly confidential and that no discussion should continue outside the room as the topic was of a highly sensitive nature. I reminded learners that all information



collected would be used only for research purposes and that the information would be stored in a very secure facility.

#### **4.9 Limitations of the study**

Some of the limitations I experienced during my study are as follows. My sample was made up of mainly grade 6 and 7 girls. I found that the boys were not very eager to join my study. At first there seemed to be many interested boys, however, very few actually took consent and assent forms. I also found that after the first focus group discussion many boys did not return. They preferred to run off to the playfield to enjoy a game of soccer. They were shy to openly speak out because they were afraid of the reactions of other learners. The majority of learners identified all sexually diverse individuals as being either gay or lesbian. They were not familiar with the term transgender. This made it very obvious that despite the introduction of sexuality in Life Orientation, specific knowledge based on gender and gender identities is either excluded or evaded because teachers are afraid to expose learners to the reality that sexually diverse identities do exist. They fear that this knowledge may influence learners to venture out and explore sexually diverse identities (Kitchen & Bellini, 2012). Contextual limitation is the fact that there is a lack of research centred on transgender and methodological limitation is that a suitable way of understanding the phenomena has still not been found. Another huge challenge was ensuring consistent attendance at my FDGs. One morning I struggled to summon the participants to our discussion. Whilst some were religiously awaiting me each morning, others, especially the boys, were often reluctant to sit for 45 minutes discussing transgender identities. I then decided to include them in interviews and found that they were more receptive to answering questions on a one-on-one basis rather than a group discussion.

Access to the learners posed another limitation. I also found that many of the learners were shy to speak up. At first their voices were very soft. It took a few minutes to warm up and then the discussions were always interesting. Participants were continually reminded that this study was in the name of development and awareness and that their contributions were important and valuable. The learners' knowledge of transgender was extremely limited. Children had no idea what it was and were very interested to know more especially when the discussion led onto surgery and hormonal therapy. The use of

the pictures depicting ‘Poppy’ and Wandile were helpful in creating a visual aid to allow participants to note the difference between the different transgender and gay identities. Learners may have felt reluctant to be open and honest. They may have been shying away from certain questions. I had to continually reassure them that no names were going to be revealed. I also encouraged them to be honest and reassured them that all information gathered would be confidential and anonymous as all names would be changed.

#### **4.10 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I explained the methodology and research design used in this study. It is a qualitative study that examines how grade 6 and 7 boys and girls make meaning of the term transgender. I used a purposive sampling method to acquire data. The instruments that I found most suitable were focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews, (aided with photo elicitation and a vignette), as these methods enabled me to understand how learners make meaning of the term transgender. The inclusion of photo elicitation worked well as the participants were visually stimulated. The pictures helped learners make reference to the different individuals mentioned. Participants were asked to volunteer to read the story. During this time the other participants listened attentively and expressed their thoughts based on observations and experiences that related to the story. I then went on to describe how I ensured trustworthiness throughout my study. Lastly, I highlighted ethical measures within my study as well as the challenges I faced as limitations within this study. The next chapter provides an analysis of data.

## **Chapter Five: Data Analysis**

### **5.1 Introduction**

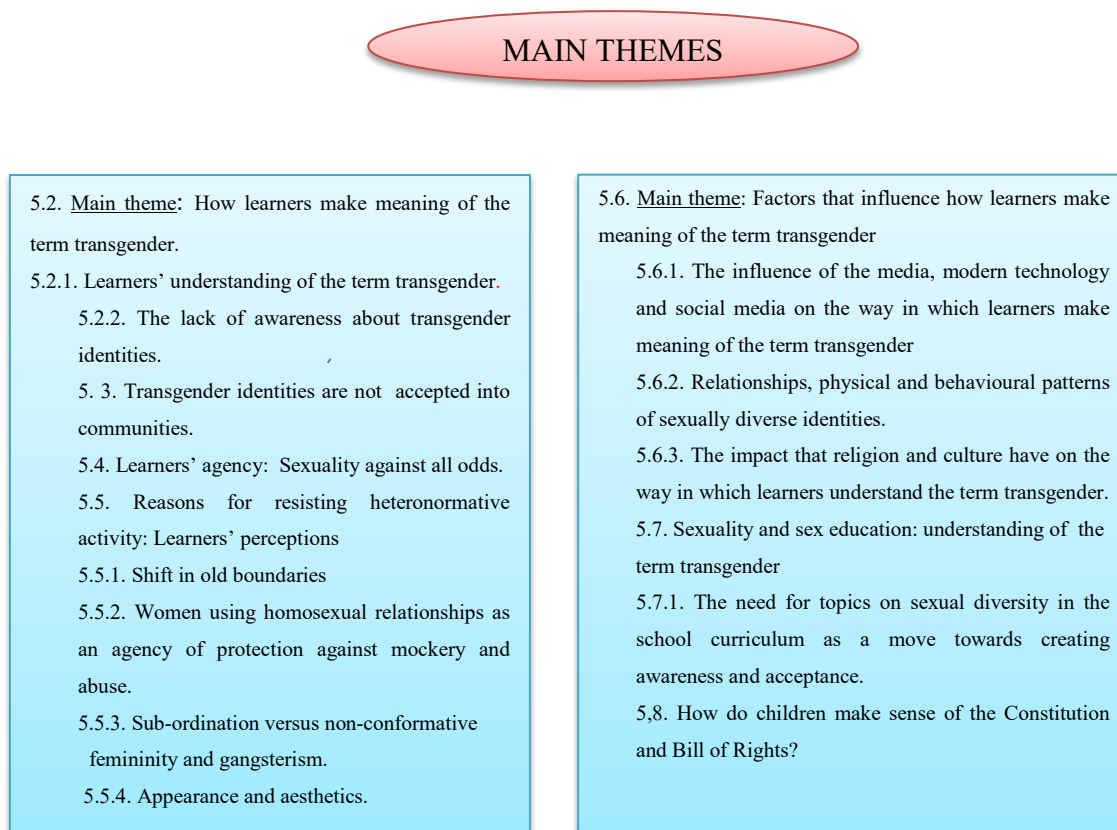
Amid the 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution lies an era dominated by technological advancement, mass migration and the collapse of the old boundaries, we see the rapid spread of sexuality discourses and the dramatic reaction of states, societies and religious groups who have realised that they have lost control (Sandfort, Simenel, Mwachiro & Reddy, 2015).

Individuals are challenging the heteronormative expectations of society. They are confidently exploring and declaring their sexuality. Despite cultural and religious convictions individuals are determined to declare their non-conforming sexualities. Unflinching youth are boldly refusing to conform to old ideologies. This trajectory towards the transformation and integration of transgender identities into our societies is influenced by the accessibility of information via social media, advanced technological developments and an evolution of human rights constituted by the Bill of Rights.

### **5.2 Data analysis, findings and experiences: How children make meaning of the term transgender**

In this chapter, I analyse the data gathered and categorise them into themes using the coding system which aids and abets summarising, synthesising, organising and compilation of data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). These themes encompass my findings carried out during data collection. The process of coding assisted me to categorise the different patterns of data and how they related to Connell's (1995) theories of masculinity, gender and power and Butler's (1989) queer theory. The focus within this chapter is to confer the findings on how learners between the ages of 12 and 15 made meaning of the term transgender and the factors that shaped these meanings. FGD's that incorporated the use of photo elicitation and a vignette were analysed simultaneously with interviews. Using the coding method, themes and sub-themes were identified. Using these

methods simultaneously, enabled me to examine how learners construct gender as a fixed binary and any gender outside this binary is questioned or rejected. The diagram below provides an overview of the themes that will be discussed in this chapter.



**Figure 9: Themes derived from data collection**

### 5.2.1 Learners' understanding of transgender

Despite the increase in the number of individuals identifying as transgender, awareness surrounding the concept is minimal (DePalma & Jennett, 2012; Jobson et al., 2012; Potgieter & Reygan, 2012; Bockting, Coleman, Deutsch, Guillamon, Meyer, Reisner, Sevelius & Ettner, 2016; Mangin, 2018; Miller et al., 2018; Ringrose, Bragg, Jackson & Renold, 2018). Transgender identities refer to individuals who define their sexuality based on their personal feelings and experiences and not the biological sex assigned to

them at birth (Eckert & McConnel-Ginet, 2014; Buchanan & McDougall, 2016; Winter, Diamond, Green, Karasic, Reed, Whittle & Wylie, 2016; Ndelu, 2017). In the following extracts, I demonstrate learners' understanding of the term transgender.

***Researcher: Children what do you understand the word transgender to be?***

**Fatima:** Miss, I do not know what this word means.

**Clara:** No Miss I do not know about transgender.

**Shaun:** No I don't know what the word means.

**Ben:** No Miss, not really.

The above responses demonstrate that 12% of the participants did not know what the word transgender meant at all while others below shared their perceptions.

**Pertunia:** Miss, it's like when a girl is very boyish and she plays with boys and it's when a boy is girlish and he plays with girls.

**Anele:** It's a gay person. The boy starts to act like a girl where he wears make-up, weaves and carries his sister's handbag... you know the one that has a chain handle. He will even sway his hips from side to side and kind of like stick out his behind. Then there are the girls who bounce and play soccer and they want to be mannish.

**Sipho:** It means people who are males and they like men and women and they like women.

**Samkelo:** It's boys who like other boys. They act like girls and they even speak like girls and giggle when other boys are around. They start to show off when the other big boys come. They swing their hands in a girlie way and act they just wear like tights and very girlie things.

**Cassandra:** For me Miss I think it's when a boy or a girl changes their gender, it's not like me ...I just like other girls and only sometimes I like boys. But I prefer girls.

**Sanelisiwe:** I understand that many people don't accept that they are boys or girls, they want to change, they want to be the opposite of themselves.

**Buhle:** Miss, it's when someone miss changes their gender from a boy to a girl.

**Lumka:** It's when a person is maybe a girl and this person wants to be a boy.

As indicated in the above extracts, the common notion among most of the learners was that a transgender person was a person who was attracted to the same sex. They associated being transgender with being gay or lesbian. Their responses correspond with Butler's (1990) claim that learners associate the behaviour of certain identities with that of gays and lesbians. Her queer theory is an ideal framework to make meaning of the differences and consistencies of social groups and the power relations that become part of an individual's experiences (Carlin, 2011). Samkelo and Anele focused on the social interactions of transgender identities in relation to gays and lesbians. They mentioned that their understanding of transgender is when boys wore feminine clothes, walked, spoke and interacted in a feminine manner. They were unclear about the correct meaning of transgender. Some participants reflected on their personal observations of transgender identities within their communities and then associated them with gays and lesbians based on their mannerisms. Only a few learners like Tyra, Cassandra and Sanelisiwe knew that being transgender was when a person wanted to change their gender (Carrera-Fernandez et al., 2013). While most of the participants were unaware that transgender identities required hormonal treatment to fully transition to their desired sex, Tyra displayed knowledge about what being transgender entailed.

**Tyra:** It's when a girl is not comfortable in her body as a girl and she wants to change herself into boy, maybe by taking pills and medicines. Miss, the medicines will shrink breasts and then it will make them grow a beard.

**Researcher:** *How many of you know the Kardashians? Anybody here know who Caitlyn Jenner is?*

**Tyra:** Oh miss, isn't their father was a man and then he changed now to be a woman, yes miss his name ...was ... I'm not too sure but Miss he's a woman now and has like long hair and breasts even. Miss, they have a lot of money, I think this is how he got to look so beautiful. I saw it in a Peoples magazine that my granny brought home from the hospital. My granny's a nurse Miss. Miss, he has some surgery to get the titties and remove some other stuff and also has to have medicines to help him become more like a woman.

Drawing on her observations in media, Tyra was the only participant who displayed knowledge about transgender. She said that transgender people are people who want to change their bodies either from a boy to a girl or a girl to a boy. She further explained that they would need to go to a special doctor who would assist them to get medicines that would help them achieve this. She went on to say that when taking these pills they would shrink the breasts and start to grow a beard. She linked hormonal treatment and Caitlyn Jenner. Tyra was also the only participant who knew that the stepfather of the Kardashians (Bruce) was now a woman after undergoing a sex change. It can be deduced that through media Tyra was able to construct knowledge about transgender.

5.2.2 The lack of awareness about sexually non-conforming identities and how it impacts on the lives of transgender identities.

***Researcher:** Have you heard the acronym LGBTQI? What do you understand by it? (I wrote it in bold letters on a chalkboard)*

**Sindy:** Lesbian, gay, bisexual ... haibo what does the T stand for ...giggle.

**Simon:** Lesbian, gay, bisexual and then (Simon covered his mouth trying to hide a grin).

**Shanai:** Lesbian, gay and bisexual, Miss the T, I really don't know.

**Tyra:** Miss it stands for the L is lesbian, the G is gay, the B is obviously bisexual and the T I think is trans.



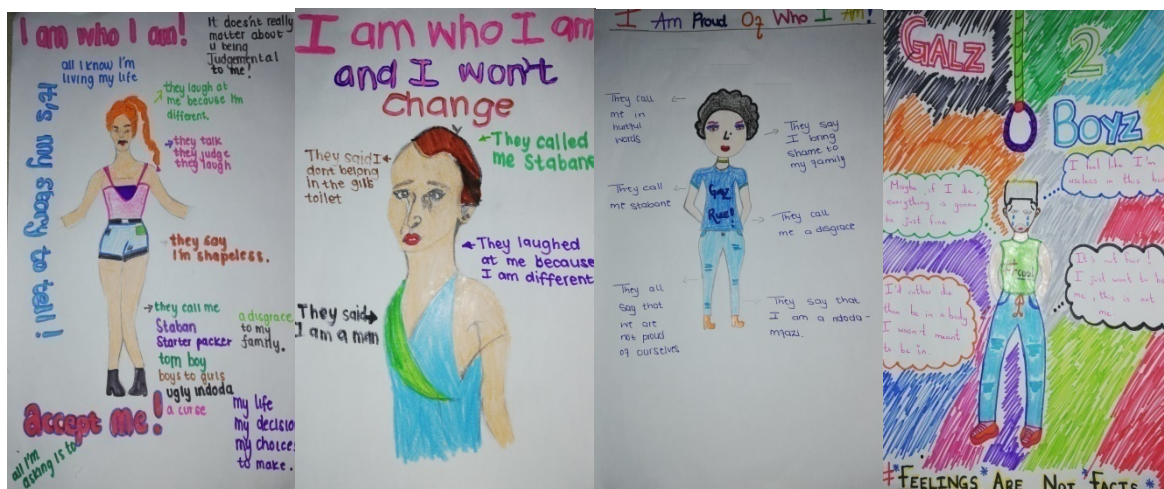
**Cassandra:** Lesbian, gay and bi's the T, I'm not sure.

**Tabani:** Lesbian, gay, and biosexual. I don't know what is the rest.

Most participants knew that *LGB* meant lesbian, gay and bisexual but were confused about the *TQI* and looked around at each other realising that they did not know the meaning of the full acronym. They giggled again because they had no idea what the *TQI* stood for. Here it was evident that the participants were well aware of the terms lesbians, gays and bisexual but they did not know about transgender identities.

I then probed using the photo elicitation method. I wanted to see if the participants knew what being transgender was about. I showed the participants a picture of 12-year-old Poppy (Appendix 1.2) as an example as she is around their age group. Poppy was once a little boy, but had transitioned to be a girl. Here, the participants expressed interest and were eager to get a better look at the picture. It was at this point that Tyra pointed out that this photo and Poppy's story were similar to Wandile, a character in *Generations*, a popular South African soap opera. Subsequently, Tyra provided the group with an overview of Wandile, the youngest son of Zola Radebe, an elite businessman and how he had transitioned into a female. After looking at the picture and Wandile, participants were a little more aware of what the term transgender was. The lack of awareness of transgender identities impacts on interpersonal relations as some people do not know of the existence of such an identity. This lack of awareness translates into miscommunication including the misuse of pronouns and the lack of respect for transgender identities (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). I proceeded to ask:

**Researcher:** *Have you seen the different ways in which people react to transgender identities or the LGBTQ community? Think about this and tell me what the people may say about individuals who are from this community? You may include a picture if you would like to.*



**Figure 10: Drawings done by participants depicting a distinct contrast to hetero-normative roles enforced by the normative gender binary**

The above illustrations are a reflection of some of the participants’ perceptions on transgender identities and their experiences. Some participants included very bold titles that emphasised their individuality. The poster entitled “I am who I am!” sends out a message that being who you are is a personal choice and no-one has a right to dictate who you should be. The illustration entitled “I am who I am and I won’t change” implies that

the youth will no longer conform to normative gender roles. These illustrations also portray a very bold and confident demure indicating that non-conforming identities are displayed in their sexuality openly. The youth of today are un-inhibited from being who they want to be. The messages conveyed above, reveal that society needs to embrace the transformation as many individuals are still in the closet.

**Luyanda:** Miss, some may say that they are annoying and narring (slang for irritating). Because he's acting like an isitabane (gay) and miss they use words like moffie.

**Tyra:** Some start backbiting and excluding them from their groups and chat groups. I don't know how to explain it but you can just see miss, the way they are treated. They will use nasty words to make the child have a low self-esteem. Miss they will call them girls to boys, double adapter and he/shes. Some may accept them too miss.

**Chuku:** Haibo miss, some will beat up the child because they will be a disgrace to the family. My granny in Nigeria has a child who is transgender. This girl used to put like a plastic tightly around her chest to make it very flat. The police found out about what she was doing and she went to jail. She wanted to change and become a boy.

**Sindy:** They will hit that child. They will see that child as a disgrace in the community and think that they will bring a bad influence to all the others.

**Snethemba:** They may get raped miss, if it's a she, the Lord will not accept that she likes girls instead of boys so the men will show her how nice boys are. They will show her that she was meant to be with a boy and not with other girls.

Many participants revealed that individuals identifying as transgender or any other non-conforming identity were exposed to harsh conditions. They were victims of all types of abuse. Some were teased, mocked, physically beaten up, embarrassed, humiliated and even raped. Society thrives on hetero-normative behaviour and anyone transgressing traditional masculine norms is immediately judged and condemned due to their sexual orientation (Stryker, 2008; DePalma & Jennett, 2012, Bhana, 2012; Judge, 2015; Bokting

et al., 2016; Buchanan & McDougall, 2016; Khan-Orthy, 2018; Spencer, 2019). Although Tyra revealed that some transgender identities are accepted, the majority of the participants were of the opinion that being transgender was unacceptable in their communities. The participants revealed how being transgender impacted negatively on their lives as they were largely subordinated. In addition, Simon shared how the community reacted violently to transgender identities as a means to regulate and maintain traditional heteronormative ideologies. This is highlighted in the next section.

### **5.3 Transgender identities are not accepted in communities**

I then asked Simon why the boys react and behave in this manner when confronted with a boy who identifies as transgender. Simon replied:

**Simon:** Hai Miss, the boys will just ignore that person or maybe they will gang up on him and take him to a place and beat him up or even just take off his clothes and make him expose his body and run naked. They will do this to try and remind him that he is a man and not a woman. Miss, they will call him strong isiZulu words like ‘inkonkonie’ and ‘isikhay’. Miss a man has to be a man and not weak like a woman. Hai Miss they will make him like a ‘popeye’ (stupid)... the boys react nastily to a man who wanted to be a woman (trans-woman). They feel like he’s a traitor.

‘Real men’ are strong, controlling and manly (Msibi, 2011, Murnen, 2015, Mfecane, 2018, Mwambene & Wheal, 2019). Hypermasculinity and hostile masculinity originate within one’s family. These attitudes are then passed down from generation to generation. When a male does not subscribe to the traditional masculinity ideology he will be forcefully socialised to conform to the traditional, acceptable masculine norms (Murnen, 2015). Simon proceeded to explain that the boys reacted this way because that boy has let them (males) down by wanting to change from being a man to a woman and they felt betrayed as males. The masculinity that they uphold was being rejected. Simon revealed that his community was highly driven by hetero-normativity and the importance of male

dominance. The man has to be a man who is a dominant character in terms of his in his mannerisms, his dressing and the roles he performs within the home and society. The men would then regulate conventional notions of masculinity through their homophobic behaviour including verbal insults and mocking, physical and sexual abuse. Studies show that communities may also inflict 'corrective' or 'curative' rape - a gruesome attack executed in an attempt to rectify homosexual behaviour (Van Der Schyff, 2018; Mwambene & Wheal, 2019). Drawing on the findings of Stobie (2011) it can be concluded that these boys could resort to corrective rape to punish non-conformists. According to Simon, this would teach boys a lesson that they should remain men. This finding resonates with Connell's (1994) argument that gender is socially constructed and that it is an instrument used to perpetuate power and male dominance.

Most of the violence, marginalisation and stigmatisation experienced by transgender identities stems from a lack of knowledge surrounding transgender identities (Kroeger & Regula, 2017). Though some learners may support and reaffirm transgender behaviour, most members of society, including parents, teachers and peers at school, continue to manifest negative attitudes and exclude sexually diverse identities (Carrera-Fernandez et al., 2013). Often transgender identities are perceived as individuals just going through a phase (Sandfort et al., 2015).

Jobson, Liesl, Theron, Julius, Kaggwa and He-Jin (2012) emphasise that a lack of data available in Africa on transgender populations is the result of a lack of funding to support transgender identities research. This lack of data impacts on all facets of development such as updated inclusive textbooks for school resource centres, relevant media coverage and documentaries that articulate the lives and experiences of transgender identities, and funding of awareness campaigns and humanitarian organisations to implement change and integration (McCann & Sharek, 2014). Despite contention from communities, the following finding revealed that learners were agents of their sexuality.

#### 5.4 Learners' agency: Sexuality against all odds

The following participants disclosed their transgender identity and experiences during the focus group discussions. They revealed how transgression of conventional gender roles and activities began at an early age.

**Gugu:** *For me this started when I was young. My parents told me when my father used to buy my brothers toys... cars and guns and I used to cry. When he used to buy me dolls I used to break them. I was like three years... So now I feel like I wasn't meant to be a girl. I sat down and thought about it but my parents won't accept it. It's becoming very difficult for me. I'm not really coping miss, I feel sad like I'm depressed. I actually want to change myself to be a boy. I'm not happy. I feel trapped in a place I don't belong. When I sit and think about it I know what I want to be but my parents won't accept it. I avoid nasty comments so I don't talk about it. I have spoken to my friend (Brian) about it and he understands because he has a sister who is like me. She likes to also become a boy and she is only four years old. But the difference is her parents are okay about it. They even buy her the clothes she wants to wear. I would like to be a boy because I don't like to cook, wash dishes and do all that stuff. Like, if I was a boy ... being a girl has too many rules. They have to be home by six o'clock and when you are a boy you can do anything. In school I have to wear a dress, my parents don't want to buy me a tracksuit because they know that I will wear it every day. I just don't usually listen to my parents anymore because they say nasty things. Both my parents are nasty to me. They usually say that I will bring disgrace to the family. They sat with me two years ago and had a talk with me. They just said that they noticed I want to be by the boys only and I'm starting to walk like a boy. So they don't like it. Yesterday when my friends came over visiting, they are boys, my father was very cross. He chased them all away. He said that they must leave right now and go back to their homes. He said that I was a girl and I must play with the girls only. So now when I come back from school I just lock myself up in the room. The boys are my real friends and now I*

*can't be with them and this make me very sad. We play, we play soccer. I really like soccer. I'm a goal keeper when I play soccer. Parents must support the children. They need the support of their parents. Parents must support. I would like to go for treatment that will help me become a boy.*

*There are other children like me. I know a 14 year old she's just like me we have the same characteristics... she lives in Pietermaritzburg. We hang around with boys; both enjoy soccer we both dress like boys. But her friends smoke and she doesn't. She doesn't wear dresses. No earrings. The children are cool with us being around them. I feel like nobody likes me. I feel sad like I'm trapped and I can't be myself. I will ask God for support and to make my parents change and for them to be more supportive. It's always tense at home. I can't have a conversation with mom and dad. It always leads to an argument about the way I am. I did tell my mom. But she thinks I'm going to change back. I feel like she can't hear me. Mom continues to buy me girlie stuff and I just leave it in my cupboard or I just give it to my sister. I wear the few boys' things I have or my brothers'. I save my own money to buy my own pants, shirts and I'm saving for 'amakhokhos' (isiZulu slang word for soccer boots). I like the smart shirt and shoe. Sometimes my mom finds these clothes and she burns it. I feel so sad so unwanted. I can be patient for this while and I will change when I can. I will hang in there. My friends support me. The children are used to it. There are so many like me. They like to wear boys' stuff. And they also like to play soccer. This is the start actually.*

Gugu revealed that from the age of three, she already knew the gender she felt comfortable in. Gugu spoke openly about her feelings and the fact that she is actually a boy trapped in a girl's body. She spoke about the emotional trauma she is currently experiencing where she cannot keep company with who she wants to due to pressure from her parents. Parents played a role in regulating her gender towards the norm and reprimanded her for transgressing. She went on to explain her feelings about being a girl and how bored she was in a girl's body. Gugu spoke about her friends and how

much more supportive they were than her family. She was very hurt that her parents refused to acknowledge her sexuality and the fact that they were still expecting her to 'come around' and adopt a more feminine stance. Gugu revealed how her peers offered her support due to the close bond they shared.

Like Gugu, studies reveal that children from the ages of three and four are very aware of their sexuality orientation (DePalma & Jennett, 2012, Kennedy & Helen, 2010; Goodman & Brown, 2016; Mangin, 2018). However, schools fail to offer the freedom for a learner to interact based on their personal preference. These learners are then compelled to fit into the normative binary groups - male or female and perform within them. Drawing on Judith Butler's Queer theory that affirms that sexuality is not fixed but rather fluid, it becomes evident that children as young as three or four are able to decipher their sexual orientation (DePalma & Jennett, 2012, Kennedy & Helen, 2010; Goodman & Brown, 2016; Mangin, 2018). The fact that one was born with female genitalia would not necessarily dictate that this identity would remain a female because she has a vagina. Rather it is now evident that sexuality is experienced by an individual who may then decide that she prefers being a male, subsequently proving Judith Butler's queer theory.

**Lumka:** It's about how they feel. It's like a feeling miss and you can't change it. I tried to but I didn't change. I still have feelings for girls. Miss, I'm like them. I like girls and I have liked them for a long time. Miss other girls like me too. It started last year Miss when I had strange feeling, I saw this girl and I normally just say girls are beautiful but this time I just felt something, I don't know what it is (say ooh) she's pretty or something like that. But this time I saw a girl and I just felt something.

In an interview with Lumka she revealed that she had an affinity for girls. She explained that when she saw a boy it was 'just ordinary' but when she sees certain girls there's 'a feeling in my chest'.



**Cassandra:** Miss it's a feeling, and this feeling Miss it grows Miss until it becomes you. I have told my mom because she is with me more. She is just okay and it feels like she thinks I'm joking about it but she doesn't know it's for real miss.

**Buhle:** I like to be a boy Miss. I like to wear boy's clothes and I like how they walk. And soccer Miss is my favourite. In my neighbourhood I hang out with the boys. They are fine with me being with them. It's not a new thing Miss, there are many like us.

**Fezeka:** There are so many like us Miss. I want to be a boy. I hate to be with girls. From grade 1 I hated to be with girls. I started loving girls from then. I have feeling for girls. I want to have a beard, an 'intshebe' (the isiZulu word for beard). My family knows Miss and other people know too because I have had a relationship with their daughter. My mom knows and she is okay with it. I think she thinks I'm not serious. She even buys me the stuff that I want. My father is cross. He shouted at me. Black is my favourite colour. I like Adidas track pants. I love to play soccer it makes me to feel like a man. I control the ball on the field. I love it. I love girls and not boys. Boys are my friends. I like to walk that way. I'm very comfortable like that. I hate being a girl. I'm not a girl I'm a boy. I'm very happy when I'm like a boy. I don't like to wear a dress. A school dress is okay. I will always be a man and I will one day be a taxi owner like my father. I think I will know how to drive it well, take care of my vehicle, put nice music and tyres and also just run it on our streets. I just love cute girls. My nickname is "malume or masoso" and I'm okay with that.

The phrase "coming out" is the moment when a sexually non-conforming identity discloses his/her preferred gender orientation. It is when a person is publicly true to his sexuality and sexual feelings (Sandfort et al., 2015). After interviewing the above participants, I realised that the number of transgender learners at school was quite considerable. It also revealed that the children were becoming agents of their sexuality despite much contention surrounding sexuality. The youth are more confident about embracing their sexuality and free to perform it. According to Sandfort et al., (2015) no

amount of repression or training can change the sexual feelings that manifest within the depths of any soul's being.

### **5.5 Reasons for resisting hetero-normative activity: Learner perspectives**

**The learners shared various perspectives on why transgender identities might resist hetero-normativity. The following sub-themes related to their responses are discussed within this section:**

- A shift in old boundaries
- Women using homosexual relationships as an agency of protection against abuse, mockery and unwanted pregnancies
- Subordination versus power
- Physical appearance and aesthetics

#### 5.5.1 A shift in old boundaries

***Researcher:** What are some of the reasons why you believe that these individuals become transgender?*

**Samkelo:** Communities are changing. Swopping genders nje (exactly). Women like women ... they swopping genders. It's incredible, yesterday umakhelwane (neighbour) was a women now she a man...I'm confused.

Samkelo spoke about society and how it has evolved. He spoke about seeing his neighbour transform her role and duties in the household almost overnight. He observed identities were not fixed but rather fluid as on one day people could identify as one gender and then the next day transform into another. This observation resonates with Butler's (1990) findings about gender and that gender is performed and not static.

**Gugu:** I don't like washing dishes and cooking and that thing about coming home at 6pm. Why can't I be out also because the boys can, why can't a girl? There's too much of problems for girls. It's boring to be girl Miss. Hay Miss, you have to wear like a certain way and stay indoors and no friends...

Gugu was clearly against the gender binaries within our communities. Her comments indicated that she was not happy with the duties assigned to women according to gender binaries. Gugu was performing masculinity to affirm that she is a male. Gugu has also revealed that being a boy meant you do not have to perform duties like washing dishes, cooking and cleaning. She indicated that being a girl was boring and restrictive. It compelled you to be homebound and everything is a problem when you are a girl. She assumed that a boy's life was more exciting and there was more freedom to do as you wished.

#### 5.5.2 Women using homosexual relationships as an agency of protection against abuse, mockery and unwanted pregnancies

**Amahle:** Miss it's just better being with girls than with boys. The boys are very insensitive and they don't know that we want like to just be gentle. Boys are rough and they don't like to sit and maybe just chat. Miss they also become violent when they see that you just talking to another boy. They don't understand Miss.

Amahle felt that boys were rough and not easy to be with. She went on to explain that jealousy leads to them becoming rude and even violent very quickly.

**Pertunia:** It's not safe acting like a girl then the men feel we are weak and they want to attack us. So the woman feels if she is a man she will not be attacked.

**Tyra:** Abuse. Many women don't want to be with abusive men and these days men are very abusive. So they prefer to be with another woman who will take on the role of a man in the relationship but this will be like a gentle man.

Pertunia and Tyra spoke about the abusive nature of some men. Pertunia spoke about women wanting to be more like men in order to avoid being victims of abuse and subordination. Mkasi (2016) mentions in her study that male authority and leadership ought not to be performed in an abusive manner but rather in a harmonious manner that will still maintain order and respect. She stated that women also wanted to be in positions of power and control. The participants believed that by changing their gender they would not fall victims to abuse and violence. Tyra suggested that the reason why women wanted to become men is because they have either experienced or observed men being abusive. Murnen (2015) illustrates in her studies that the abuse, violence and domination asserted by men on women is simply a modus of using the masculinity trait in an attempt to reinforce female subordination. Mathew (2010) addresses similar issues in her study where she found that violence and abuse are manifestations of conflict arising within relationships due to infidelity, sexual entitlement, and insecurities based on gender division in labour and positions of power. Tyra explained that the women now wanted to assume the role of men in relationships, however, they were going to be gentle men who were more aware of how to treat women and cater for their needs. Correspondingly, Cassandra indicated alternate non-hegemonic characteristics she would employ in her role as a male.

**Cassandra:** Miss I will be a man who knows how to treat a woman. I will know like what she needs. I will not abuse her. If she wants something then I will buy it and if I don't have money I will explain that I will get it for her when I get the money. Miss, I will not be that one to shout and perform beat up my wife. I will listen to her and make her happy.

Cassandra went on to very subtly confess that she identified as lesbian and assumed the role of a man in her relationships. Here, it is evident that she wanted to play the role of a man who would be able to satisfy the needs of a woman. She also alluded to the fact that the men she has encountered or experienced were physically, emotionally and financially abusive. She went on to explain how she would perform

her role as the male in the relationship such as being a listener and provider and being kind.

On the contrary some participants felt that even girls themselves were nasty and therefore they preferred to be in the company of males.

**Sindy:** Girls are bad to each other Miss. Some girls are very hurtful. They gossip about you and say bad things about you when you are not around. They are not true friends and they are very jealous.

Sindy felt that women can be very mean to each other. Some girls may want to avoid being gossiped about and rather hang out with boys who are more easy going. By joining the boys they would avoid stressful situations where girls are nasty.

**Luya:** Miss (...a short pause) women don't want to date boys anymore Miss because then they get pregnant (A hushed silence resonated at this point as all the other participants agreed but were not as brave as Luya to bring up this point). Miss men are cowards because as soon as the girl tells him that she is pregnant then he accuses her of having others and he doesn't understand that it is his child. They start to call her a "isifebe" (whore) a very bad word... (the other participants sighed). Then Miss the girls feel it's easier to have a relationship with a girl cos it will save her problems...like worrying about becoming pregnant and disgracing herself.

Luya, a very boisterous character, was brave enough to share that many of the girls no longer date boys. They rather date girls as this saves them from falling prey to unwanted pregnancies. The women are finding that men are too dominating, irresponsible and demanding. Due to hegemonic versions of masculinity they desire feminine relations instead.

**Tyra:** Miss, another reason why so many young girls are choosing to become transgender and lesbian is because they are afraid to get pregnant. When you tell your boyfriend that you are pregnant then he starts to call you a bitch and says that he is not the father. He accuses the girl of having many boyfriends and Miss the girl is left with the problem of the unwanted child. Then she tries to do abortion or just has the child and then there's no money and she has to even leave school.

Here again lies evidence that male masculinity comes into play. The males are unjustifiably relinquished of all responsibilities pertaining to pregnancy and the young women are left to deal with parents and society who shun her (Meyer, 2017; Mfecane, 2018). The absence of fathers and the rate of parental abandonment in South Africa is very high. According to statistics gathered by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) at least 40% of mothers in South Africa are single parents (Mtuta, 2019). The survey went on to say that most children in South Africa have absent fathers. Meyer (2017) clearly illustrates that women in South Africa, irrespective of their location or race, experience more impoverished circumstances than their male counterparts. Meyer (2017) goes on to relate that female-headed families are more common and patriarchal values support masculinity identities despite the fact that most households are female headed. Young women of today are working against the normative expectation of the traditional roles enforced by heteronormativity.

The above responses seem to indicate that there is a profound desire for women to acquire more masculine positions in society. In taking on a more masculine disposition, they aim to avoid being victims of male dominance, unwanted pregnancies, oppression, gender-based violence and other forms of abuse.

### 5.5.3 Subordination versus non-normative femininity and gangsterism

**Sindy:** Miss it is also because some woman like to play that gangster man, so she will dress like a gangster with All Stars (sneakers) and big chains like in the soapie, Uzalo.

Sindy explains that many women want to be in a position of power. She makes reference to 'gangster'-like men and infers that there is a desire for the women to occupy these positions in society. Women are now aspiring to acquire the role of gangsters in their communities, as this role will grant them superiority in terms of respect, power and money. According to Shaw and Skywalker (2017) women seek belonging in gangs as a tactic to yield security and resources. Gangs provide status such as designer clothes, flashy cars and protection. In most instances women turning to gangsterism may have been victims of abuse themselves. They also become the overseer of the community. These characteristics are very appealing to some individuals and may be the reason why they decide to adopt a more masculine personality to acquire status (Jones et al., 2018).

#### 5.5.4 Physical appearance and aesthetics

**Sena:** Sometimes a girl looks like a boy and is even built like a boy. Like strong looking and tall. Then she decides that she is better off as a boy.

**Gloria:** Miss, there was this boy and he once was interested in a girl. The girl refused him and made a remark that he was too pretty to be a boy. This boy actually took the advice of the girl and started acting like a girl and he liked it, and now he's a gay.

Sena and Gloria spoke about the physique and physical features of an individual. She said that if a girl had a broad structure i.e. large framework, broad shoulders and big arms then this was another reason why girls may want to become men. Society dictates that women need to be petite and slender. Only then are they considered attractive or alluring (Toselli & Spiga, 2017).

In the above extract, many learners demonstrated an awareness of the heterosexual norms dictated by society. They went on to also associate the increase in the number of non-conforming identities with the fact that these identities may no longer wish to follow stereotypical gender roles, hence, the change. The younger generation was not prepared to follow heterosexual oppression and in changing their gender they opposed the normative dictates associated with heteronormative subordination. Women are now striving to attain that position in the hierarchy where they are no longer dominated. Status and differential rights are defended by the enactment of gender differences. The woman traditionally bore a subordinate position within the family, while the boys and men were granted the freedom and privileges like their father (Meyer, 2017). This concept of individual freedom and power was advocated by a heteronormative society and gender binaries they conformed to. Their responses reflected that children are becoming bold and now possess the agency to make meaning of their identities. With a shift from the acceptable heteronormativity to the non-conforming identities, a struggle ensues due to this shift in power dynamics (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009).

## **5.6 Factors that influence how learners make meaning of the term transgender**

### 5.6.1 Media, modern technology and social media and the way in which learners make meaning of the term transgender

Photo elicitation and a vignette (story) were very useful tools that I used to guide my discussions without having to say too much. I found that as soon as I began using the pictures that I had carried along, there was a sudden lift in the atmosphere and the discussion immediately took off. Learners were immediately aware of the context of our discussion. I began my focus group discussion with the use of a picture of Somizi. Somizi, a judge on a popular talent show, is currently trending on social media sites like Twitter, Instagram and Facebook because he was recently married to Mohale, an up and coming South African model, entrepreneur and motivational speaker. Both their white and traditional weddings sparked the attention of people far and wide. Talk of the wedding was the hype for many weeks even before the wedding date had been officially



announced. The glitz and glamour surrounding this event was a pinnacle to all viewers and followers. Nobody wanted to Miss a moment during the preparation and the wedding itself. Somizi has in recent years risen to fame and glory. He can now be considered a South African icon. Society is driven by status. Flashy cars, exclusive tailored garb and an exquisite life-style are but a few of the desires of many a young man and young woman. Information on these fashion gurus and icons is freely accessible with the smart and android phones in many a person's pocket. The lifestyles of these icons motivate many individuals with similar desires. Hence, I found using Somizi as a starting point in my discussion subtly helped steer my discussion into gender non-conforming identities and then more specifically towards the concept transgender. I found that the introduction of Somizi brought on many interesting perceptions. Our discussion then took us to a point where learners revealed many more popular television personalities starring in many soap operas. Learners knew the specific details in terms of the channels, viewing times, and details about the characters' lifestyles on screen and off screen.

**Researcher:** *Have you heard about transgender people?*

**Gloria:** I first heard about it on Generations. It was very interesting because Wandile said that he was a trans man on Generations. There's also a character in the soapie Empire, but I'm not sure what his name is.

**Cassandra:** Miss, Wandile from Generations is a transgender and there's also ... ubani, Schumacher is from The Queen.

**Tyra:** Miss, right now there are many shows on TV that have gays and stuff. Like also Taco Miss, she's a YouTube blogger and LaSizwe a talk show presenter.

Gloria was quick to respond. She excitedly commented that she remembered watching a soap opera where there was a trans-woman called Wandile. She made the connection of the word transgender with the character in the soap operas. During this focus group discussion I found that the media had a huge role in transmitting information. Tyra and Cassandra added to this where they went on to mention more characters on television

shows and soap operas who also identified as either transgender or non-conforming identities. During these conversations there seemed to be a shift in the conversations. The participants spoke about Somizi who is a judge from the talent show called ‘South Africa’s got Talent’ and his partner Mohale, a model, Schumacher and Prince from the soap opera The Queen, La Sizwe, the host of a reality show and even Taco, a YouTube blogger. It is very evident that the media has subtly introduced transgender identities to the participants in a positive way. The abovementioned personalities, despite their sexual orientation, are more easily accepted by society due to their status (Jones, Brewer, Paul, Young, Lambe & Hoffman, 2018). Their experiences are favourable compared to the experiences of non-celebrities who identify as gender non-conforming.

Jones et al., (2018) confirm that in recent years transgender identities have gained much more popularity and attention. Television viewing has cultivated favourable perceptions of transgender identities. I found that the media had a huge influence on the way in which viewers perceived transgender identities. The media has a way of sensationalising the image, lifestyles and personalities of transgender stars. Richardson (2015, p. 211) provides a useful illustration in saying “...the power that queer citizens enjoy is largely dependent on access to capital and credit.” This now makes it more acceptable to societies who embrace the positionality of transgender identities in a more positive way.

#### 5.6.2 Relationships, physical appearance and behavioural patterns of sexually diverse identities.

***Researcher:** Do you know anybody who is transgender? Please tell me about them, their characters and how are they as friends?*

**Amahle:** Yes Miss. My sister’s friend was a boy and he is a girl now. She even wears a bra and puts in some tissues to make the tittie (breasts) look big. She wears beautiful wigs and nice make up. Yoh Miss she is a pretty girl. She is so fun to be with. She makes us laugh Miss, yoh. And she can dance too.

**Sindy:** Miss there are many. Some even all live together. They are very nice but they can be rude. They not afraid to say whatever they want and they can be loud, very loud.

**Tyra:** Miss we even have one in grade 6. My aunty is Miss. He wears such expensive clothes. He's not afraid to tell anybody about who he is. He just walks around and spoils us.

**Simon:** Yes Miss. I see them in my community. They wear stuff like tights and hi-heels. They have funny hand movements. They always laughing and sway from one side to the other side when they walking... like they shaking their bums. They not shy to do anything.

**Gloria:** Yoh Miss they not afraid to embarrass you too Miss. Haai Miss they can be so mean. Then they just burst out laughing.

**Samkelo:** I see them, but I don't know any.

**Sanelisiwe:** They make a very good friend Miss. Like they will tell you what looks good and they are very good to put make-up and making hairstyles. They very stylish yoh Miss. I like them Miss. They nice.

From the above extract I found that some participants viewed transgender identities as being very confident and friendly personalities. Sindy and Gloria mention that transgender identities are very rude and straight forward. This stems from the fact that not all individuals are cordial to transgender identities. Their bold nature is a coping mechanism that helps them continue with their lives from day to day. I discovered participants who were acquainted with a transgender person and had a close relationship with them held more positive views about the transgender individual (Carrera-Fernandez, Lameiras-Fernandez & Rodriguez, 2013; Jones et al., 2018). The participants remarked in admiration that transgender identities were very fashionable and took great pride in their personal appearance.

### 5.6.3 The impact that religion and culture have on the way in which learners understand sexuality and transgender

### 5.6.3.1 Religion

Religion can be classified as one of the most significant aspects in an individual's life. It is the embodiment of a particular faith e.g. Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam to name a few. When we are born, we are automatically assigned a religion, henceforth, this religion dictates the pathways of our many decisions. Our names, dress style and day-to-day actions are all governed by our religious backgrounds. It serves as a form of discipline, a means of enforcing boundaries as well as rules (Msibi, 2013). From an early age children are taught rituals and basic actions that make up their way of life e.g. something as simple as taking a bath or perhaps serving a meal where two specific dishes may not be served together. As we grow up within these religions, these practices then become convictions. These teachings become part of our lifestyles where our thoughts and perceptions are also influenced by the teachings we have lived by. The regulation of one's sexuality is greatly influenced by religion and its ideologies (Young, Shipley & Trothen, 2015). There is great tension concerning the relationship between non-conforming gender identities and religion. Gender minorities are often inflicted with a great deal of condemnation (Beagan & Hattie, 2015). Individuals identifying as transgender are often excluded or experience religious isolation stemming from heterosexist stigma (Tabaac & Witten, 2016). During my data collection I found that many learners' perceptions and ideologies on non-conforming identities were influenced by the religious backgrounds they hailed from. They shared the following responses when asked the following question based on religious beliefs:

***Researcher:** What does your religion say about transgender identities? Tell me about some of the comments you may hear from your pastors at church, Maulanas (a Muslim priest) and people who go to church or masjid (Muslim prayer place)?*

**Chuku:** Miss, in my religion, I'm a Catholic, the person who is a girl and then act like a man is cursed. In the Bible it says that gays are cursed because it is against the will of God.

**Sindy:** According to the Bible it is not acceptable to be a woman if you were supposed to be a man.

Chuku and Sindy highlighted their teachings from the Bible. They spoke about the curse that would befall a person if he or she were to change their gender. They said that changing one's gender is going against the will of God. Religion thus mediated gender identities.

**Linda:** It is not what people should be doing. When you come to heaven now, God is expecting a male because he sent you down as a male. So, Miss I think that people should go back to what they were made as otherwise it becomes confusing. They should just go back to the normal bodies and act the way that they were made. Miss God made you a specific way so you should stay that way. But miss also who are we to judge. They want to be something else, they become happy ... aye Miss it's not our business. They only want to be happy.

Linda's response is contradictory as initially she felt that God decided on people's gender and then suggests that everybody go back to their birth gender as it will help them to get into Heaven. Later, she decides that it is not her business to speak much on the subject as it could compromise someone's happiness. Linda stated that she does not have the right to judge because everybody around us is ultimately seeking happiness.

**Simon:** Miss, in my religion, its Christian. It says they are mad because how can someone sin like this when they know they will go to hell. It's wrong to sin in my religion Miss. The punishment is very bad to go to hell.

Simon explains that being a Christian has taught him that if he committed a sin, he will go to hell instead of heaven so this transgender individual will have to be mentally unstable to deliberately change his or her gender. This confirms Nzimande's (2017) study which found that some people do consider being transgender as an unnatural or abnormal phenomenon.

**Cassandra:** So Miss, when some parents and even Gogo do find out they immediately take the child to the church to bath in holy water and ask the church pastor and the people to pray for them. The family will see it like a curse or something.

**Chuku:** In Nigeria it's a bit confused because sometimes they accept it and sometimes the family is too old fashioned and then they are very cruel. They take the child to church and bathe them in holy water because they say the child is possessed and that she or he has demons. In the communities they make side comments at the person who is different and they even throw them with rocks. They think he or she is bad luck and they feel that it is like a disease and that they may spread the disease to others.

Cassandra and Chuku mention that some people may see it as the person has been cursed. In this instance an elder like Gogo (granny) will approach the church and the elders at the church. She will request their prayers and holy water which could be used to try and remove the curse that has befallen the individual. Transgender is perceived as wrongful and a sin (Msibi, 2012).

**Clara:** Sometimes they are not accepted into their churches and communities. The people at church will never allow them to pray together.

**Thabani:** Some say God will not bless him and he have a bad luck a bad thing forever for the rest of his life.

**Fatima:** Miss I'm a Muslim Miss and my parents do not accept that my sister is in love with another girl. We still share a room at home but she isn't home much of the time. When she is at home there are always uncomfortable situations and Miss my mother always cries. She says that because of her our whole family will be cursed by Allah because it's like she never do her job and make sure that Mariam was going to be with a man rather than the lady she is with now. Because Miss in Islam Miss, you know, it's not allowed. The family Miss, are always asking questions and the people too. My Dad even brought the Maulana home to make dua (pray) for Mariam to come right.

Learners revealed that religion was a major factor that influenced their understanding of transgender identities. Their religion contributed significantly to their perceptions of, and attitudes to, transgender. Clara and Thabani explained that being transgender was unacceptable. People and God would not accept it as they were bewitched and they would have bad omens attached to them for the rest of their lives. Simon, Clara, Thabani and Fatima felt strongly about conforming to the tenets of their religions. During my interview with Fatima I also found that an individual disclosing their non-conforming sexuality affects the dynamics within a family, especially the parents. Fatima spoke openly of how her religion (Islam) was totally against it. She spoke about her sister identifying as a lesbian and explained the conflict and resentment her sister experienced as a result. Moreover, she highlighted the emotional trauma her mother experienced due to the situation. It was evident from the data that the situation created conflict within the immediate and extended family as well as emotional strain that could lead to depression for the parents and transgender individual.

Religion and culture created barriers where equality and inclusion become questionable (Neary, McEvoy & Irwin-Gowran, 2016) with religious men believing that they are representatives of God, hence, their ability and power to render transgender identities unacceptable (Hadebe, 2010). In a narration from Abu Hurayrah (Allah be pleased with him) he said: *The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) cursed the male who wears female's clothing and the female who wears male's clothing.* Narrated by Abu Dawood (4098) and noted as authentic by al-Nawawi in al-Majmoo' (4/469) and by al-Albaani in Saheeh Abu Dawood. In Islam, men are forbidden to dress like women and vice versa. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: If ever one finds anyone doing what Lot's people did, kill the person who does it, and the person unto whom it is done (38:4447). The lusting for the same sex is unacceptable.

The Christian Bible states that *a female should not put on a male's garment nor shall male put on a female's cloak. Whosoever does do these things will be declared an abomination to the Lord your God (Deuteronomy 22:5).* According to Jones et al., (2018) most religious people hold negative views about transgender identities. They allege that

more morally sound people will hold less positive views on transgender identities. Drawing from a Christian point of view, speech acts are performative and discussing sex with children deemed innocent can be considered child abuse and becomes a sensitive issue and sinful (Eliason, 2010; Msibi, 2013). Many religious individuals would rather stick by their religious convictions than delve into issues that will render one a sinner (Jones et al., 2018). Culture also regulated gender identities as will be shown in the next findings.

#### *5.6.3.2 Culture*

Culture is a shared practice within societies and passes from one generation to another. Culture serves to differentiate people. It includes knowledge, customs, values and habits adopted by individuals within a society. Any individual growing up in a particular society will be infused with the culture within that society. Idang (2015) emphasises that one's culture encompasses beliefs and values about all that is acceptable and unacceptable within a culture. These beliefs and values are treasured. Hence, when an action goes against one's beliefs and values then the person violating the beliefs is ostracised (Masuku, 2015).

“In the Zulu constructions of masculinity there are multiple factors that caused Zulu masculinity to evolve over time which suggest that it is not fixed, but is fluid and dynamic” (Hadebe, 2010, p. 67). The Zulu culture places great emphasis on morality and respect especially for the elders in the clan. The values people adopt are influenced by their culture (Idang, 2015; Jones et al., 2018). The participants revealed the following during the focus group discussions:

***Researcher:*** *What does your culture say about transgender identities?*

**Chuku:** In my country Nigeria, Miss, they will put you in jail. My granny says that women turning to men are cursed and have a demon inside them. Then granny says that they need to see the traditional healer. There needs to be a ritual



done so ancestors can show what the problem is. Miss my grandmother's friend's child did not want to be a girl anymore. She wanted to be a boy. Granny said she wore wigs and tied clear plastic around her chest. In Nigeria they are very strict. They are Catholics Miss but my granny's friend accepted her child. She tried everything to make her child happy.

According to a study done by Msibi (2011) people of the Igbo and Yonibaland tribes (in Nigeria) live beyond western gender binaries. Women were viewed as being powerful. This was evident in their gender positions and their ability to practice gender flexibility in social roles. If a woman hailed from a "brotherless" family she was allowed to assume the role of a male so that she could inherit the land of her father. Drawing from Msibi's research, it is evident that some individuals accept transgender identities due to their cultural influences that have been passed down from generation to generation.

**Sindy:** The children who mention that they are transgender will be sent to the hill. Here, the rituals are performed. They are stripped off their clothes and paint their bodies and they are trained with stick fighting. Miss, some even die because they have to fend themselves and do things like hunting and fighting each other to become strong men.

In the Xhosa culture men are sent off to the mountains to confirm their manhood (Mfecane, 2018). According to Sindy, men were also sent off to the mountains when they were found to be adopting a more feminine identity. This practice of enacting hegemonic masculinity served to reaffirm their manhood (Mayeza, 2016). The conditions on the mountain were very harsh and needed strength and resilience to endure the stay there. In sending the man to the mountains, families aimed to remind them of their manhood and that they needed to be skilled. This finding is evident in research carried out by Mfecane (2018) who outlines the traditional role of males in the African society. He maintains that masculinity and manhood are often conflated. The man is the symbol of power in his family and community. In sending the men off to the mountains, families do this to mediate ideal notions of masculinity based on strength and competition. Connell's theory of masculinity and power demonstrates the need for men to conform to being powerful

and aggressive. The men going off to the mountain need to display these characteristics in order to survive out there.

**Buhle:** In my culture there is something we call ancestors. We believe that no one is alone. Everybody has a one ancestor that stays with him. So this ancestor can be a male or a female. If you are a woman you can have a male ancestor with you or if you are a male you can have a female ancestor with you. So transgender is sometimes accepted in my culture because if the male ancestor that's with a female body wants a female, then that female body will be acting like a male because she is having the feelings coming from the ancestor who is a male. Then Miss in this case it is acceptable but only if you know about this culture. So it's not seen like a bad thing then because that's why they call a male sangoma (traditional healer) Gogo (granny) because he has a female ancestor with him or Baba (father) because she has a male ancestor attached to her.

This finding resonates with Stobie's (2011) study wherein she found that ancestors used the body of a living being to perform certain actions including mannerisms, sexual desires and relinquishing dominance. Buhle explained that in her culture everyone has an ancestor who is constantly attached to them. This ancestor could be responsible for how one behaves as well as the preferences that one may have in terms of sexual attractions, choice of clothes and certain behavioural patterns. The presence of an ancestor could be a reason why someone behaves like a male when they are female. She explained that:

**Gloria:** Miss, sometimes the mother is willing to accept her child for however he is, but when there is an *indoda* (a strong traditional man, who assumes the dominant position in the home by making rules and regulations that govern the household) around she has to support the *indoda* and act like she's also not happy with the child. She has to support the *indoda* otherwise the *indoda* will be troublesome with the *nkosikazi* (traditional wife whose role is to subservient and subordinate to the man). She has to do her role as an *nkosikazi* and listen to the *indoda*.

**Researcher:** *What will the indoda do to his child who identifies as transgender?*

**Sindy:** Miss he will lock his child up. Isn't Miss the *indoda* is a real man who likes to eat meat and show off that he can provide for his family. He also likes to invite his friends Miss to show that he's a man. So when the child says that he wants to be a girl, the *indoda* won't want to be seen with that child. So when his friends come for the *shisanyama* (braai, barbeque), the child will be locked away so nobody can see that his child is this way. Miss he will say "*uyihlazo*" (you are an embarrassment to me).

**Simon:** Isn't Miss the *indoda* like to get respect from others in the community. So when this child says this to him, it's yoh like disrespect. So he will say this transgender child will ruin his reputation and his place in the community. It will be as if he cannot take charge and cannot keep his home in order. He feels he won't get the respect he deserves.

**Pertunia:** Miss there will be lots of shouting and even beating up. The child will be taught a lesson so he will never want to be a woman.

**Tyra:** The *indoda* will also say things like "*Awufuzanga mina*" (you didn't take after me). "... *hamba layekhaya asilidingi ihlazo kulomndeni*" (Leave this home. We don't need this disgrace!).

**Busi:** They will make him work in front of everyone like digging the garden and cutting and cleaning the sheep...because Miss in my culture only a man can cut the sheep. So this will like prove to others that the child is a man.

**Tyra:** If it's a girl Miss, she will be forced to stay in the house and go no-where. She will be forced to wear dresses and the doek (headscarf) and all her boy clothes will be given away to the other children.

**Samkelo:** Miss, the *indoda* will hit the child because he is a disgrace going on like a woman.

**Luyanda:** The *indoda* won't want to be seen the transgender child because how can an *indoda* have such a child who's like a he-she?

**Busi:** Weh heh Miss, the *indoda* was going to hit his child and call him “*isitabane*”. Miss there was going to be fights in the house. He will bring the child down and show him how to be a man, maybe even beat him.

**Tyra:** If the child is mature the *indoda* will get him married so he will have to start acting like a man. He will force him to have a wife to prove that he’s a man and also insist that he has more than one wife to prove his manhood.

**Sindy:** The *indoda* may take the child to a sangoma for spiritual healing. He will perform all the ceremonies for the ancestors to guide them and make him a man again.

Within African societies, the gender binary holds strongly as specific roles were dictated to males (*indoda emadodeni*) and females (*nkosikazi*) (Hadebe, 2010; Mfecane, 2018). Their religion contributed significantly to their perceptions and attitudes of transgender. Many participants revealed that the male (*indoda*) took charge, he made all decisions and all others followed his ruling (Mkasi, 2016; Mfecane, 2018). The *indoda* had an ego and would not allow for this ego to be meddled with. His child who identified as transgender could not be exposed. This bruised his ego. How could he have produced such an offspring? The child was then sent off to boarding school, the farm or shipped off to relatives far away from his current location in the hope that this distance would change the child to conform to conventional masculine norms.

The aggressive response of the *indoda* and his need to have total control of the situation is descriptive of power entrenched within ideal notions of masculinities (Connell, 2002). He believes that in sending the child off to the farm he will remedy the situation by teaching the child how to be a man. He will also avoid further embarrassment within his community with the absence of the transgender child. A man’s power is thus determined by his ability to reproduce offspring (Msibi, 2011).

**Chuku:** Miss, they may also send the child to the farm. At the farm maybe *malume* (uncle) will start to give the child hard work like running after the cattle and goats or doing difficult manly work so that he can become a man again.

**Gloria:** Sometimes Miss, they will send him up into the mountains to learn about becoming a man. They learn about fighting and hunting.

Chuku and Gloria revealed that the child may be sent off to the farm or rural areas. Here the uncles would punish the child with hard labour to remind him that he is a man and not a woman. The *indoda* assumes that sending off the child to the farm will expose him to the harsh conditions that will make him a man again. The family at the farm is coached and given strict instructions on what to do to reinstate the original gender into the child. He will not allow for his offspring to be of this nature as it is a direct blow to his ego (Msibi, 2011). Drawing from Mfecane (2018), hegemonic masculinity in South Africa is a reflection of social realities. It reflects how the power dynamics of a man are determined by the manner in which he performs his duties as a father, husband and a man in society. Gender and masculinity are social constructs that are passed down from generation to generation (Connell, 1995). These social constructs encourage the portrayal of hegemonic masculinity traits. Men are constantly striving to prove themselves and their masculinity to other men to attain power (Msibi, 2011). The participants showed signs of empathy as we discussed the *indoda* and his reactions to the transgender child. They also explained that the *indoda* and his actions were too harsh. They used words like “haai no Miss” and “cha” (no). Negative attitudes experienced by transgender identities stem from a normalisation of a heteronormative society and the non-conforming identities were viewed as being ‘unnatural and unAfrican’ (Nzimande, 2017, p. 239).

### **5.7 Sexuality and Sex education: Understanding the Term Transgender**

Schools, educational institutions and the family are critical places where, via the intervention of controlled knowledge based on facts and worthiness, conscious and unconscious processes of reproduction and the naturalisation of the heteronormative symbolic order constructs individuals as gendered and sexualised beings (Nzimande, 2017). Schools, more specifically primary schools, as contended by Carmody (2012) and Bhana (2013) are the best ideological mechanisms i.e. institutions through which, due to their critical role in reproducing the social order, knowledge is transmitted. “Controversial” subject matter is especially subjected to criticism and monitored by a lay

public. Contested issues on which society is divided are characterised as “controversial” - “different opinions, values and priorities, and, basically and essentially, with different material interests” (Richardson, 2004, p. 27). They are the subject of raucous public discussion about what is permissible, acceptable and healthy. According to Goodhand and Brown (2016) schools tend to privilege and normalise heterosexuality via language and routine actions, informal and formal curriculum and policies, and subtle messages transmitted about acceptable and unacceptable gender behaviour. The introduction of topics related to sexuality into schools will bridge the gap between the known and the unknown in terms of transgender identities.

#### 5.7.1 The need for topics on sexual diversity in the school curriculum as a move towards creating awareness and acceptance

The inclusion of sensitive gender issues remains a very stigmatised and controversial topic in schools (Goodhand & Brown, 2016, Malo-Juvera, 2016). Such topics are too often ignored or avoided as highlighted in the following extracts:

***Researcher:** What are some of the things that need to be done to make it easier for transgender identities?*

**Tyra:** It’s important to become open about this topic now. We cannot keep it a secret anymore because we already have so many gays and lesbians at our school already.

**Lumka:** Something needs to be done in our school to give people like us advice. We are scared because nobody seems like they will accept us.

**Busi:** Teachers need to become more kind to such learners. When teachers are so strict and harsh then learners don’t even want to learn their subject.

**Gloria:** Many learners are feeling this way now, they even try to stop the feeling but it can’t happen. So they need to learn more about it. Like how to keep themselves safe especially now that they just abuse and also kill.

**Samkelo:** I don't know about the transgenders. I only know about lesbians and gays. I will like to know what it is like maybe see a movie about it during L.O. lessons or even more worksheets or notes to help us to understand.

**Sipho:** Transgender people need to learn to be safe. Maybe schools can help them to learn about this because many people won't do it and the church won't do. Only school can do it like in the textbook or worksheets.

**Fezeka:** I think L.O. (Life Orientation) must be about transgender. If we learn more from textbooks then other children won't tease us and make us feel different. There must be more information available at school to help us all.

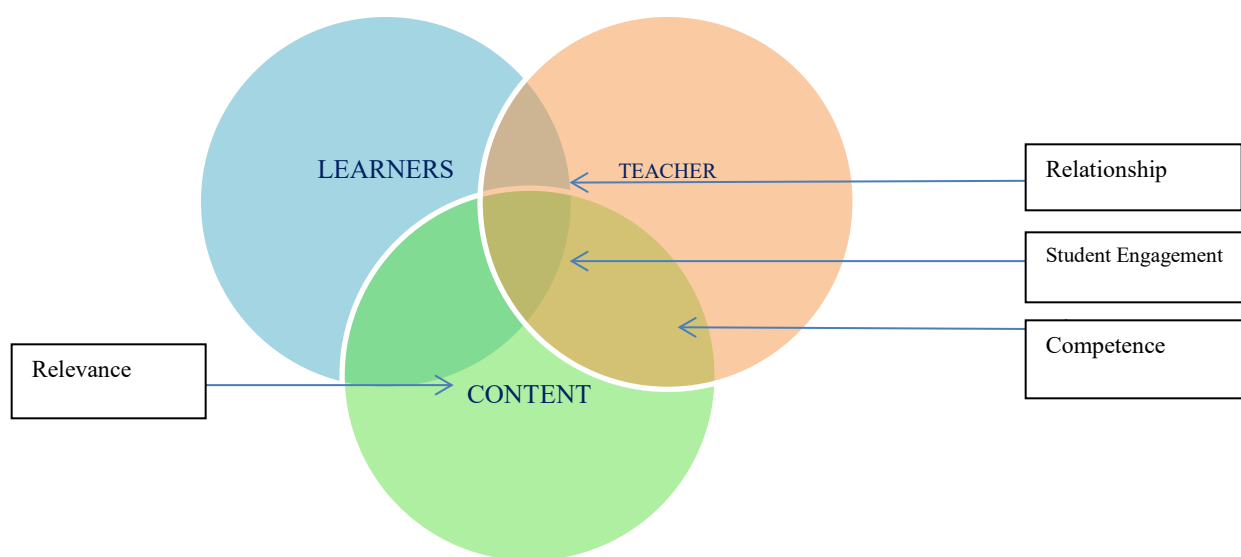
**Gugu:** Transgender is so real. I know because I am transgender. So many people don't even know that's why they don't want to accept us. They need to learn about it and then they will know it's a feeling that we can't control. Sometimes we even try to stop it like I said to myself I have to stop this and just carry on like a girl. It is not easy doing this. I started feeling depressed, like I do not want to be anywhere anymore. It's very hard Miss.

During the analysis of the responses I received from many participants who had been interviewed or part of the FGDs, I found that children did not know what a transgender identity was. According to the Life Orientation curriculum sexual education is a compulsory topic. This topic is also touched on in lower grades in the form of Life Skills and Personal and Social Wellbeing (PSW) (Helleve, Flisher, Onya, Mukoma & Knut, 2011). These learners are currently in grade 6 and grade 7 and it is apparent that the topic has not been dealt with adequately, hence, the misinformation or assumptions surrounding the term transgender and sexuality in general. In the extracts, Lumka confessed that she identified as a lesbian and requested that school offer guidance and counselling at school to assist learners who may identify as sexually diverse.

Tyra, Fezeka, Lumka, Gloria, Samkelo, Sipho, Gugu and Busi revealed that learning more about transgender identities would equip them with knowledge on how to interact and accept them. The inclusion of transgender identities within the school curriculum would offer a platform for learners' development of acceptance and mutual respect which

is a basic human right (Gowen & Wings-Yanez, 2014). Consequently, Tucker, George, Reardon and Panday (2016) allude that from their study it was ascertained that young people’s sexuality was largely framed too simplistically and very often deviated from the topic altogether. Teachers themselves have not embraced the reality that non-conforming identities do exist and that they are a big part of our curriculum. In a reflective study based on negative attitudes towards LGBTQI individuals conducted by Nzimande (2017), pre-service teachers were interviewed and they disclosed that they were not prepared to talk about “this gay stuff” as it was against their convictions. Despite the fact that learners displayed a great deal of excitement and interest during lessons surrounding sexuality, teachers were not prepared to deliberate on the topic (Helleve et al., 2011). Participants called for knowledge on sexual identities, acceptance and diversity. The Department of Education plans on including this in the L.O. curriculum but there is a lot of controversy around this, especially among parents and teachers.

In Figure 11 below, Tucker et al., (2016) present a diagram that illustrates the intimate relationship between learner, teacher and content being taught.



**Figure 11: Depicting student engagement model (Tucker et al., 2016)**



Figure 11 illustrates the direct relationship shared by the three components that make up the process of learning. According Tucker et al., (2016) the accessibility and familiarity of Life Orientation (L.O.) content and innovation within lesson delivery could enable learners to feel that their opinions, experiences and personal aspirations are valued. Learners develop relationships with educators and value inputs from their educators. Teachers wear many caps in the classroom: social worker, parent, counsellor, and friend. The most challenging feature about teaching sexuality is handling the interaction with learners, communicating messages and the use of specific language (Helleve et al., 2011). Teachers display a hierarchy of their adult influence whilst engaging with their learners. This builds respect within the relationship shared by teacher and learner. The sharing of life obstacles and ways to manage these obstacles increases awareness as well as vital knowledge. Learners are dependent on their L.O. teachers to make meaning of things and also help them make decisions (Tucker et al., 2016). Subsequently, the learners develop interpersonal relations with their teachers and begin to value their presence and build a trusting and open relationship with the teacher.

Samkelo, Fezeka and Siphon mentioned worksheets and textbooks that could be made available to provide more education on transgender identities. The lack of this content material impacts on the knowledge acquired by all learners. The choice of resources therefore becomes important as they are vital aspects that influence the knowledge of the learners. The acquisition of knowledge would contribute to the development of teachers and peers and the transformation within the school to acceptance, respect, integration and tolerance (Meyer & Leonardi, 2018).

### **5.8 How do children make sense of the Constitution and Bill of Rights?**

Human rights are mandatory to all citizens of South Africa, whether minority or majority (Ilyayambwa, 2012). Section 25(5) of The South African Constitution displayed stereotypes that could be harmful to the rights of non-conforming identities. The Constitutional Court then intervened and added clauses to discourage this. South Africa is the first country in the world that discourages discrimination based on sexual orientation

(Ellerbeck, 2017). The South African government has also published a public pledge service that is committed to including gender identity in schools from kindergarten to matric and the right to reflect one's chosen sexual orientation. The participants expressed their views about the constitutional rights:

***Researcher:** What are the reasons why more people are comfortable to talk about their gender?*

**Simon:** Isn't Miss, the people have so much of rights Miss.

**Tyra:** People have learnt about their Bill of Rights. Miss it's the South African Constitution that has creating so much freedom that the people are doing as they please.

**Cassandra:** Miss I think they're brave now because the government allows it.

**Gloria:** Maybe because people are more educated and they are working so they feel strong because when you have a job then you are not waiting for money from SASSA (government social grant).

**Pertunia:** I think it's because of the Constitution, isn't it says people have freedom of everything.

**Samkelo:** They are very brave now. They don't care about respect I think. Before, they won't talk about it because it was like disgusting to our parents and old people.

All the participants shared a common view that the South African Constitution has created a means for non-conforming identities to claim their human rights. This is supported by research conducted by Ilyayambwa (2012) who states that human rights are intended for all people. He goes on to explain that the South African Constitution (Chapter one) clearly captures the pursuit to provide equality as stipulated in "human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedom" (Ilyayambwa, 2012, p. 51). Diverse identities are further supported by NGOs and organisations that support them. The democratic government in South Africa supports the need to provide health facilities and medical care suitable for transgender identities.

Though few, clinics have been established to provide hormonal therapy as well as restructuring surgery to support the needs of transgender identities.

## **5.9 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I analysed the data collected by grouping common themes and using a coding system to categorise them. In my findings it was evident that many participants did not know what the word transgender meant. The lack of awareness enables continued social prejudices against all individuals who do not conform to heteronormativity, hence, rendering transgender identities unacceptable within their own communities. Participants revealed that there was a distinct shift away from hetero-normativity and hegemonic masculinities. The promotion of male dominance and female subordination is now being rejected by transgender identities. It was found that learners are moving away from hetero-normativity as they embraced alternate identities through their agency. Subsequent to these findings is data that resonates with Butler's queer theory (1990, 1993) where she argues that gender is fluid. A child classified as being female at birth based on her biology can however identify as male. Furthermore, school curriculum and policy are not synchronised and teachers are reluctant and nervous to teach about sexuality. This toxic school environment needs transformation since schools are an important component in the process of creating positive awareness. The concluding chapter presents a summary of the main findings and offers recommendations on ensuring the integration, interaction and acceptance for transgender identities.

## **6. Chapter Six: Conclusion**

### **6.1 Introduction**

In this study, I aimed to investigate learners' perceptions of transgender identities. I embarked on a quest to identify factors that contributed to the way in which learners, aged 12-15, constructed meaning of the term transgender. This study will contribute to existing knowledge on transgender identities, the factors that shape the understanding of the term transgender and ways in which we can ensure the integration, interaction and acceptance for transgender identities. In this final chapter I will provide a summary of the previous chapters that make up this thesis, the themes and findings derived after the analysis and lastly recommendations that will consolidate a better environment for all transgender identities.

### **6.2 Summary of Chapters**

In Chapter One, I identified the main focus within this study; the objectives and the aims. I included a background to the study and a rationale that motivated me to pursue this topic. This chapter also presented the critical questions that resonate in this study. Additionally, Chapter One highlighted the theories used to underpin the framework of this study and an overview of the research methodology employed.

Chapter Two focused on theories that framed this study and supported my findings. Connell's (1995; 2002) theories of hegemonic masculinity, gender and power, resonated throughout this study as it became evident that society is, broadly speaking, heteronormative. The family, school and society are major social agents that influence the attitudes and perceptions of an individual. Men are perceived as the dominant gender that thrives on the position of power in families and society. This type of behaviour is often normalised (Bhana, 2016). In addition, Butler (1999) argues that gender is not static - she contends that gender is fluid. Adopting specific labels such as male or female is a social

decision (Eckert & McConnell, 2014). Wider knowledge of these findings could work to counteract negative views of transgender identities.

Chapter Three focused on the literature review. Here, literature from local and international researchers was presented. The chapter began with the historical background and origins of non-conforming identities and transgender identities (Jargose, 1996; Stryker, 2008). The term transgender was defined. Physiological and sociological arguments were presented to support the so-called authenticity of transgender identities. This chapter unpacked the broad spectrum of marginalisation and stigmatisation experienced by transgender identities in school as well as society, despite legislation and curriculum that has amendments to support transgender identities.

Chapter Four encompassed a detailed presentation of the method and research design wielded during this phenomenological qualitative study. Location, methods used during data collection, sampling and analysis techniques were presented. A sample of 34 participants was employed, and eight focus group discussions as well as 34 interviews were utilised to gather rich data. Information was presented about all participants in a table providing a basic profile of each learner constituting age, gender, race, and the suburbs they hail from (Tables 3, 4 and 5). This chapter discussed the mode of ensuring trustworthiness, validity, ethics and limitations surrounding this study.

Chapter Five, the analysis chapter, unpacked and scrutinised all feedback acquired during the process of data collection. This chapter focused on how learners responded to questions about transgender identities and the factors that shaped their perceptions. This chapter aimed to amass knowledge that will assist in creating a supportive schooling environment in the future. In using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, aided with use of a vignette and photo elicitation, rich data was gathered. This data was transcribed verbatim and analysed using the coding system where themes were identified.

Chapter Six, which is the concluding chapter, provides an overview of all the chapters that make up this dissertation and an encapsulation of this study's key findings. This chapter constitutes a comprehensive list of possible recommendations for future intervention in terms of the inclusion, interaction and integration of transgender identities into our schools which will infiltrate our societies at large.

## **6.3 Main Findings**

The following themes and subsequent sub-themes contributed to insightful findings.

### **6.3.1 How children make meaning of the term transgender**

#### *6.3.1.1 Learners' understanding of the term transgender: Misunderstood and confused*

During the process of analysis one of the main themes I derived was that many of the participants either did not know about transgender identities or thought they knew about it but confused it with homosexuality. The term transgender was highly misunderstood. Only one participant knew that transgender identities needed specialised treatment and surgery to help them conform to their true identities.

#### *6.3.1.2 Lack of awareness and misconceptions*

The lack of awareness on transgender identities has created many misconceptions. Participants revealed that transgender identities were seen as mere misfits who transgressed the boundaries of heteronormativity. I found that the stigma attached to transgender identities contributed to transphobic attacks. Participants' attitudes and responses to transgender identities were based on their commitment to stereotypical gender binaries (Formby, 2015; Zeeman et al., 2017). Despite policies and the Bill of Rights, the basic human rights of transgender identities continue to be violated (Wilmot & Naidoo, 2014). Very little is known about them and their experiences (McCann & Sharek, 2014). This lack of awareness inhibits the interaction and integration of transgender

identities in our societies. This further perpetuates hate crimes against transgender identities based on personal hostilities one may bear towards non-conforming identities. Several scholars speak of the shift in power dynamics displayed when behaviour patterns shift from normative to non-conforming (Schilt & Westbrook; 2009; Zimmerman & Shuaiber, 2013; Formby, 2015; Zeeman et al., 2017). This disapproval is the result of transphobia and homophobia.

### **6.3.2 Transgender identities are not accepted**

An important finding based on a lack of awareness was directly linked to the use of language in terms of transgender identities - the specific pronoun used to refer to an individual. Cisgender people in general lack the knowledge of communicating effectively with transgender identities. The use of pronouns is a sensitive and important factor that contributes to transphobia and may be categorised as an act of social aggression in the form of verbal harassment (Zimman, 2017; Hillard, 2019).

### **6.3.3 Learners embrace their sexuality**

Despite the harsh reception of teachers and school mates towards transgender identities, it became clear that the participants were confident to display and speak about their own sexuality. Learners spoke about their experiences and use this study as an opportunity to talk about their own non-normative sexual identities. These sessions were therapeutic for them as they are not free to discuss such topics with their parent. Three participants openly declared that they were lesbians and one identified as being transgender. As with this study it has been noted that children as little as three years old, are now aware of their sexuality and are able to openly declare it (DePalma & Jennett, 2012; Kennedy & Helen, 2010; Goodhand & Brown, 2016; Mangin, 2018).

### **6.3.4 Reasons for Resisting Heteronormativity: Learners' Perspectives**

In terms of the positionality of transgender identities it was again apparent that if an individual identified as anything other than the traditional masculine or feminine counterpart, they were severely teased, mistreated, ignored and abused (emotionally, physically and even sexually) by a society that thrived on heteronormativity (Murnen, 2015). One of the reasons for this is because heteronormativity created a distinctly superior gender (Connell, 1987). From as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century, sexuality has been the most institutionalising element in power relations (Ceplak, 2013). Men have used their dominant position in societies and homes to take control and demonstrate their superiority in the form of traditional gender roles including - a women's place is in the kitchen and; only men are allowed out late at night. This was referred to as 'biopolitics'. It was a mechanism of regulation, surveillance and discipline to ensure gender domination via hegemonic practices. Common practices, such as abuse and domination, resulted in a very toxic portrayal of the gender binary (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Men often capitalised on this institutionalisation of hegemonic masculinity i.e. the domination of women as they stand to benefit from being in this dominant position. Their exalted position is considered the ideal positionality of any man (Connell, 1987). Participants spoke about the move away from traditional gender binaries. They deliberated on the many reasons for women adopting masculine roles in society. Their reasons centred on the lack of responsible behaviour from their male counterparts. They mentioned factors such as abuse, unwanted pregnancies and the element of possessing power within their families and communities. It was evident that the Bill of Rights, religion, culture and the lack of knowledge transmitted to learners in schools impacted and influenced how the participants made meaning of the term transgender.

### **6.3.5 A shift in old boundaries**

Participants spoke of a change in society. Marais (2013) confirmed that people are socialised to adopt a heteronormative position in society and families. Participants revealed that the societies they live in have many non-conforming identities. They spoke



about families where women took on roles either as a woman or a male. Heteronormativity is slowly being replaced by a complex and integrated society encompassing sexually diverse identities. Gender roles have also transformed and can no longer ascribe specific responsibilities to a specific gender.

### **6.3.6 Women using homosexual relationships as protection against heterosexual abuse, mockery and unwanted pregnancies**

Women are now seeking security and protection in homosexual relationships. With the marked increase in abuse, gender-based violence and killings perpetrated by intimate partners, women are finding a greater sense of security, protection, love and comfort in relationships with other females (Mathew, 2010). Participants revealed that women are also turning to same-sex relationships to safeguard themselves from unwanted pregnancies and single parenting. The number of absent fathers is a growing pandemic in South Africa (Freeks, 2019). South Africa is one of the countries with the highest number of absent fathers. According to Freeks (2019), an estimated 2.13 million South African children are fatherless (father is deceased) and a further 9 million are growing up without the presence of a father (fathers choose to be absent).

### **6.3.7 Subordination versus non-normative femininity and gangsterism**

Participants spoke about women wanting to become gangsters in their communities. They revealed that women no longer ascribed to the traditional ideology of being homebound. Women are confident about their capabilities and strive to move away from subordination. These women desire a position of power and want recognition in their communities. Gangs provide a sense of power and status. Shaw and Skywalker (2017) have addressed these issues in their study, where they found that gangs provide a sense of security and a superior position within communities that are especially desirable to women who have been victims of violence and abuse.

### **6.3.8 Physical appearance and aesthetics**

The physical appearance and associated behaviour of transgender identities was another factor that influenced participants' understanding of the term transgender. Participants revealed that fashion sense, make up and accessories are a huge factor. I found that many participants viewed transgender identities very admirably. They admired their fun-loving character, fashion sense and ability to deal with criticism.

### **6.3.9 Factors that influence how learners make meaning of the term transgender**

#### *6.3.9.1 Media, modern technology, and social media and the way in which learners make meaning of the term transgender*

Television, the internet, YouTube and other social media platforms were found to be a huge factor that influenced learners' understanding of transgender. I found that the use of photo elicitation during the process of data collection was highly effective. When pictures of the many non-conforming characters were revealed e.g. Somizi, Wandile and Schumacher, the participants become excited and more confident to participate in the discussion. The pictures aided in effectively contextualising the discussion. It was evident from this that television, cellphones and social media platforms including WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, played a paramount role in the awareness and acceptance of transgender and non-conforming identities (Jones et al., 2018). Television viewing cultivated favourable perceptions of non-conforming identities. I found that during the discussion relating to non-conforming identities who occupied iconic positions in society, participants spoke with acceptance and revealed that these individuals were gracefully accepted into society. It was clear that the status of the individual contributed to the level of their acceptance by society. The non-conforming identities such as Somizi and Thulasizwe “Lasizwe” Dambuza were more readily accepted into society compared to the person on the street.

#### *6.3.9.2 Relationships and physical appearance*

Participants who knew individuals who identified as non-conforming identities revealed that they liked them. This indicated that participants who had direct contact with non-conforming identities were more accepting of them. The participants admired the bravery and confidence that transgender and other non-conforming identities displayed.

#### *6.3.9.3 The impact that religion and culture have on the way in which learners understand sexuality and transgender*

The findings revealed that culture and religion were influential factors that created barriers to the inclusion of transgender identities in families and communities (Neary, McEvoy & Irwin-Gowran, 2016). Participants shared very interesting perceptions on why transgender identities were on the increase. Some of their reasons were that old boundaries were slowly falling away. People were bound by their religious and cultural convictions that inhibited them from embracing and respecting all individuals who identified as transgender. Idang (2015) emphasises in his study that one's culture shapes one's beliefs and perceptions of scenarios. Some participants viewed transgender identities as being mentally unstable since nobody would voluntarily sin and ensure their admission into hell. Participants revealed that transgender identities were continually exposed to harsh condemnation and exclusion. Some cultural beliefs affirm that transgender gender identities are a result of the presence of their ancestor who may be of the opposite sex. Their behaviour is then attributed to the presence of the ancestor (Mkasi, 2016). I found that a society where culture and religion are ingrained is prone to ostracise any individual who fails to stick by rules and expectations of the beliefs within the culture (Masuku, 2015). According to Hadebe's (2010) and Msibi's (2012) studies, being transgender was considered sinful and unacceptable.

#### **6.3.10 Sexuality and sex education: Understanding the term transgender**

### *6.3.10.1 The need for topics on sexual diversity in the school curriculum as a move towards creating awareness and acceptance*

Participants revealed that they had noticed a transformation in societies. People were no longer identifying as only straight males and females. They added that the variety of sexual identities was complex and confusing. The school's curriculum should include information that will create awareness, understanding and positive attitudes towards non-conforming identities.

### *6.3.10.2 How do children make sense of the Constitution and Bill of Rights?*

Including policy alone is not a solution, adequate prevention or education in practice is paramount. The inclusion of sensitive gender issues remains a controversial topic in schools (Goodhand & Brown, 2016). Schools continue to emphasise a heteronormative culture. Inadequate attention is given to transgender and non-conforming identities. Despite legislation and policy that have sanctioned topics related to sexually diverse identities and sexuality, such topics are often ignored and avoided (Goodman and Brown, 2016; Neary et al., 2016). Participants revealed that teachers shy away from teaching topics related to sexuality and non-conforming identities due to stigmas and old ideologies that discourage non binaries. They are reluctant to introduce these topics in lessons as they lack the skills to transmit knowledge related to sexuality and non-conforming identities, they are bound by their personal conflicting ideologies and there is a sense of loyalty to their communities to uphold heteronormativity.

## **6.4 Recommendations**

The availability of information on non-conforming gender identities in South Africa is limited (Bhana, 2012). Due to this lack of information and knowledge about transgender identities, heteronormative communities fail to accept and show compassion (Dierckx et al., 2016). There is a dire need to address the complexities of human sexuality and non-binary constructs associated with non-conforming identities (Kroeger & Regula, 2017).

Awareness can begin in schools, hospitals and the waiting areas in clinics (McCann & Sharek, 2013). All schools should utilise the Life Orientation period to introduce sexually diverse identities (Potgieter & Reygan, 2012). Additionally, Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) should be included in the curriculum with specifically trained teachers to deliver the message that sexual diversity is a reality. Bhana, (2012) states that schools and teachers are key players on the road to transformation. She further states that it is imperative that schools, learners and teachers take on the responsibility of promoting the development of democracy in South Africa.

Teachers should be encouraged to take such topics more seriously in schools and content should focus on addressing anti-bias education practices. The recognition of the knowledge associated with trans health and the needs of transgender identities is important since this knowledge will create more awareness. Consequently, these topics will benefit both non-conforming learners as well as heterosexual identities that may have family and friends who identify as sexually diverse (Gowen & Yanez, 2014). Bhana (2014) argues that the problem is perpetuated when teachers are inadequately equipped to teach about sexuality. According to Meyer and Leonardi (2018), when teachers in class display an acceptance of trans learners, then learners too show acceptance of their peers. I believe that sexuality must be approached respectfully and positively. This means that every individual's sexual feelings should be respected and accepted as something positive for being human (Sandfort et al., 2015).

Learners have requested exposure to more information and facts related to non-conforming gender identities (Miller, Mayo & Lugg, 2018). If learners are given information and taught about topics related to sexuality, then there will be an improvement in terms of understanding and alleviating transphobia and homophobia. Malo-Juvera (2016) argues that LGBTQI textbooks should be compulsory. This will curb the transphobic and homophobic harassment, discrimination and violence that persist at schools. It will in turn create a more comfortable environment for learners who either openly or secretly identify as transgender or non-conforming (Martino & Cumming-Polvin, 2018). The primary goal is to develop learners holistically - academically,

emotionally and as humanitarians (Potgieter & Reygan, 2012). The teacher can now become instrumental in the facilitation of an egalitarian space. It is at this point that teachers may introduce sensitive topics in an unbiased manner so as not to influence the learners' perceptions and decisions, instead to support their opinions and advise accordingly.

Research has identified that there is a need for specialist training of all teachers, nurses and other health practitioners to effectively address the specific needs of trans youth (Bhana, 2012; Kroeger & Regula, 2017; Meyer & Leonardi, 2018). While there is increasing scholarship on transgender lives, there remains much scope to explore the health and emotional well-being of trans youth. Particular attention should be paid to the needs of minority groups, such as transgender youth, in order to promote social inclusion. Informed and active collaboration involving teachers, parents, young people and health professionals is required to provide development of school-based youth services and clinics (Zeeman et al., 2017).

Additionally teachers can ensure that all children are appreciated, included and recognised. Early childhood development teachers have an important role to play in stressing, from the early years of development, that there is no right way to being a boy or a girl. The culture of an inclusive learning environment is essential. Developing policies, procedures and curriculum should not perpetuate the traditional gender binary system, but rather essentialise inclusivity. Kothlow and Chamberlain (2012) confirmed that it is the responsibility of every teacher to create an environment where learners can thrive academically, emotionally and socially. Mangin (2018) asserts that teachers should be directly involved in discouraging unjust situations in their classrooms and schools. She added that education leaders should devise strategies to overcome the hostility to differences. It is the teacher's responsibility to displace negative attitudes by forming close meaningful relationships with all their learners. Kroeger and Regula (2017) say that a school community that provides an environment where professional staff and learners feel supported and safe, creates a generation of individuals who are open to new worldviews. When teachers help learners learn about the diversity of perspectives,

learners internalise the acceptance of all identities irrespective of the dominant culture (Goodman & Brown, 2016).

## **6.5 Conclusion**

This study has contributed to the move towards a school-based curriculum that ensures inclusivity and the recognition of transgender identities. This inclusion will create an environment that fosters equality and respect for all (Wilmot & Naidoo, 2014; Neary et al., 2016; Tucker et al., 2016). There is a dire need to understand, integrate and include transgender identities (Bockting et al., 2016; Miller et al., 2018). School homophobic violence and discrimination create critical barriers to learning and in the development of ‘self’ (Formby, 2015; Bachanan & McDougall, 2016; Zeeman et al., 2017). Non-conforming identities will experience fruitful learning in an environment that recognises and respects their presence. This inclusion will also create informed adults who will contribute to the democratic and unbiased development of our societies and country as a whole. The school can be used as an effective instrument of transformation. By reinforcing knowledge and ideologies, teachers can create the change needed. Human rights are mandatory to all citizens of South Africa whether one identifies as a minority or majority (Ilyayambwa, 2012).

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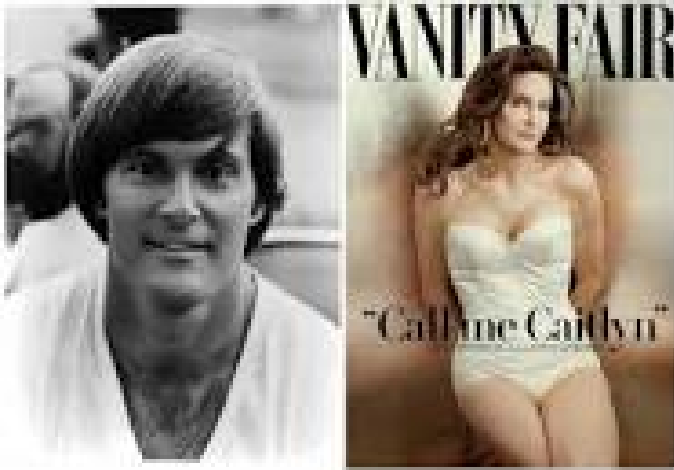
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# APPENDIX 1:

## Transgender: International Examples



Bruce Jenner's transition to Caitlyn Jenner (Showbiz411.com)

**San Juan, Puerto Rico:**  
**Kenya Olivera**  
(imdb.com)

**Australia:**  
**Bridget Clinch:** The first transgender soldier to transition while serving in the Australian army (msn.com)

**United States of America:**  
**Janet Mock:** A married writer and producer and writer. (newsharvard.edu)

**United Kingdom:**  
**Caroline Cossey:** A transgender British playboy model and actress. (whosdatedwho.com)



## South African transgender individuals

**Lesbian - Toya Delaize**, a South African singer/songwriter, now based in the United Kingdom, identifies as lesbian (zimbio.com).



**Gay - Somizi** is a public figure in the South African entertainment industry and the first gay SA make-up Brand ambassador – Black Opal (citybuzz.co.za).



**Bisexual: Vuyo Ngcukana** plays a bisexual character, Schumacher, on the DSTV channel called Mzansi. (Instagram/Vuyo Ngcukana)



**Transgender: Elle van der Burg** is a South African model and activist who has graced the cover of South African Cosmopolitan magazine (beautifulnews.co.za)





**Intersex: Caster Semenya**, Olympic Gold Medalist (wired.co.uk).



**Queer: Sibabalwe Gcilitshana**, the first openly queer woman to participate in the Miss South Africa contest (twitter.com).



# APPENDIX A



education

Department:  
Education  
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Phindile Duma

Tel: 033 392 1063

Ref.:2/4/8/1822

Mrs L Syed  
64 Jesmond Grove  
Musgrave  
4091

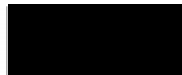
Dear Mrs Syed

## PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: “**PRIMARY SCHOOL AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF TRANSGENDER IDENTITIES: VIEWS FROM LEARNERS**”, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 03 June 2019 to 04 January 2022.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Phindile Duma at the contact numbers below.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

UMlazi District



**Dr. EV Nzama**  
Head of Department: Education  
Date: 06 June 2019

KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Postal Address: Private Bag X9137 • Pietermaritzburg • 3200 • Republic of South Africa

Physical Address: 247 Burger Street • Anton Lembede Building • Pietermaritzburg • 3201

Tel.: +27 33 392 1063 • Fax.: +27 033 392 1203 • Email: [Phindile.Duma@kzndoe.gov.za](mailto:Phindile.Duma@kzndoe.gov.za) • Web: [www.kzneducation.gov.za](http://www.kzneducation.gov.za)

Facebook: KZNDOE... Twitter: @DBE\_KZN... Instagram: kzn\_education... Youtube: kzndoe

...Championing Quality Education - Creating and Securing a Brighter Future



26 July 2019

Mrs Laaiqah Syed (9405785)  
School of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Dear Mrs Syed,

Protocol reference number: HSS/0329/019M

Project title: Primary school and the construction of transgender identities : Views from learners

**Approval Notification – Full Committee Reviewed Protocol**

With regards to your response received on 11 June 2019 to our letter of 03 June 2019, 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 1 year 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 Rosemary Sibanda (Chair)

/ms

cc Supervisor: Professor Deevia Bhana  
cc Academic Leader Research: Dr Ansurie Pillay  
cc Administrators: Ms S Jeenaarain, Ms M Ngcobo, Ms N Dlamini and Mr SN Mthembu

---

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Dr Rosemary Sibanda (Chair)

Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000

Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3587/8350/4567 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)



Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

## APPENDIX B

**LETTER TO THE PRINCIPAL: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY IN YOUR SCHOOL.**

The Principal  
Charles Hugo Primary School  
125 Waterfall Road  
Sydenham  
Berea  
4091



Dear Mr Y. Harms

13 March 2019

**Permission to conduct a research study in the school.**

I Laaiqah Syed (Student number 9405785) am a Master's (Gender Education) student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study at your school. The aim of this study is to examine how teachers and learners construct meaning to gender identities, in particular transgender at a primary school as bullying, discrimination and violence stem from these notions.

My supervisor, Professor Deevia Bhana is the principal investigator in this study which is part of a larger research project titled, **learning from the learners**, which seeks to explore how boys and girls in schools in Kwa-Zulu-Natal and Western Cape learn about and "perform" gender and sexuality. My research project forms part of this project.

This study is expected to enrol 35 participants in total, comprising of teachers and learners. I will utilize interviews as a method to collect data. I intend to conduct this research from April-May 2019. I will ensure that teaching and learning time is not disrupted when conducting this research study.

The school along with the participants will be anonymous and all data collected confidential. For this reason the real names of participants will not be used. Participants will also be allowed to withdraw from the study at any time if they feel uncomfortable, without any penalty. However there will be limits of confidentiality in cases where the well-being of learners is affected. This will be disclosed in the consent forms handed out to participants.

Thank you for your cooperation.  
Sincerely,



Laaiqah Syed  
Cell: 0836101246  
Email: laaiqahsyed@gmail.com



Project Leader: Prof. Deevia Bhana  
Tel: (031) 260 2603  
Email: bhanad1@ukzn.ac.za

## APPENDIX C

### Parents/Guardians Informed Consent Letter



Dear Parent/Guardian

Date: 30/07/ 2019

### **REQUEST FOR PERMISSION FOR YOUR CHILD/WARD TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY**

Thank you for your co-operation I, Laaiqah Syed (student number: 9405785), am a Masters (Gender Education) student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I will be conducting research at your child's school. This letter invites your child to participate in a broader research project entitled: "Learning from the learners" and seeks your permission to allow your child's participation. Professor Deevia Bhana is the principal advisor and my supervisor on this project.

The title of my study is: "Primary School and the construction of Transgender identities: views from learners." This study aims to examine how learners construct meaning to Gender Identities. This study also aims to analyze how learners feel about children who may be transgender, how learners interact with and accommodate learners who may be transgender.

I intend on engaging 30 participants made up of learners. I will include interviews as well as focus group discussions to gather my data. The focus group discussions and interviews will be audio-recorded and video-recorded. The data collected will then be transcribed and made available to your child/ward to ensure that information was captured correctly. Please rest assured that teaching and learning time will not be compromised during my process of data collection.

All recordings and data captured will be secured ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. Participation is voluntary. Your child/ward is free to withdraw should he/she decide to. Should you require any further verification or validity pertaining to my study, you are welcome to contact Chief advisor on this project i.e. Professor Deevia Bhana on bhana1@ukzn.ac.za or telephonically on 031 260 2603.

Yours sincerely

Laiqah Syed

Cell: 083 610 1246

Email: laaiqahsyed@gmail.com

**PARENTS INFORMED CONSENT REPLY SLIP**

I, ....., the parent/guardian of ..... hereby grant permission to my child/ward to voluntarily participate in the above – mentioned study.

.....

SIGNATURE OF PARENT/GUARDIAN

.....

DATE

Additional consent, where applicable

I hereby grant permission to:	Please tick to grant permission.
Audio-record and video-record my child's/wards interview.	

## APPENDIX D

### Participants Assent Letter



Dear Participant

Date: 30/07/2019

#### **Request for permission to participate in a research study**

I, Laaiqah Syed (student number: 9405785), am a Masters (Gender Education) student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I will be conducting research at your school. This letter invite you and requests your permission to participate in a broader research project entitled: “Learning from the learners.” Professor Deevia Bhana is the principal advisor and my supervisor on this project.

The title of my study is: “Primary School and the construction of Transgender identities: views learners.” This study aims to examine how learners and teachers construct meaning to Gender Identities. This study also aims to analyze how learners’ feel about children who may be transgender, how learners interact with and accommodate learners who may be transgender.

I intend on engaging 30 participants made up of learners. I will include interviews as well as focus group discussions to gather my data. The focus group discussions and interviews will be audio-recorded and video-recorded. The data collected will then be transcribed and made available to you to ensure that information was captured correctly. Please rest assured that teaching and learning time will not be compromised during my process of data collection.

All recordings and data captured will be secured ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. Participation is voluntary. Note that you are free to withdraw at any point in time, from this study, should you decide to. If you require any further verification or validity

pertaining to my study, you are welcome to contact Chief advisor on this project i.e. Professor Deevia Bhana on bhana1@ukzn.ac.za or telephonically on 031 260 2603.

Thank you for your co-operation.

Yours sincerely

Laaiah Syed

Cell: 083 610 1246

Email: laaiqahsyed@gmail.com

**PARTICIPANT’S ASSENT REPLY SLIP**

I, ..... (Full name and surname of participant) hereby confirm that that I fully understand all terms and content within this document and the nature of the research to be conducted. I assent to voluntarily participate in the above – mentioned study. I am also aware that I may withdraw at any point from the above study.

.....

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

Additional consent, where applicable:

I hereby grant permission to:	Please tick to grant permission.
Audio-record and video-record my child/wards interview.	



## APPENDIX E

### FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

**PHOTO ELICITATION:** A picture to be used as part of my instrument (FGD).



*A picture of Somizi a very public figure who is part of the LGBTQ community and now named first SA make-up Brand ambassador - Black Opal.*



Picture of Wandile a transgender character in a popular South African soapie called Generations on SABC 1.

## APPENDIX F

### A VIGNETTE: I am only just being ME!

#### **I am only just being ME!**

Stabile was an innocent 12 year old girl from Umlazi. She was always punctual and diligently travelled every-day to her primary school in the city of Durban via taxi. Stabile loved soccer. She breathed it, like we breathe in a breath of fresh air. Stabile was already no less than 1.65m tall. She was lean and had the physique of a tall, dark and handsome lad. She'd often say out quite proudly, "I'm just like Casta..."

Stabile walked with a very profound bounce in her step and this aggravated her class teacher who would often exclaim, "Stabile, get yourself out that door and let's try walking in again, this time lose the damn bounce!" The one thing Stabile hated most was, conforming to the school rule of wearing a blue pinafore and black daisy shoes. She would persistently wear the school tracksuit, with her male brooks sticking out at the back. Stabile never ever carried a lunchbox with neat sandwiches, yoghurt and a fruit. She would however have at least 6 amagwenyas with polony, a plastic packet with crushed off-cut biscuits and not forgetting a hearty 2l bottle of Stoney Ginger-beer. This would be very quickly devoured by Stabile within seconds. The Stoney Ginger -beer was grasped in one hand and gulped down, straight out the bottle.

Oh how this frustrated her teacher Mrs. Syed. Her ultimate goal each year was to produce little ladies in GR 7, who stood upright, walking one foot in front of the other and sitting with crossed legs. What was ever going to become of her Stabile? Mrs. Syed, in her frustration, would issue disciplinary notes, one after the other or in most instances blurt out a very harsh and sometimes embarrassing comment. Stabile was never once rude or impudent in response to her insensitive teacher. This was just the way SHE was.

*True story ... names have been changed.*

**QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED:**

1. Have you ever experienced or noticed learners like Stabile in your school?
2. What do you think of children who are this way?
3. Would you be friends with a child who is like Stabile? Why?
4. Will you invite this child to your birthday party? Why?
5. What do your parents, neighbors and church say about people who are like Stabile

## **APPENDIX G**

### **Focus group schedule: Questions to be asked:**

1. Who is the person featured in this picture?
2. Who can tell me more about him?
3. Do your families know about him?
4. What are some of the things they say about him?
5. What do you think he is?
6. Do your friends know about him?
7. What are some of things they say about him?
8. How do you feel about him wearing this make up?
9. What do you think about how he dresses and the things he does?
10. Do you know anybody who is like Somizi?

## APPENDIX H

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: Learner questions



*Transgender Poppy Tine age 12 began her transition from male to female at 9 years old*

**“Born as a boy, poppy tine, 12 from Worcestershire started living as a girl from the age of 9. “Her story inspired the makers of drama Butterfly, a series on ITV**

1. Who would like to tell us something about the picture?
2. What names are given to people like Poppy?
3. What do you feel when you see or hear about people like Poppy?
4. What does your church say about people like Poppy?
5. Do you know of anybody in your neighborhood or family who is also this way?

**Additional questions:**

1. What is your understanding of the word transgender?
2. What are your thoughts on transgender identities?
3. Do you know of someone who may be transgender?
4. Why do you believe that is transgender?
5. How would you feel if you found out that you had a transgender child in your class?
6. Have you ever had a transgender child in your school?
7. Tell me a little a bit about this child?
8. What would you do within your class/school to accommodate children who may be transgender?
9. What are the reactions of other children towards transgender children?
10. What would you do to befriend a transgender person?
11. Would you invite a transgender person to your home?
12. Will you invite a transgender person to your birthday party?

## APPENDIX I: EDITING CERTIFICATE

### **NERESHNEE GOVENDER COMMUNICATIONS (PTY) LTD**

REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2016/369223/07

DR NERESHNEE GOVENDER (PhD)

WRITING PRACTITIONER • EDITOR • COPYWRITER • TRAINER

PhD-Management Sciences - Marketing (Media, gender and identity)

M-Tech Public Relations

B-Tech Public Relations (*Cum laude*)

B-Tech Journalism (*Cum laude*)

e-mail: neresh@ngcommunications.co.za

32 Kharwa Road

Kharwastan

Durban

4092

Cell: 084 702 25 53

14/03/2020

**Attention: Laaiqah Syed**  
**Student number: 9405785**

### **RE: EDITING CERTIFICATE**

**FOCUS AREA: Primary school and the construction of transgender identities: views from learners**

A research study submitted as the full dissertation component in fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Education Degree in the School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

**This serves to confirm that this thesis has been edited for clarity, language and layout.**

Kind regards,



\_\_\_\_\_  
Nereshnee Govender (PhD)



**Certification from Editor**

505 The Oaks

1a Oak St

Wynberg

Cape Town

7800

084 6764670

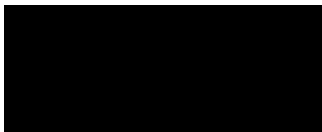
[Catherineharrison1@gmail.com](mailto:Catherineharrison1@gmail.com)

5 December 2019

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to certify that I, Catherine Jourdan, proof-read, copy-edited and formatted Laaiqah Syed's dissertation "Primary school and the construction of transgender identities: views from learners".

Yours faithfully

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Catherine Jourdan.

Catherine Jourdan

## APPENDIX J: TURN-IT-IN ORIGINALITY REPORT

### Turn-It-In Originality Report

**Submission Author:** Laaiqah Syed  
**Submission date:** 07-Dec-2019 07:39 PM (UTC + 0200)  
**Submission ID:** 1229321765  
**Word Count:** 37 560

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