

**The Attitude and Experiences of High School Learners on the Teaching of LGBT  
Content in a South African Co-Ed School**

**A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Education at the**

**University of the Free State**

**Bloemfontein**

**in Fulfilment of the**

**Requirements for the Degree**

**Master of Education**

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**January 2016**

## Declaration

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## **Acknowledgements and Dedication**

First, I would like to thank God, for giving me the opportunity and the strength to undertake this degree and for helping me overcome all the obstacles I faced along this journey.

I would like to thank my advisor and mentor, Prof. Dennis Francis, who was instrumental in getting me to this point. His belief in my abilities and his support of my study were, without a doubt, crucial for this challenging journey. His words of encouragement were endless and always so timely. Without his participation in this endeavour, I would not have been able to accomplish this personal and professional goal.

To my parents, Annette and Henry Snr., and two sisters, Maryke and Amelia, who, with patience and words of reassurance, have supported me every step of the way through this challenging process. Their loving support and unending dedication made my day-to-day life more manageable and helped me remain sane.

To Dr. M. Mentz, Ms. A. Welman, Ms. E. Visagie and Ms. R. Johnson, my deepest appreciation for your continuous support and words of encouragement.

To all my friends and colleagues, my deepest gratitude for encouraging me when I felt that I could not complete this study.

To my learners, whom I have taught for the past three years, thank you for inspiring me each and every day and for growing with me to become agents for change, equality and social justice.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my nieces and nephews, Lohan, Dewald, Mikayla, Amèlie and Simonè. It is my hope and dream that they may also advocate change and become critically conscious in respect of issues of social justice and equality.

Finally, the financial assistance of the National Research Foundation (NRF) towards this research is acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not necessarily to the attribute to the NRF.

## **Abstract**

Upon the ratification of the *Constitution*, the South African Schools Act of 1996 inaugurated a new education system that confronts all forms of unfair discrimination and intolerance. South African schools, however, remain heteronormative and heterosexist, where many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) learners or those who are perceived to conform to non-normative gender and sexual identities, experience heteronormativity and heterosexism daily. Schools and classrooms are spaces where compulsory heteronormative and gender-normative behaviour are tolerated and even promoted. It is in these ‘safe’ and ‘inclusive’ spaces that the LGBT youth encounters physical and emotional harassment.

This research study explores high school learners’ attitudes towards, and experiences of the teaching and learning of LGBT issues, and argues that these attitudes and experiences yield rich insights into the possibility to work towards a school climate free of heteronormativity and heterosexism and to create a true ‘safe’ schooling space.

Using a case study methodology, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eleven high school learners studying at a co-ed high school in the Gauteng province of South Africa. Findings reveal that high school learners have heteronormative and heterosexist attitudes towards sexual and gender diversity; that sexual and gender diversity is not taught in schools; due to a lack of knowledge, ignorance and stereotyping of gender and sexuality, and that exposure to sexual and gender diversity influences the attitudes of the youth.

While the data demonstrates clear evidence of a culture of heteronormativity and heterosexism in high school spaces, it also shows that the youth realises the importance of the teaching and learning of sexuality and gender diversity and want to learn about it.

I conclude by calling on schools to invest time in creating policies for safe classrooms and promote critical discussions regarding sexual and gender diversity issues. I also call on teachers to create learning environments where stereotypes and stigmatisations are challenged. Lastly, I acknowledge the limitations of the study.

## Opsomming

Met die bekragtiging van die Grondwet, het die Suid-Afrikaanse Skolewet van 1996 'n nuwe onderrigstelsel in werking gestel wat alle vorme van onregverdigte diskriminasie en onverdraagsaamheid konfronteer. Suid-Afrikaanse skole bly egter heteronormatief en heteroseksisties en baie lesbiese, gay, biseksuele en transgender (LGBT) leerders – of diesulkes wat waargeneem word as nie-normatiewe gender – en seksuele identiteit, ervaar heteronormatiewe en heteroseksisme op 'n daaglikse basis. Skole en klaskamers is ruimtes waar verpligte heteronormatiewe en gendernormatiewe verdra en selfs bevorder word. Dit is in hierdie “veilige” en “inklusiewe” ruimtes waar die LGBT-jeug fisiese en emosionele teistering ervaar.

Hierdie navorsingstudie verken die houding van hoërskoolleerders teenoor, en die ervaring van die onderrig en leer van LGBT kwessies en argumenteer dat hierdie houdings en ervarings 'n ryke insig bied in die moontlikheid om 'n skoolklimaat vry van heteronormatiewe en heteroseksisme te skep en dat 'n werklik “veilige” skoolruimte geskep kan word.

Met die gebruik van 'n gevallestudie metodologie, is semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude met elf hoërskoolleerders in dubbelgeslag skole gevoer in die Gauteng Provinsie van Suid-Afrika. Die bevindings het bewys dat hoërskoolleerders wel heteronormatiewe en heteroseksistiese houdings oor seksuele – en genderdiversiteit het en dat seksuele en genderdiversiteit nie in skole onderrig word nie. As gevolg van 'n gebrek aan kennis, is onkunde en stereotipering van gender en seksualiteit aanwesig en daardie blootstelling aan seksuele – en genderdiversiteit beïnvloed die houdings van die jeug.

Alhoewel die data duidelike bewyse toon van 'n kultuur van heteronormatiewe en heteroseksisme in hoërskoolruimtes, wys dit ook dat die jeug die belangrikheid van onderrig en leer van seksualiteit en genderdiversiteit besef en meer daarvoor wil leer.

Ek sluit af deur 'n beroep op skole te doen om tyd te bele in die ontwikkeling van beleide vir veilige klaskamers en om kritiese besprekings aangaande seksuele – en genderdiversiteitskwessies aan te moedig. Ek doen ook 'n beroep op opvoeders om leeromgewings te skep waar stereotipes en stigmas uitgedaag word. Laastens erken ek die beperkings van die studie

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

Many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals or those who are perceived to conform to non-normative gender and sexual identities experience heteronormativity and heterosexism daily. LGBT learners face several challenges in South African schools. Heteronormative and heterosexist discrimination not only takes place, but is also supported and even actively encouraged in schools. In their study conducted in the Gauteng province of South Africa, Wells and Polders (2006) investigated anti-gay hate crimes. They found that 19 per cent of lesbian and bisexual women and 20 per cent of gay and bisexual men reported being raped or sexually coerced while at school. Research findings from existing studies suggest that, while the South African Constitution endeavours to protect the rights of every individual, regardless of sexual orientation, such protections have not been extended to schools (Butler, Alpaslan, Astbury, & Kingdom, 2003). According to Msibi (2012), the LGBT youth have negative experiences of schooling, which range from punitive actions expressed in derogatory language to vicious hate, expressed by means of violence. In South Africa, gendered violence, experienced through homophobia, has become common, with ‘curative rape’ for lesbian women on the increase and gay men being beaten up and verbally harassed (Msibi, 2011). The strict policing of gender and sexuality extends beyond those who identify themselves as LGBT, with boys considered effeminate, or girls considered butch. The South African LGBT youth experience much higher rates of victimisation than their non-LGBT peers. This emphasises the importance of developing an understanding of what contributes towards a hostile school environment, heterosexism, heteronormativity and their negative effects on both the psychological and educational well-being of the learner. Crimes motivated by prejudice, or ‘hate crimes’ against the LGBT youth provide both teachers and schools with a crucial opportunity to create a platform for open dialogue and critique about the meaning of sexuality and gender equality, the ways in which violence is engendered, and the connection between schooling and the responsibilities of learners to the development of South Africa’s democracy (Bhana, 2012). In the past decade, the experiences of the LGBT youth have received increased attention in global empirical literature, most of which has focused on the experiences of anti-LGBT victimization and its consequences, such as higher rates of suicidal thoughts and attempts, substance use, and sexual risk behaviours (Bontempo & D’Augelli, 2002).



Schools do not function independently and are part of society. Understanding oppression in schools requires examining the relationship between schools and other social institutions and cultural ideas (Stambach, 1999). Much attention to, and focus on sexual minorities has stressed that same-sex attraction and sexual behaviour are deviant and harmful to both the individual and society. ‘Discrimination’ and ‘oppression’ are some of the terms used to describe South Africa’s apartheid regime from 1984 to 1994. Apartheid affected millions of people, but one group that was seemingly forgotten during this era was the LGBT community who were and still are in the minority. Despite all the attempted interventions and legislature, discrimination and prejudice continue to cause distress to LGBT individuals everywhere. Schools play an important role in education, enabling these institutions to correct any type of social inequality as far as gender and sexuality are concerned. With the release of Nelson Mandela on 2 February 1990, LGBT movements were able to engage in political discussions, which included sexual freedom as a fundamental human right in the new Constitution. In 1996, South Africa’s new Constitution made discrimination based on sexuality illegal, making South Africa’s Constitution one of the most progressive in the world in terms of personal freedoms. Mistreatments of gay and lesbian individuals are a threat to South Africa’s fledgling democracy (Nel & Judge, 2008).

### *1.1.1 Background*

In the context of increased attention to safer school environments, studies have demonstrated the rising rates of victimization and bullying experienced by LGBT youths at school, and have more recently focused on the contexts and characteristics of schools that support negative attitudes and behaviours toward LGBT youths (Kosciw, Greytak & Diaz, 2009). Schools, in which community-based opposition to LGBT youth exists, can provide valuable insights into the identification of likely common ground among the different competing perspectives of LGBT issues in schools (Msibi, 2012; Quellett & Griffin, 2010; Richardson, 2006; Van Vollenhoven & Els, 2003). Schools and classrooms are spaces where compulsory heteronormative and gender-normative behaviour are tolerated and even promoted. This creates and maintains a school culture of silence where what is and what is not an appropriate sexual and gender behaviour is a norm. It is in these ‘safe’ and ‘inclusive’ school spaces that the LGBT minority encounters physical and emotional harassment on a daily basis, with over 10 per cent of both Black and White South African young people experiencing same-sex attraction (Francis, 2012). Victimization and harassment often target students whose perceived sexual orientation is often based on their non-conformity to gender norms (Msibi,

2012). LGBT sexualities have been associated with negative contexts (Simoni, 1996; Temple, 2005) and are labelled as deviant and immoral and thus separated from their heterosexual counterparts (Francis, 2012). Non-heterosexuality and atypical gender behaviour carry a stigma. For many LGBT school learners, intolerance and prejudice make school a hostile and dangerous place where harassment and victimisation are daily occurrences. In order to reduce the sources of risk for LGBT learners, the youth needs to be given the opportunity to critically discuss and be provided with the necessary knowledge and platform by means of both the formal and the hidden curriculum and textbooks. These will better equip them in promoting tolerance of all sexualities to the ideal of creating a school climate free of heterosexism and heteronormativity ( Horn, Szalacha, & Drill, 2008; Kosciw, Palmer, Kull, & Greytak, 2013). As highlighted by Quinlivan & Town (1999), a school environment can be created where sexuality is openly discussed, by means of dialogue, and explored rather than simply presumed. A space for critical discourse is only possible if LGBT and sexuality, in general, are fully and accurately addressed by the teacher and included in the curriculum (Potgieter & Reygan, 2012; Wilmot & Naidoo, 2014) . Schools are places where learners and teachers can both engage in dialogue about critical social issues and challenge heteronormative and heterosexist prejudice (Department of Education, 2002). This is, however, not the case, as South African teachers are reluctant to teach about sexuality and gender for a number of reasons (Francis & Msibi, 2011).

While there has certainly been an increase in the work focussing on LGBT learners and schooling, there exists a limited amount of work exploring the schooling space of heteronormativity and heterosexism. I have taught learners of different races, gender, cultures and religions in schools, and I have noticed the various forms of exclusion and daily experiences of heteronormativity and heterosexism by LGBT minority learners. None of the schools at which I taught had policies protecting the LGBT minority, or made any effort to raise awareness of sexual and gender diversity, even though these schools perceived themselves as ‘safe spaces’. At school, learners who flee from the heteronormative culture and do not ‘succeed’ in hiding it are at risk of being ignored in a ‘supposedly’ all-inclusive education system for all. This marginalisation helps confine the dominion of the ‘normal’ individual. How many times have we witnessed situations at school where ‘feminine boys’, who seemed to prefer to play with girls and did not play rugby, became targets of jokes and name-calling? How many uncountable situations happened where boys refused to join games considered girlish, or prevented girls and boys considered to be gay from joining recreational

‘masculine’ activities? Does one need to be aggressive, know how to control pain, hide emotions, not play with girls, and hate reading books in order to be merely a ‘man’? These are some of the challenges that confront the LGBT youth.

This dissertation is more than simply a research study. It is self-reflecting and personal. Teaching learners respect for diversity and difference (*inter alia*, sexuality, gender, race, and religion) is the teachers’ inescapable responsibility. It is not an option they can choose. Indeed, there are times when I do not agree with some values and morals whereby learners live and strive for, but then I need to dig deeper into my consciousness and realise that it is not my duty to teach them ‘my’ views, values and opinions, but rather those of South Africa as a country where inclusivity and anti-discrimination are the order of the day. Respect is a virtue that needs to be mutually developed. It is not simply present; it needs to be ‘activated’. Schools and educators are in the fortunate position to make and facilitate this change. This is not possible if there are still educators who are heteronormative and heterosexist and make use of ‘labelling’ when a learner identifies or is perceived as LGBT. I am intrigued by the dialogue taking place in the staffroom. At one table, some teachers are talking about their gay or lesbian friend who has a new partner about whom they are so happy. At another table, teachers are talking about gay learners as being ‘abnormal’, due to their sexuality and opposing religious views. My main issue is the following: If these are the attitudes of teachers, how are these reflected in their classrooms? How can they inspire and create positive attitudes and safe spaces among their learners if they are so ‘repelled’?

I am fascinated by the learners’ opinions, perceptions and attitudes on the subject of sexuality education and sexual orientation. After having facilitated a class discussion, I was encouraged by so many different opinions to set the platform for a space of critical engagement questioning. I was elated to observe the learners’ opinions and how they addressed these. This might seem strange to some people, but I was pleased by their differences and perceptions on sexuality and what diversity means. I was thrilled by the fact that they were able to utter their opinions in a safe space. This does not merely happen naturally, but it needs to be created. This made me realise again that the answer to mutual respect and diversity is most certainly possible through discourse created in the safe space of the classroom, with the teacher being able to facilitate by means of the didactical skill of open dialogue. Unfortunately, the majority of these learners’ perceptions are based on a lack of knowledge and prejudice created by social factors. Who will correct them and give them the knowledge and accurate information? Is it the duty, as sworn in the ethical code of conduct that teachers

sign with the South African Council for Educators? I would like to address many aspects, one of which is the fact that it is still ‘allowed’ to call a child or young adolescent a *faggot* or a *moffie*. We, as South Africans, all strive, or are supposed to strive for social justice. The question is whether similar attention and repercussions apply for hate crimes against the queer society as opposed to racism. What is the role of educators? Is it not to shape the lives of young people while helping them to become responsible citizens who uphold the values of the Constitution? If individuals are not educated and provided with the necessary knowledge about the crucial concepts concerning LGBT, is it not surprising that South African LGBT learners experience such high numbers of hate crimes? There are so many areas to be investigated in this field of knowledge. I did, however, choose to address the topic of my research study, as I believe that, through knowledge, power can be distributed to the equal rights of all sexualities of high school learners.

### *1.1.2 Rationale*

An increasing body of research has emerged on the LGBT youth’s experiences, demonstrating the hostile and generally unsupportive and unsafe climates in South African schools for many of these youths. In the past fifteen years, over 30 lesbian murders are known to have taken place (Bhana, 2014). In the South African curriculum, issues relating to sexuality fit into the broader outcomes of the Life Orientation (LO) learning area (Francis, 2012). LO, was introduced as a learning area in South African schools in the late 1990s, as a result of the post-1994 shift in education policy to Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) (Department of Education, 2002). The Revised National Curriculum Statements for LO (Department of Education, 2002) and the Department LO Teacher Guidelines (Department of Education, 2006) also remained silent on issues of sexual and gender diversity. Richardson (2006) confirms this, pointing out that there are no educational policies requiring schools to become safe places for the LGBT youth or where both teachers and the curriculum address homosexuality. When one examines education in the South African context, there are policies on basic rights. Despite these policies and protections, schools continue to be unsafe spaces for LGBT learners, who are victimised, harassed and bullied. This is evidence of a misalignment between policy and practice, and of the South African education system not being all-inclusive. According to Wilmot and Naidoo (2014), the school curriculum provides the most powerful instrument to establish the norm, police observance thereof, and coerce conformance thereto. In their content analysis of widely used Grade 10 LO textbooks, Wilmot and Naidoo (2014) found that the representation of sexuality in South African

textbooks indicates universal normalisation of heterosexuality and the widespread prevalence of heterosexism.

Research in the South African context has been done in the field of LGBT in schools; however, heterosexism and heteronormativity still reign (Butler *et al.*, 2003; DePalma & Francis, 2014; Thabo Msibi, 2012; E. M. Richardson, 2006). This is not only a South African phenomenon. In the Republic of Ireland, (Reygan, 2009) found that these learners experience a homophobic climate and are victims of verbal, physical and emotional abuse. There is a conspicuous dearth of literature and research on LGBT identity construction in LO textbooks. It was found that heteronormativity and heterosexism strongly underpin the representation of sexualities in the South African LO textbooks studied and that the positioning of heterosexuality as superior to LGBT sexuality, through devices such as normalising judgement and exclusion, perpetuates heterosexism (Wilmot & Naidoo, 2014). It is evident that more research should be done in finding alternative ways to address heteronormativity and heterosexism in schools. Investigations of critical pedagogy and curriculum content, challenging normative gender and sexuality in schools, can provide vital information in addressing heteronormativity in schools (Quellett & Griffin, 2010; Temple, 2005).

This proposed research argues that an examination of high school learners' attitudes towards and experiences of the teaching of LGBT yields rich insights into the possibility to work towards a school climate free of heteronormativity and heterosexist discrimination. It must be emphasised that learners play a resilient role in creating a school climate free of heteronormativity and heterosexism and that their voices need to be heard, irrespective of their sexuality. All heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender learners need to be critically engaged with the necessary knowledge, even if they feel uncomfortable to speak about it. Freire (1995) did extensive work on oppressive education and knowledge construction. He stated that knowledge production, construction and creation are a conscious process of practice, where knowers become curious, restless, investigative, probing, questioning, creative and learning subjects.

Illuminating the meaning of LGBT and the term 'queer' is also important in the South African schooling context. It is imperative to note that some LGBT individuals view the term 'queer' as judgemental and others view it as a statement of pride (Sigamoney & Epprecht, 2013). In the acronym LGBTQ, the Q stands for 'questioning' or 'queer'. In the 1990s, gay activists adopted the term 'queer', which is often used to reject traditional gender identities

and to allow for more ambiguous alternatives to LGBT. In this study, I shall refrain from using the term 'queer' prior to and during contact sessions, because it has a stereotypically negative connotation among high school learners and it may hinder participation and discussion. For this same reason, some people within the LGBT communities also choose not to use the term 'queer' as a self-identifier (Goldstein, Russell & Daley, 2007). The use of 'queer' in South African research is recent and not without any contestations (Msibi, 2012). Temple (2005) denotes sexuality as defying sex and gender norms, and the term 'queer theory' as referring to sexual categorisation processes and their deconstruction. Queer theorists have argued that the curriculum should promote a culture of human rights and challenge heteronormative thinking, not only by promoting social justice, but also by broadening possibilities for perceiving, interpreting and representing experience (Epstein, O'Flynn & Telford, 2001). Many people desire a repetition of the silence (school culture/culture) that is normally associated with the term 'queer', preferring instead the less confrontational terms 'gay' and 'lesbian' that do not contest the very meaning of 'normal' (Simoni, 1996).

While all the scholarly work has been commendable, there is, to my knowledge, no recent study that explores high school learners' (of all sexualities) attitudes towards, and experiences of the teaching of sexual and gender diversity, as well as research in the field of heteronormative and heterosexist school culture in high schools. Through the lens of the high school learners whom I interviewed and from whom I collected my data, I asked my three key questions. How do these young people feel about LGBT being taught? What are they taught? What are the effects of teaching LGBT or the lack thereof? Ultimately, the effects of the learners' attitudes and experiences are tested as to whether or not they have an impact on the school's culture of heteronormativity and heterosexism.

I have used the term 'heterosexism' instead of 'homophobia', because homophobia has typically been employed to describe individual anti-gay attitudes and behaviours, whereas heterosexism refers to the societal ideologies and patterns of institutionalized oppression of LGBT individuals. Heterosexism describes an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behaviour, identity, relationship, or community (Herek, 1990). The term 'heterosexism' highlights the parallels between anti-gay sentiment and other forms of prejudice such as racism, sexism and oppression, in general. People with LGBT orientations have long been stigmatized. According to Temple (2005), heterosexism refers to the assumption that heterosexuality is superior. This has implications for the

teaching of LGBT, in that the classifications and discussions in sex education (such as homosexuality, heterosexuality, bisexuality, and transgenderism) are used not only to make sense of sexuality, but also to structure them in ways that render them normal or abnormal, superior or inferior. Simoni (1996) defines heterosexism in the American context as the belief that heterosexuality is the only natural and acceptable sexual orientation and the irrational hatred and discrimination directed at those deemed non-heterosexual. I use and understand the term ‘heterosexism’ by referring to the oppression of LGBT people or those labelled as LGBT. Heterosexism may be defined as the belief and practice that heterosexuality is the only form of sexuality and is often perpetuated through the school’s provision of the hidden curriculum or the social norms that school learners learn without them being part of the formal curriculum.

“Heterosexism and heteronormativity are pervasive in the South African society” (Wilmot & Naidoo, 2014:323). The term ‘heteronormativity’ is the process whereby heterosexuals become constructed as the norm and everything against is constructed as deviant (Msibi, 2012; Simoni, 1996).

Warner (1993) describes heteronormativity as:

*“... the normalising processes which support heterosexuality as the elemental form of human association, as the very model of inter-gender relations, as the indivisible basis of all community, and as the means of reproduction without which society wouldn’t exist.”*

A culture of heteronormativity created by schools, teachers and the curriculum provides a space where power is placed into the hands of the heterosexual learners. This opens a space of marginalisation, thus enhancing oppression, ‘normalising’ power relations, and silencing dialogue. Heteronormativity and heterosexism affect everybody, not simply gay and lesbian people (Francis & Msibi, 2011). My clarifying the terms ‘heterosexism’ and ‘heteronormativity’ used in this study enable me to explain how I understand the attitudes and experiences of LGBT young people in and beyond the schooling space. Although past research provides a wealth of information that has advanced our understanding of the school experiences of the LGBT youth, there are nevertheless some limitations with this body of knowledge.

### *1.1.3 Critical questions*

Essentially, three critical questions will guide me in this study:

1. What are high school learners' attitudes towards, and experiences of the teaching and learning of sexual and gender diversity?
2. How do these attitudes and experiences manifest in, and beyond the school?
3. How do these experiences and attitudes contribute to a heteronormative and heterosexist school culture?

By engaging with my first question, I wish to explore the learners' understandings of homosexuality and their attitudes towards LGBT in school. I also wish to uncover and understand the reasons why these young people have their specific attitudes and experiences. This question is not restricted only to the school setting, as the learners' experiences are not only constructed in, but also beyond the school. In the second question, I aim to discover how these attitudes and experiences manifest in, and beyond the classroom. I was especially interested in how these young people, regardless of their sexuality, act on their feelings about, and towards sexual and gender diversity. In my final question, I wish to explore how/if these experiences and attitudes contribute to a school culture of heteronormativity and heterosexism. In this study I did not make use of a theoretical framework for the reason that, after thoroughly studying past research and theories, I did not find a one suitable to my study. For that reason I decided to rely strongly on past and present literature.

#### *1.1.4 Organisation of chapters*

This dissertation is divided into six chapters. The first chapter introduces the problem that led to my study. In Chapter 2, I shall discuss current and past literature on LGBT in the South African context and in international research by focussing on the youth, the challenges these learners are facing as the minority, and what the curriculum and policies are doing to create a 'safe' space for these learners who are or perceived to be LGBT. In Chapter 3, I shall discuss my methodology and the theoretical approach to my research design, the collection of data, the sample and the participants and what ethical factors I had to take into consideration. In Chapter 4, I shall present the data that was collected from the learners and in chapter 5 discuss the findings of the data by making use of these learners' narratives. In my concluding chapter, I shall make recommendations based on the findings of my data collected, as discussed in Chapter 4.

#### *1.1.5 Research design and methodology*

I recruited 11 Grade 10 male and female learners using purposeful random sampling. These participants are all from a high school in the Gauteng province of South Africa. Semi-



structured interviews by means of open ended questions were conducted with each participant individually. The interviews were digitally recorded; transcribed and handwritten notes were also taken. This research was conducted in one of the participating school's classrooms after school at a time that best suited the participants. The interviews lasted between 20 and 35 minutes each. Thematic analysis was used for analysing the data. The first stage of analysis involved the collection and organisation of all the data. The next stage involved processing all the data to search for repeated patterns. The data was transcribed into segments, then described and categorized in order to establish trends and patterns. I shall provide more detail of the methodology in Chapter 3.

#### *1.1.6 Conclusion*

In this chapter, I provided the background and the rationale for the study. I also stated the three critical questions that will guide the study and that I shall aim to answer. The value of the research as well as the layout of the chapters were outlined. I concluded Chapter 1 with a short summary of the methodology adopted in this study.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Overview and background**

This chapter focusses on reviewing both local and international research. I shall attempt to highlight the gaps that exist in the literature on LGBT with reference to heteronormative and heterosexist attitudes and experiences in schools as well as high school learners' attitudes towards, and experiences of sexual and gender diversity. I shall pay more specific attention to the silence concerning sexuality and gender in schools as well as school cultures of heteronormativity and heterosexism where heterosexuality is maintained and even promoted. As noted in Chapter 1, hardly anything is known about the way in which learners feel and experience the teaching of LGBT issues in South Africa. Bhana (2014:8) reinforces this point by arguing that "transforming attitudes amongst young people is a key driver for broader social change".

Learners are seeking answers. The only question is: Where and how? I can only speak for myself and my own experiences relating to sexuality and how my social, cultural and religious experiences and background constructed my attitudes. I cannot pretend to even try to comprehend what other boys and girls, who are or perceived to be LGBT, from different social structures are experiencing. I can, however, rely on research done by numerous researchers who report on the extreme and harsh living conditions in, and with which these young people are living and struggling. They report homophobic bullying, harassment, and even correctional rape of lesbians or of those perceived to be lesbians. In South Africa, LGBT learners experience discrimination, rejection, isolation, non-tolerance, marginalisation and harassment in school (Butler & Astbury, 2008). All of this is happening in the 'safe spaces' which we, as South Africans, claim our country and schools to be. In this study, I seek answers to the attitudes and experiences of high school learners in a co-educational state school in the Gauteng province of South Africa regarding the teaching of LGBT content. I shall explore the following issues: the constitutional and legislative policies of South Africa and their relation to sexual and gender diversity; oppression of the LGBT minority youth in South African schools; high school learners' attitudes towards, and experiences of the issue of sexual and gender diversity; the factors that contribute to learners' attitudes towards LGBT; their experiences of the teaching of sexual and gender diversity in school; how these attitudes manifest in, and beyond the school ground, and the teaching and learning of LGBT.

The results of the study will then determine how or not these attitudes and experiences affect a school culture of heteronormativity and heterosexism.

This chapter expands the literature review relating to heteronormativity and heterosexism. I shall first examine the constitutional and legislative policies of South Africa and the protection they offer the sexual minority population. I shall then discuss the experiences of the LGBT youth in South Africa and worldwide. My focus will then shift to the existence of heteronormative and heterosexist school cultures. Lastly, I shall explore the role of teachers and the curriculum as agents of change towards anti-oppressive education. In doing so, I shall synthesise existing scholarship relating to both local and international research done on the phenomenon under discussion. Essentially, this chapter demonstrates the need for this study, given the dearth of research on heteronormativity and heterosexism among high school learners and their attitudes towards, and experiences of the teaching and learning of sexual and gender diversity.

### *2.1.1 Constitutional and legal framework: Policy vs practice*

South Africa, like many other countries, has a dark history of discrimination and prosecution against LGBT people. According to Van Vollenhoven and Els (2003), the Defence Force, during the apartheid years, screened approximately 900 young LGBT individuals to undergo aversion therapy, including shock therapy and gender reassignment surgery. Over the past 100 years, U.S. society has moved from viewing homosexuality as immoral and deviant, and thereby a threat to innocent children, to recently and slowly viewing it as more acceptable (Griffin, D'Errico, Harro & Schiff, 2007). Education has carried a conservative legacy of discrimination towards minority groups in South Africa.

In South Africa, there is a gap between the 1996 Constitution and the reality of heteronormativity in South African schools, highlighting the dissimilarity between policy and practice (Bhana, 2012). In a post-apartheid South Africa, with its policy of unequivocal protection, heteronormative and heterosexist behaviours and attitudes are anti-constitutional, but a reality (Republic of South Africa, 1996). South Africa has undergone significant socio-political changes since the first democratic election in 1994 and since the adoption of the post-apartheid Constitution in 1996. Globally, South Africa has been acknowledged for its most advanced and liberal Constitution of unprecedented commitment towards equality and diversity, and the inclusion of all people regardless of their difference. South Africa is the fifth country in the world to legalise gay marriages, and the first on the African continent. In

1996, the Department of Education included an anti-discrimination clause in its policy claiming an all-inclusive education system (Butler *et al.*, 2003). Contrary to these ‘inclusive’ policies, discrimination and violence against sexual minorities in South Africa are still commonplace occurrences (Wilmot & Naidoo, 2014). Deacon, Morrell and Prinsloo (1999) state that homophobia and discrimination against gays have been and remain unquestioned features of African and White South African schooling.

Gay and lesbian communities continue to experience horrific forms of violence, including rape, gay-bashing, and even murder (Msibi, 2011). South Africa is not unique in facing sexual minorities. In her article in the *Pretoria News*, Potgieter (2014) mentioned that abuse by peers and teachers is not uncommon, while the curriculum often entrenches negative stereotypes. She also writes that research in the United Kingdom found that over 70 per cent of lesbian and gay youth, who had been bullied at school, pretended to be ill in order to avoid a homophobic school environment. Heterosexism and heteronormativity are not unique to the South African context. Internationally, Australian lesbian teachers also highlighted the need for addressing issues of homosexuality in schools (Ferfolja, 1998). In commenting on the occurrence of heterosexism in Scottish schools, Buston and Hart (2001:107) suggest “a strategic silence operating in relation to homosexuality”. A report from the Human Rights Watch noted that South Africa still faces unfulfilled responsibilities in implementing its constitutional protections. South Africa left its commitments on the shelf, unsupported by action (DePalma & Francis, 2014). This is cause for concern as these contradictions between policy and practice create a systematic exclusion of the LGBT youth from the education system, purely on the basis of their gender and sexuality.

While remarkable progress has been made in securing legislative protections for LGBT people, resistance to homosexuality is still visible and widely supported (Bhana, 2014). The African National Congress’ (ANC) deputy president, Jacob Zuma lashed out at homosexuality, describing it as “un-African” and stating that “same-sex marriage is a disgrace to the nation and to God. “When I was growing up unqingile (homosexuals) could not stand in front of me” (Francis & Msibi, 2011:162). How is it then that the South African youth must respect the Constitution and have positive attitudes towards the oppressed and, in this specific case, ‘homosexuals’? Soon thereafter, Zuma became the president of the Republic of South Africa. Over the past six years, the world has witnessed an increase in homophobia in several countries: Zimbabwe in 1995 at the International Book Fair; Namibia; Swaziland; Uganda; Kenya, and Egypt. With the democratisation of South Africa and an

inclusive Constitution that treasures wide-ranging protections of human rights, one would expect that the broader social values contained in the Bill of Rights and reflected in the Educational Curriculum Policy would be enabled through the curriculum practice and in all prescribed learning materials. This is, however, not the case. Following on the ratification of the Constitution, the South African Schools Act of 1996 undertook to inaugurate a new education system that confronts “racism and sexism and all other forms of unfair discrimination and intolerance” (Wilmot & Naidoo, 2014:324). A great deal of the research done on the LGBT youth in South African schools focusses on homophobic harassment and assault (Msibi, 2011; Msibi, 2012). Although legislation such as the Constitution, which entrenches all people’s rights, guides South African schools, attitudes towards LGBT individuals are yet to be improved in both schools and social structures. Both legislative and educational interventions are needed in order to understand and address the seriousness of heteronormative and heterosexist attitudes in schools. It is important to establish an understanding of how learners feel about the teaching of LGBT content. The Constitution is thus not a reality for LGBT people and, in particular, the youth.

Currently, in a post-apartheid South Africa, homophobic behaviours and attitudes are anti-constitutional, and sexual orientation is thus a human right. While many significant strides have been made towards racial equity, there are still disparities in addressing the reform of the social well-being of LGBT individuals. Heteronormativity and heterosexism should be seen to in the school system in order to address prejudicial attitudes and discrimination. Schools are places where learners and teachers can engage in dialogue about critical social issues (Bhana, 2012; Van Vollenhoven & Els, 2003). The South African National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996 aims to facilitate the democratic transformation of the national education system that serves the fundamental rights of all people in South Africa. It recognises that legislative and educational interventions are needed to understand and address the gravity of heteronormativity and heterosexism. While every person has the right to a safe environment, there rests a legal duty on teachers to ensure that students will not be harmed physically or psychologically and educated, irrespective of their sexuality. Bhana (2012) correctly argues that teachers play an important role in critiquing heteronormativity and heterosexism grounded in South Africa’s legal claim to equality on the basis of sexual orientation. Currently, there is a lack of research on how teachers understand and address homophobia (Francis, 2012, Reygan and Francis, 2015). Francis (2012) shows that, in most instances, teachers ignored or avoided issues related to sexual diversity. When teachers did

not include aspects of homosexuality, they took up the position that endorsed the idea of compulsory education. In the study of Francis and Reygan (2015) they found that teachers experienced discomfort with the topic of sexuality and gender diversity, had inherited bitter knowledge about non-normative sexual and gender identities, and experienced strong negative affects when discussing the topic. Francis and Reygan (2015) also found that the teachers that participated in their study reported an array of emotions and feelings around sexual and gender diversity, which in main were feelings of discomfort, disapproval and fear.

Deacon *et al.* (1999), state that conscious attempts to transform South African education are, to a large extent, driven by the legislative flagship of the 1996 South African Schools Act. Nevertheless, the South African gay and lesbian youth still report heteronormative and heterosexist attitudes and actions perpetrated by both students and teachers in schools. They may also engage in anti-gay name-calling, harassment and bullying (Richardson, 2009). In their study conducted among the LGBT youth in the American context, Kosciw *et al.* (2009) suggested that heteronormativity can be explicit, including name-calling, or verbal and physical harassment of students who deviate from normative gendered forms of sexuality. However, as Griffin *et al.* (2007) explain, it can also be less explicit, perpetuated through pervasive heteronormative discourse and symbols of appropriate gender and sexual relations displayed in school classrooms and extra-curricular activities in gender and society-school culture (Eder & Parker, 1987).

Research conducted by Human Rights Watch (2003:187) shows that “prejudice against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people persists” in South Africa. Article 9(3) of South Africa’s Constitution (Government Gazette of South Africa, 1996) states that:

*“No person shall be unfairly discriminated against on the grounds of race, gender, sex, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language, birth, or marital status”*

### *2.1.2 Lives of the LGBT youth*

The LGBT youth, or those who are perceived to be LGBT, may suffer from loneliness, identity crises, depression, high levels of anxiety, extreme hypervigilance, and self-loathing; they may become homeless or even attempt suicide (Griffin *et al.* 2007). Stein (2005) reported a high prevalence of name-calling, verbal abuse, mockery, discrimination and shaming. Numerous researchers indicate that pupils who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersexed suffer various forms of harassment at school (Bhana, 2012; Msibi,

2012; Potgieter & Reygen, 2012). Nel and Judge (2008) found that violence against gay men is commonly explained as a rejection of the victims' acting like women. According to Bhana (2014), hetero-patriarchal understandings of gender play a key role in the rejection of homosexual identities and behaviours. Negative experiences range from verbal abuse to physical violence. This is not only a reality in South Africa. Verbal abuse appears to be a prevailing theme across all studies detailing the experiences of LGBT learners. Richardson (2006) notes that many learners attend schools that are heterosexist and that support homophobic harassment.

Ignoring sexuality is partly to blame for the maintenance of heterosexual privilege. Traditional beliefs, combined with homophobic stereotypes have resulted in traumatic experiences for the lesbian and gay youth in South Africa (Butler *et al.*, 2003). In DePalma & Francis' (2014) study, the teachers who were interviewed expressed some degree of confusion when confronted with the term 'sexual diversity', suggesting that they had not yet encountered the construct. This does not mean that they did not recognize more popular terminology such as gay, lesbian, or homosexuality. It does imply that they did not explicitly understand sexual orientation as part of the natural human diversity. In addition, the teachers' descriptions revealed a relatively common association between gender and sexuality. For example, they insist that they can identify gay learners by their behaviours, preferences, and friend groupings and, in one instance, by a learner's being more in touch with his feminine side. This association is also reported among the youth (Epstein & Johnson, 1998). When sexuality is raised at schools, it is usually within the borders of danger and denial. The notion that homosexual conduct is unnatural, evil or perverse can result in harassment, abuse, parental rejection, isolation, and rape of homosexual people.

"Homophobia and discrimination against gays have been and remain unquestioned features of African and white schooling" (Deacon *et al.* 1999:164). In a study done in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa, Bhana (2014) found that one in five lesbians and gay school children in Pietermaritzburg and Durban are raped or sexually abused at school, with 68 per cent of gay learners and 42 per cent of lesbian learners reporting victimisation. Education and knowledge acquisition do not involve repeating what one already knows, but rather learning something that disrupts one's common sense of the world (Kumashiro, 2002). Both legislative and educational interventions are needed to understand and address the seriousness of heteronormativity and heterosexism in schools. Heteronormativity and heterosexism should be undertaken in the school system in order to address prejudicial attitudes and

discrimination. From a young age, South African boys and girls are trained into their respective roles (Francis & Msibi, 2011). DePalma & Francis (2014) note that lesbians are considered to be masculine, whereas gay men are considered to be feminine. This tendency is not unique to the South African context and society. Gendered assumptions about sexuality are often associated with cross-gendered psychological or physical characteristics, such as the desire to become the other sex or the possession of two sets of genitalia (Francis & Msibi, 2011). Many boys fear that any display of 'feminine' traits might result in them being labelled homosexual. Being labelled gay is only a problem when a stigma is attached to homosexuality (Griffin *et al.*, 2007).

### *2.1.3 A culture of heteronormativity and heterosexism*

Stevenson (2010) defines experience as the knowledge of an event or subject gained through involvement therein or exposure thereto. An individual growing up and living in a society and institution such as the school can foster the development and observation of social experiences. Van Vollenhoven and Els (2003) argue that greater exposure to LGBT people can have a positive impact on heterosexual students by decreasing their ignorance, stereotypes, and prejudices and by providing positive educational exposure to a group who is different from them. Van Vollenhoven and Els (2003) also state that inclusion of LGBT into the curriculum can benefit LGBT students by sending the message that, as a minority, their existence and identity does not have to be invisible, marginalised, or subjugated. Prominent psychologist Allport (1935) describes attitudes as the most distinctive and indispensable concepts in contemporary sociology. Attitudes are formed from a person's past and present experiences about a certain topic, concept or structure. Learning can account for most of the attitudes one holds. For the purpose of this study, attitudes are expected to change as a function of prior experience. Kosciw *et al.* (2009) showed that indicators of hostile climate include frequency of homophobic remarks and victimization regarding sexual orientation and gender expression. One must remember that prejudice and homophobic attitudes do not simply remain attitudes, but have consequences leading to various forms of abuse endured by lesbians and gay men in South Africa. Richardson (2009) defines an LGBT-friendly school as one that considers the rights and needs of LGBT learners and teachers, as well as the rights and needs of same-sex attracted learners and teachers who do not take on these labels. Francis (2012) reports that the cultural positioning of homosexuality as deviant and immoral separates LGBT people from heterosexuals, making homosexuals invisible when it comes to the sexuality education curriculum.



In order to develop an anti-heteronormative and anti-sexist school culture, a queer school moment needs to be established. According to Goldstein *et al.* (2007), a queer school moment presupposes the availability of both complete and non-biased knowledge about sexual diversity. It assumes that full knowledge is possible for all learners, including heterosexual learners, and that heteronormativity and heterosexism is situated within classrooms (Kumashiro, 2002). According to Goldstein *et al.* (2007), queer school moments require pedagogical practices that trouble the official knowledge of disciplines, disrupting a space of heteronormativity and heterosexism. Discrimination against LGBT learners indicates an educational dysfunction as to the development of skills and attitudes in the school system, where the implementation of values should be internalised (Van Vollenhoven & Els, 2003). Teachers too often change or adapt the syllabus to avoid challenging content such as sexuality and gender, and to not challenge existing norms. Due to their religious and cultural beliefs, they are reluctant to engage with LGBT issues in the classroom. Critical dialogue needs to be recognized and established in order for learners to actively engage in the content being taught. Potgieter & Reygan (2012) point out that the schooling system and, in particular, teachers and the curriculum content have a crucial contribution to make in nurturing citizens who are committed to social justice. The ‘choice’ of not teaching LGBT, due to the teacher’s personal beliefs, reproduces not only heterosexism, but a culture of heteronormativity and the silence thereof.

In their study, Francis & Msibi (2011) found that the majority of LO teachers have received little, if any training in the teaching of the content of the curriculum. There is also a great resistance not only towards the inclusion of sexuality education in the curriculum, but also towards the teaching thereof. It is clear that sexuality education and the teacher’s values are closely linked and informed by both content and approach. It is argued that the reasons or factors causing the teachers not to teach about sexuality education are due to not providing them with the necessary content which results in the topics of sexual diversity not being addressed at all (Francis & Msibi, 2011). Deacon *et al.* (1999) argue that teachers’ views about democracy and transformation are often in conflict with the progressive policy in the country, with teachers holding onto familiar patriarchy and religion. While there is the potential for student teachers to rethink these familiar understandings, homophobia cannot simply be addressed exclusively by stand-alone teaching modules. In a study conducted by Francis (2012) it was found that teachers do not adequately address issues of homosexuality and bisexuality in the classroom. Whether teachers are consciously or unconsciously

promoting a culture of heteronormativity and that when a topic or content – if existing – of sexuality is addressed, they only refer to heterosexual learners or remain ‘silenced’. This is perceived as the ‘right’ and ‘normal’ sexual orientation and normalizing heterosexuality, creating stigma and stereotyping.

Francis (2012) suggested that there are four key reasons for teachers not addressing sexual diversity in their classrooms. First, LGBT or sexual diversity is not explicit as a policy task in the LO curriculum. Secondly, LO teachers lack uniformity of training. Teachers come from a diverse range of fields and study areas that do not always adequately equip them on how to teach and facilitate sexuality education effectively. Thirdly, teachers do not teach sexual diversity, due to their own ideas, beliefs and prejudices. Bhana (2014) reported that teachers do not believe that it is their obligation to address sexuality of any form, thus supporting a culture of heteronormativity and heterosexism. This lack of teaching and learning, in conjunction with the teachers’ attitudes, influences how the learners respond to both the teaching and the content of LGBT. This ultimately influences both the learning of sexual diversity and the learners’ attitudes towards it. Teachers do not realise that their position – with their own perceptions and prejudices – affects the way in which their learners will accept, construct and perceive the content and ideas of sexual diversity. Fourthly, teachers do not teach sexual diversity, as they believe that the parents and the school will not approve thereof. Hardly anything has been done to equip teachers to challenge and teach issues related to homosexuality and homophobia in the classroom. This results in teachers grappling with sexuality education and paying hardly any attention or ignoring issues relating to sexual diversity (Francis & Msibi, 2011; Richardson, 2006).

Although school systems have been fairly silent on issues regarding lesbian, gay and other groups of youth who would be classified as sexual minorities, a growing number of researchers have investigated the experiences and representation of sexual minority youth within educational systems (Potgieter & Reygan, 2012). In a study by Butler *et al.* (2003) investigating the coming out narratives of 18 gay and lesbian youth, it was found that teachers ignore the presence of LGBT youth, and that schools do nothing to validate their lives, to challenge heteronormativity, or to discourage the vilification of homosexuals. Schools are harmful spaces. They are obliged to be and provide helpful spaces for all students, especially for those students who are targeted by forms of oppression because of their sexual orientations. Schools and teachers have a legal and ethical obligation to ensure the safety of their learners. Schools need to be a space that welcomes, educates and addresses

the needs of the 'other'; to be an affirming space, where 'otherness' should be embraced, and where being 'normal' is not presumed (Malinowitz, 1995). Teachers who are knowledgeable and have critically questioned their own attitudes towards sexual diversity will more likely question their assumptions about gender roles, compulsory heterosexuality and same-sex relationships, and be more willing to encourage classroom discussions on homosexuality. Young people want to learn more about sexuality (Francis & Msibi, 2011) and need to be able to transform their lived experiences of LGBT into knowledge and to use that knowledge as a process of questioning and a critical consciousness concerning sexual and gender diversity. Francis (2013) found in his study done among 15 to 18-year-old learners in the Free State province of South Africa that there were strong arguments for the inclusion of LGB learners in the school and for acceptance and equality. Teachers have a responsibility to intervene both critically and ethically. Critical reflection and questioning can materialise through the correct method of dialogue and through promoting the process thereof.

#### *2.1.4 Teachers not teaching*

Educators are disinclined to confront homophobia and heterosexism in schools, choosing to be cautious rather than risk controversy and conflict and turning the blind eye (Francis & Msibi, 2011). In the study of Francis (2013) he found that teachers found it difficult to reconcile their own values with those of the sexuality education curriculum and is linked to teachers' desire to promote certain values and morals. Teachers are social agents bearing the mark of culture, religion, sexuality and gender (Francis & Le Roux, 2011; Schoeman, 2006). Recognising the fundamental importance of teachers in ending oppressive forms of relations, international and local research indicates that teachers are strong allies in developing learners' capacities to question and interrupt inequalities based on social differences (Bhana, 2012; Schoeman, 2006). It is critical for teachers to explore how their own heteronormative and heterosexist prejudice impacts on young people's lives and to listen to the voices of gay and lesbian youth (Butler *et al.*, 2003). Schools and teachers not teaching and not creating platforms for discourse are also putting heterosexual learners at risk of creating meanings and perceptions based on discrimination and familiar understandings of sexuality. This has negative consequences for schools and the prospect of a safe and secure environment in South Africa (Bhana, 2012). She clearly argues that the development of a school culture, where heteronormativity and heterosexism are challenged, depends a great deal, among other issues, on the capacity of teachers to engender a safe environment where learners can participate in dialogue on LGBT issues. Francis (2011) states that the challenge lies in

teachers' abilities and attitudes towards the focus area of sexuality and relationships. Francis and Msibi (2011) argue that, despite the equality clause [9(3)] of the South African Constitution, which includes sexual orientation and a discourse of tolerance and inclusion, institutions in South Africa are still including heterosexism and heteronormative behaviour in the educational domain. This emphasises the importance of developing an understanding of the contributing factors in creating a hostile environment. A heteronormative and heterosexist schooling space has negative effects on the psychological and educational well-being of all learners.

Within the social institution of the school, everyone is forced into one role, male or female, and is assumed to be heterosexual. In their study done in secondary schools in the United States, Kosciw *et al.* (2013) suggested that a hostile school climate has serious ramifications for LGBT learners. They also noted that institutional support can play a significant role in making schools safer for these learners. Morrell (2003) notes that the silencing of sexuality at schools is an important part of the social regulation and policing of behaviours and attitudes. This creates a culture of enforced silence and stigma in schools. Schools and teachers remain silent and ignorant about sexual and gender diversity. Schools construct knowledge and simultaneously power relationships that the curriculum builds daily in schools with the support of gender norms and heterosexual background, thus promoting compulsory heterosexuality.

Silence, misconceptions, disregard and social prejudice uphold the 'hidden curriculum', violating LGBT learners' rights to dignity and equality and resulting in 'stigmas', heteronormativity and heterosexism. When schools refuse the 'rights' of LGBT learners not to be discriminated against, it enhances both the 'hidden curriculum', in that normativity should be maintained, and the 'silence' concerning the existence of LGBT learners. Schools are harmful spaces and need to be and provide helpful spaces for all students, especially for those targeted by forms of oppression. Schools need to be a space that welcomes, educates and addresses the needs of the 'other', as well as an affirming space, where 'otherness' should be embraced and where being 'normal' is not presumed (Malinowitz, 1995). Kumashiro (1999) suggested that teachers need not only acknowledge the diversity among their students, but also embrace the differences and treat their students as raced, gendered, sexualized and class individuals. Oppression should be addressed in the way in which schools respond to the harmful nature of the teachers, and involve the teaching of all learners. Due to their morals, values and religion, many teachers enforce their own ideas and opinions –

whether directly or indirectly – on their learners. This creates further marginalisation between the ‘normal’ heterosexual learners and the ‘outcast’ LGBT learners. Bhana (2012) argues that teachers play an important role in offering a critique on homophobia grounded in South Africa’s legal claim to equality on the basis of sexual orientation. Currently, there is a lack of research on how teachers understand and address homophobia (Francis, 2012). Teachers should teach in a way that challenges heteronormativity as well as acknowledge and address the fact that students do bring sexuality into schools and that all learners are not heterosexual (Epstein, 1997). Teachers should not ignore the differences in their students’ identities, nor assume that all their students are ‘normative’. Teachers should rather affirm differences and tailor their teaching to the specifics of their student population in establishing an all-inclusive classroom and school environment. Attention should be paid to those learners who are harassed, because they are or are perceived to be LGBT based on their gender expressions or ‘lack of masculinity’. Those non-gender-conforming learners are at risk and harmed by heteronormativity and heterosexism.

#### *2.1.5 Curriculum as regulator of sexuality and gender*

I consider the notion of curriculum in order to refer to a plurality of learning situations (both formal and informal) in which knowledge, subjects, identities, differences, inequalities and hierarchies are built, as well as processes of marginalisation and exclusion. Curriculum content and the provision of accurate and ethical LGBT information to young people is a gap which is felt acutely by South African youth (Human Rights Watch, 2003). Heteronormativity and heterosexism characterise school curricula internationally, and LGBT youth face disruption to schooling as a result of discrimination (Reygan, 2009). With the democratisation of South Africa and the implementation of an inclusive Constitution, which enshrines wide-ranging protections of human rights, one expects the broader social values contained in the Bill of Rights and reflected in curriculum policy to be enabled through the curriculum practice and in all prescribed learning materials. This is not so in South Africa. Potgieter & Reygan (2012) examined selected LO textbooks for Grades 7 to 12. They found that the representation of sexual minorities in these textbooks does not realise the commitment and spirit of the South African Constitution. Similarly, Wilmot and Naidoo (2014) qualitatively examined the coverage of sexualities and how sexualities are constructed and projected in the Grade 10 LO textbooks. Their findings were in line with those of Potgieter and Reygan (2012), in that a low percentage of statements is devoted to sexuality overall and the normalisation of heterosexuality mainly through the exclusion of LGBT

sexualities. Some researchers have attempted to work against oppression by focussing on what privileged and marginalised students know and should know about the ‘other’. Freire (1995) pointed out two kinds of knowledge. The first kind of knowledge is the knowledge about only what society defines as ‘normal’ (the way things generally are) and what is normative (the way things ought to be). Such partial knowledge often leads to misconceptions and stereotyping. Schools and teachers often contribute to this ‘partial’ knowledge by selecting topics for the curriculum in the South African context where LO teachers ‘choose’ not to address sexuality, one of the reasons being that teaching sexuality ‘issues’ makes them ‘uncomfortable’. The second type of knowledge is about the ‘other’, but encourages a distorted and misleading understanding of the ‘other’ based on stereotypes and myths. In other words, the second type of knowledge is partial/biased and acquires knowledge both in and beyond the school. In addition, according to Potgieter & Reygan (2012: 49), “there are three ways of knowing: the first is the awareness of an issue, but overall ignorance and naivety; the second is a concerted effort to not tell the truth, and the third form of knowing is a ‘switch off’”.

Schools are still institutionally heteronormative and heterosexist by their very structures, procedures, curricula and policies. As a result, this hegemonic norm that everyone is heterosexual remains part of the school culture (Meyer, 2010). It is important that teachers become more aware of the ideas of the hidden curriculum and of the way in which they may spread heteronormativity without meaning to do so (Richardson, 2009). In the official LO curriculum established by the South African Department of Education, hardly anything is done to encourage teachers to address sexual diversity (DePalma & Francis, 2014). As mentioned earlier, the curriculum does not include sexuality education; it is the teacher’s responsibility to find a space for such discussion. Other types of oppression such as racism are included in the curriculum and receive a great deal of attention from both the teachers and the school, but not LGBT. The hidden curriculum is no less important than the formal one; therefore, anti-oppressive education involves focussing on observations, support as much on what is being taught and learned intentionally and visibly as well as unintentionally and indirectly (Kumashiro, 2002). The hidden curriculum plays an important role in formulating the experiences and determining the attitudes of learners. Beyond the school, learners are learning about and exposed to queers from sensationalist and stereotypical accounts in the media and from popular culture. In the school, with the formal curriculum, students do not learn much that challenges these stereotype misrepresentations. Learners hear and/or engage

in hardly any or no discussions about queers, except when making jokes and comments that often go unchallenged by the teacher. Consequently, young people learn that it is acceptable to denigrate queers (Unks, 1995). It is suggested that the ‘knowledge’ many learners have about LGBT learners is either incomplete because of exclusion, invisibility, and silence, or partial because of belittling and marginalisation. What makes this partial knowledge problematical is that it is often taught through the informal or ‘hidden’ curriculum, meaning that it is taught indirectly and pervasively. Because it is so often unintended, it carries more significance than the official curriculum (Jackson, Boostroom & Hansen, 1998). The ways in which one thinks are framed not only by what is said, but also by what is not said. Critical theorists made this explicit in their analysis of the school curriculum and the hidden curriculum. There are different perceptions on how to bring about change. As with Kumashiro’s (2002) concept of “paradoxal condition of learning and unlearning”, learning involves a crisis. Educators thus need to create a space and platform in the curriculum for students to work through the crisis by means of critical dialogue. Learners may find dialogue about sexual diversity uncomfortable and even disturbing, resulting in the ‘crisis’. This is where the teacher should intervene in this predicament and facilitate the learning process. The path to developing a critical consciousness involves not only learning about the processes of privileging and marginalizing, but also unlearning that what one has previously learned is ‘normal’ and normative (Britzman, 1998). Their knowledge and, consequently, their attitudes are formed through the learners’ social, cultural, religious and political experiences and background. In terms of section 16 of the Constitution, everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which, in terms of section 16(1) (b), includes the freedom to receive information. LGBT learners’ right to freedom of expression are, therefore, violated if the school curriculum does not address it and refuse to deal with supportive LO content. In terms of curricula, Macintosh (2007:35) states:

*“Assumptions of student and teacher identities as heterosexual, examples expressed through heterosexual narrative, and curricula seeped in gender normativity are all characteristic of the ways in which non-normative sexualities are ‘inadvertently’ excluded from curricular agendas and various social justice reforms citizenship experienced by lesbians and gay men.”*

Issitt (2004) states that textbooks serve an ideological purpose by the selection of knowledge, transmitting the ‘thinkable’, exercising the ‘unthinkable’, and reproducing the epistemic and ontological beliefs enshrined in the curriculum. According to Potgieter & Reygan (2012), The Revised National Curriculum statement for LO and Departmental LO Teacher Guidelines

remained silent on the issues of sexual diversity. They are of the opinion that LGBT is not fully addressed in the curriculum and textbooks for Grades 7 to 10. Britzman (1998) argues that resistance to knowledge is often an unconscious defence mechanism and the desire to ignore. The policy guidelines for the subject LO broadly focus on sexuality without any specific reference to diversity or homosexuality. Both the teachers and the school managers must thus interpret and give shape to discussions relating to non-normative sexualities. In most instances, such discussions do not even take place. Failure to address heteronormativity and heterosexism in schools has broader implications, given the key role of schools in shaping attitudes and values.

Despite the language of inclusivity and tolerance in a post-apartheid South Africa, many South African institutions, including education, continue to reproduce patterns of heteronormativity and heterosexism (Richardson, 2006). As Giroux (2001:18) argues,

*“Pedagogy must always be contextually defined, allowing it to respond specifically to the conditions, formations, and problems that arise in various sites in which education takes place.”*

Temple (2005:281) concluded, from the texts that she studied, that the stage is set to view sexuality in terms of opposites of normal and abnormal. She also states that “the texts defined a couple as a man and a woman; parents as mother and father, and adolescence as a time to become interested in the opposite sex” (Temple, 2005:287). Myerson, Crawley, Anstey, Kessler and Okopny (2007:92) explored how texts used in the study of human sexuality frequently reinforce binary construction of sexuality and either overtly or covertly reinforce “dominant heteronormative narratives of sexual dimorphism, male hegemony, and heteronormativity”. Not only in South Africa is heterosexuality normalized and non-heterosexuality portrayed as deviant and abnormal. In an investigation of heteronormativity in Biology textbooks, widely prescribed in Ontario schools, Bazzul and Sykes (2011) were also struck by a general silence regarding same-sex attraction and practices.

## **2.2 Conclusion**

In light of the above findings, it is evident that the South African Constitution is failing in its attempt to protect and support the sexual minority; that heteronormativity and heterosexism remain rife in South Africa and internationally among the youth, in particular, and the involvement and contributions of school, teachers and curriculum. To my knowledge, there are no national studies examining high school learners’ attitudes towards, and experiences of



the teaching and learning of LGBT, the manifestation of these attitudes and experiences in and beyond the school, and their influence on the school culture and climate. Much of the past research in the South African context has focussed on the experiences of the LGBT youth and can, therefore, not necessarily be generalizable to the attitudes of the larger high school population. Thus, this study focusses on high school learners not disclosing their sexuality.

Essentially, I ask three questions:

1. What are the high school learners' attitudes towards, and experiences of the teaching and learning of sexual and gender diversity?
2. How do these attitudes and experiences manifest in and beyond the school?
3. How do these experiences and attitudes contribute to a heteronormative and heterosexist school culture?

In the next chapter, I shall discuss the methodology.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I provided an overview of literature from both South African and international scholars on the culture of heteronormativity and heterosexism in and beyond the school setting and the attitudes and experiences of high school learners.

This chapter is divided into four sections. I shall first discuss the methodology adopted in this research. This is followed by a discussion of the selection of the participants as well as of how my data was generated. In the third section, I shall focus on the data-analysis process and, in the last section, I shall discuss the ethical matters pertaining to this study.

These discussions are necessary as they relate to how I approach answering the study's research questions as to what the attitudes and experiences of high school learners are; how these attitudes and experiences are manifested in and beyond the school, and how these attitudes and experiences contribute to a heteronormative and heterosexist school culture.

#### *3.1.1 Research design and methodology*

##### *3.1.1.1 Research design*

I selected a qualitative research strategy for this exploratory study. Qualitative research attempts to study the daily life of different individuals or groups of people in their natural setting and is particularly useful for studying educational settings and processes. Creswell (2012: 37) states that

*“... qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The final written report or presentation includes the voice of the participants, the reflectivity of the researcher, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem.”*

This research was not about collecting data, but about capturing experiences, attitudes and emotions. Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape the inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). For qualitative researchers, detail is also found in the precise particulars of such matters as people's understandings and interactions (Silverman, 2005). From an ontological perspective, qualitative approaches are

constructionist; they understand reality as being socially constructed. Flick (2013) suggests that a qualitative research design helps the researcher understand the participants' cultural and social interactions in their living spaces. Not only was it important for me to capture the responses of the learners. I wanted to experience not only "what" they said, but also "how" they said it. I encouraged the young people I interviewed to be as open and honest as possible. The fact that I spent some time explaining to them that what they say in the interviews must be kept confidential and that nobody will know their identity made a difference. In my instance, I accepted that my presence in the field and interviews would influence what I saw and heard, but I could not predict 'how' or to "what" extent. I was aware that my presence in the field might affect the learners' behaviours and responses. It is unrealistic to suppose that any researcher enters a field without past experience or some pre-existing ideas. To suppose that the researcher's presence will not exert an influence on the data is equally unrealistic (Silverman, 2005). In this sense, my experience as a high school teacher teaching the same grade as the learners who were being interviewed was of great value and gave me confidence in conducting the interviews as well as in interacting with these learners.

### *3.1.1.2 Research methodology – A case study*

I made use of an instrumental case study for my research, as it is one of several ways in which I could do research in the social sciences and capture a true understanding of the social context that assisted me in understanding the learners' behaviour and the social context in which this took place. Punch (1998:150) explains a case study as follows:

*"The basic idea is that one case will be studied in detail, using whatever method seems appropriate. While there may be a variety of specific purposes and research questions, the general objective is to develop as full an understanding of that case as possible."*

There are, however, several types of cases. Stake (1995) distinguishes three types, the intrinsic, the instrumental and the collective. In an intrinsic case study, a researcher examines the case for its own sake. In a collective case study, the researcher coordinates data from several different sources, such as schools or individual. I have decided to use an instrumental case, as it gives me insight into a specific theme or issue. An instrumental case study is also the study of a case (e.g., person, specific group, occupation, department, organization) to provide insight into a particular issue, redraw generalizations, or build theory. In instrumental case research the case facilitates understanding of something else. The

focus is on an in-depth understanding of the entity, issue or theme (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In my study, this was an ideal method for exploring the attitudes and experiences of the learners being interviewed. This method enabled me to position my participant's experiences, perceptions and attitudes regarding LGBT in, and beyond the school. In addition, a case study is intended to provide detailed, specific accounts of particular circumstances rather than offering broad, generalizable findings (Stake, 1995). A case study answers the study's research questions using the evidence for the particular case setting (Thomas, 2013).

### *3.1.1.3 Participant selection and data-collection setting*

This study was carried out at a high school situated in the northern part of Pretoria in the Gauteng province of South Africa. This is the high school at which the interviews were conducted and where the participant learners go to school. Data was produced through individual, semi-structured interviews which were conducted with 11 Grade 10 learners. The high school selected was based on accessibility, feasibility and diversity. In total, 11 learners (five males and six females) participated in this study. This particular school has a total of 993 learners. As mentioned, this school is diverse in terms of language, race and gender. A detailed statistical spreadsheet is attached with the numbers of learners attending the school, statistics on the number of learners according to their race, gender and ethnicity. It is a bilingual school offering classes in Afrikaans or English as home language. After studying the statistical spreadsheet, which provided me with detail on the learners, it was evident that neither English nor Afrikaans is, in fact, the participants' home language. The reason for providing these figures is to support my sample and the representation of the learners selected for the study.

A single interview, lasting between 25 to 35 minutes, was conducted at the school in which the participants are enrolled. The participants were between the ages of 16 and 18 years and all in their Grade 10 year of schooling. Their participation was dependent upon their willingness to form part of the interview, their availability after school, and their suitability. This study was thus limited in terms of the specific views presented by the 11 high school learners. The study can, therefore, not be generalised, but is presented by those learners who were willing and available to participate in this study. The study can, therefore, not claim to represent the views of all high school learners in the South African school setting. My study does not focus on individual learners, but on an investigation into their positioning in relation

to their feelings towards the teaching of LGBT content. The set of questions was facilitated by an interview schedule that focussed on their knowledge of the Constitution, social justice, their views on LGBT, heteronormativity and heterosexism in, and beyond their school setting, as well as the teaching and teaching content in the school and classroom setting. Their experiences and attitudes were, however, not restricted to the classroom, but also beyond the classroom.

Working with Braun and Clarke's (2006) model of thematic analysis, the data was analysed using a step-by-step procedure, which began by seeking, through the interviews conducted with all the learners, repeated patterns of meaning in their description and understanding of social justice, sexuality, LGBT and the teaching thereof. In the second part of the analysis, codes were produced to highlight patterns. Themes were then produced.

Semi-structured interviews were used, as this method of interview features both structured and unstructured interviews and, therefore, uses both closed and open questions. For the purpose of consistency, I had a set of pre-planned key questions for guidance so that the same areas were covered with each interviewee. As the interview progressed, the learner was given the opportunity to elaborate on or provide more relevant information such as examples of his/her experiences, and so on. One of the advantages of semi-structured interviews is that this type of interview is flexible in process, allowing the interviewee's own perspectives to be explored (Bryman, 2012). Open-ended questions were used; these defined the area to be explored and simultaneously allowed the interviewer to diverge in order to follow up or explain a particular area in greater detail. In qualitative research, open-ended questions are asked so that the participants can best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings (Creswell, 2012).

The order of the questions in the interview schedule had to be re-arranged throughout the interviews to suit each learner, depending on their comfort, background knowledge and attitudes towards me as the interviewer. This was done to increase the reliability and validity of the data. Purposive sampling was used and enabled me to choose a case, because it illustrated some feature or process in which I am interested. Denzin & Lincoln (2011:370) state that:

*“Many qualitative researchers employ ... purposive, and not random, sampling methods. They seek out groups, settings and individuals where ... the process being studied is most likely to occur.”*

The Principal and Vice-Principal of the participating school made non-probability random sampling possible for this research study. They used the Grade 10 alphabetically numbered class lists. Learners were chosen per class according to their number on the class list. The researcher then came in direct contact with the learners, and informed them as to the nature of a research study; what it entails to be involved in a study; the purpose of the study; what is expected of them for this study, and the nature of the risks and benefits. A consent form was distributed to the participants' parents/legal guardians who completed and signed it, as all the learners but one who were interviewed were under the age of 18 years. The contact details of the researcher were also included on the consent form in case the participants or their parents/legal guardians had any other questions. The learners then returned the consent forms of the parents/legal guardians on the day of the interviews. For logistical purposes, I contacted the learners who chose to take part in the study.

Purposive sampling was used in that the learners had to adhere to the criteria of being a Grade 10 learner at the participating high school.

#### *3.1.1.4 Background and demographics of school and learners*

The 11 learners who participated in the study were from a diversity of cultures, languages, and experiences. Below is a table profiling each of the learners. I also added the pseudonym, age, home language, language taken as home language in school, as well as race/country of birth.

**Table 1: Demographics of learners**

Participant	Pseudonym	Age	Home language	Language taken as home language at school	Race/country of birth
1. Male	Dyllan	17	English	English	White/South African
2. Female	Linda	16	Afrikaans	English	White/South African
3. Female	Kate	16	Afrikaans	English	White/South African
4. Male	Joseph	16	Arabic	English	Algerian
5. Female	Britney	16	Afrikaans	English	White/South African
6. Male	Thabo	18	South Sotho	English	Black/South African
7. Male	Lesiba	17	Portuguese	English	Portuguese
8. Female	Brenda	16	Afrikaans	English	White/South African
9. Male	Vele	16	IsiZulu	English	Black/South African
10. Female	Faith	16	Sepedi	English	Black/South African
11. Female	Nomsa	17	IsiZulu	English	Black/South African

**Table 2: Learners according to race and gender in order of number represented in the High School**

Grade	White		Black		Coloured		Other		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Grade 12	52	50	33	39	10	15	4	2	205
Grade 11	46	48	39	60	9	6	3	2	213
Grade 10	46	50	11	42	11	7	3	7	192
Grade 9	39	38	40	47	6	12	2	4	188
Grade 8	37	44	40	49	10	12	2	1	195
Total	218	229	174	234	46	52	14	16	993

M = Male; F = Female

**Table 3: Total learners according to gender per home language**

Total learners according to gender per home Language																																								
Grade	Afrikaans			Other			English			IsiNdebele			IsiXhosa			IsiZulu			Nigerian			Sepedi			Sesotho			Setswama			Siswati			TshiVenda			Xitsonga			Total
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T				
Grade 12	25	40	65	5	0	5	42	37	79	2	2	4	1	2	3	6	3	9	0	0	0	3	4	7	5	3	8	7	10	17	1	1	2	2	1	3	1	2	3	205
Grade 11	35	29	64	7	1	8	24	37	61	6	5	11	1	5	6	7	3	10	1	0	1	8	14	22	2	4	8	4	16	20	0	0	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	213
Grade 10	20	31	51	4	3	7	37	40	77	2	4	6	0	4	4	1	8	9	0	0	0	8	5	13	2	1	8	6	8	14	1	0	1	2	0	2	0	0	0	192
Grade 9	14	26	40	4	4	8	32	33	65	1	3	4	3	3	6	6	3	9	0	0	0	9	13	22	4	0	8	9	11	20	1	0	1	2	2	4	1	0	1	188
Grade 8	24	34	58	0	1	1	29	32	61	3	6	9	1	2	3	6	6	12	0	0	0	11	7	18	2	5	8	8	11	19	1	0	1	2	0	2	1	2	3	195
Total	118	160	278	20	9	29	164	179	343	14	20	34	6	16	22	26	23	49	1	0	1	39	43	82	15	13	40	34	56	90	4	1	5	9	4	13	3	4	7	993



### *3.1.1.5 Data analysis*

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. Thematic analysis is a poorly demarcated, rarely acknowledged, yet widely used qualitative analytic method (Boyatzis, 1998). It also involves searching across a data set – be it a number of interviews or focus groups, or a range of texts – to find repeated patterns. One of the benefits of thematic analysis is that it has a flexible approach that can be used across a range of epistemologies and research questions.

The process starts when the analyst begins to notice and search for patterns of meaning and issue of potential interest in the data – this may occur during data collection. The end point is reporting the content and meaning of patterns (themes) in the data, where “themes are abstract constructs the investigators identify before, during and after analysis” (Ryan & Bernard, 2000:780). Analysis involves a constant moving back and forth between the entire data set, the coded extracts of data that are analysed, and the analysis of the data produced.

For the analysis of the data I made use of Braun & Clarke’s (2006) 6-phase guide to doing thematic analysis. Ely, Vinz, Downing & Anzul (1997), however suggest that analysis is not a linear process where one simply moves from one phase to the next, but rather a recursive process, where one moves back and forth, as needed, throughout all the phases. This process also develops over time. The following six phases were used as guidelines: to familiarise myself with the data, to generate initial codes, to search for themes, to review the themes, to define and name the themes, and finally to produce the report.

In phase one, I immersed myself in the data to the extent that I became familiar with the depth and breadth of the content. Immersion usually involves the repeated reading of the data, and reading the data in an active way – searching for meanings and patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this phase, I started taking notes and marking ideas for coding. According to Braun & Clarke (2006), coding continues to be developed and defined throughout the entire analysis.

Since I worked with verbal data, these had to be transcribed into written form in order for me to conduct a thematic analysis. The process of transcription, while it may seem time consuming and frustrating at times, can be an excellent way to start familiarising oneself with the data (Riessman, 1993). During this process, meanings are created, rather than simply mechanically putting spoken words on paper (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999).

Phase two started after I read and familiarised myself with the data. This phase involved the production of initial codes from the data. Codes identify a feature of the data that appears interesting to the analyst, and refers to “the most basic segment, or element of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998:63).

Phase three re-focuses the analysis at the broader level of themes rather than codes. In this phase, I sorted the different codes into possible themes, and collated all the relevant coded data extracted within the identified themes. This phase ended with the collection of candidate themes and all extracts of data that were coded in relation to them.

In phase four, I devised the set of candidate themes; this involved refining these themes. In phase five, I conducted and wrote a detailed analysis for each individual theme. The final phase involved the final analysis and writing up of the report.

### *3.1.2 Ethical considerations*

I paid minute attention to the ethical issues involved in this research. In studying people’s behaviour or asking them questions, one must face not only the values of the researcher, but also the responsibility to those studies (Silverman, 2005). A credible research design involves not only selecting informants and effective research strategies, but also adhering to research ethics (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In my research, I had to consider the influence that language, gender and culture may have on both myself and the participants in the study. I was aware that different learners would react differently towards me as a researcher, because I am a male researcher from a different cultural background. The fact that I teach at a school with a similar demographics background as the school where I did my research, assisted me, as I was acquainted with the culture and language, even though I cannot speak or understand the language. The statistics clearly show that there were 11 reported ‘home languages’, namely Afrikaans, English, IsiNdebele, IsiXhosa, IsiZulu, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, SiSwati, Tshivenda, and Xitsonga. There were also two groups who identified their home language as ‘Other’ and ‘Nigerian’. Language was thus an obstacle and a barrier but it was also a strength of the study as it was representative. The school is a dual-medium school where both Afrikaans and English are taught as home language. I did, however, start my interviews by providing the participants with background regarding their residential area, so that they were aware of my scant knowledge. My fluency in both Afrikaans and English as languages was a great help.

There are numerous reasons why I paid special attention to the ethical considerations. One of the reasons is that I am conducting my research in a very sensitive area and, secondly, all but one of the learners is younger than 18 years. Permission was granted and a consent form was signed by the following people/bodies:

- The parents/legal guardian.
- The learner/participant.
- The headmaster on behalf of the school where the study was conducted.

The consent form included details regarding the study. Information such as the topic of the study, the aim of the study as well as the process of data collection was included. The list of interview questions was also provided. It was also clearly communicated to the parties involved that their participation in this study is totally voluntary; that they can withdraw from the study at any time, and that they do not have to answer all the questions. Each participant, his/her parents, legal guardian or caretaker as well as the participating school and the SGB received a copy of the consent form.

I made use of pseudonyms for each of the participants in my data analysis; the school was also given a pseudonym to ensure that there can be no association with the learners who participated in the study. The school assisted me with the selection of the participants, the venue and the logistical arrangements. I enjoyed working with the participants, as each of them arrived on time in their allocated time slot. I interviewed two learners daily and only one learner on the last day. There are two reasons for this. First, I wanted to make it as convenient as possible for the participants by allowing them to choose a day and time within the two-week time frame when the interviews would be most suitable for them. I also conducted the interviews in one of the school's classrooms, thus enabling the learners to participate in the interviews directly after school or after their extramural activities without having to go home and make alternative transport arrangements. I was aware of the fact that many of the learners would participate in extramural activities and I did not want to intrude in their daily routine. To reduce researcher bias, I reevaluated impressions of respondents and challenged pre-existing assumptions and hypotheses. While question-order bias is sometimes unavoidable, I asked general questions before specific, unaided before aided and positive before negative which minimized bias.

I believe that there was an association between my doing research on a sensitive topic such as LGBT and my own sexual orientation, even though none of the learners raised the issue. Each and every learner treated me as researcher with the utmost respect. At the same time, I did not hinder them from discussing and telling me how they felt. I made it clear from the start that there is no right or wrong answer to any of the questions and that all the questions are based on their experiences and on how they are feeling. I tried to make them feel as comfortable as possible. There was, however, a change in their attitude and responses as we progressed with the interviews. The challenge was that some of the key terms and concepts were unknown to them. I had to stop and explain these terms first, because the follow-up questions were based on these concepts. If I had not explained the concepts and the terms, the learners would not have been able to take part in the discussion. The majority of the learners were not shy to tell me what they thought and about their experiences; the discussion lasted longer than anticipated. I was delighted with the analysis, as I had a great deal of data available to use. I enjoyed the interviews with these young people, and their positive attitude towards this study was indeed helpful. Even though the answers to the questions were initially very brief, the participants entered into a full discussion towards the middle of the interviews.

Full ethical clearance was obtained from the University of the Free State's Faculty of Education and from the Gauteng Department of Education. A slight delay from the Department of Education for confirmation set my initial date for data collection behind by three weeks. The Gauteng Department of Education also instructed me to change some of my initial interview questions as well as to include the interview question in the consent form which the parents/ guardians had to sign since it is sensitive topic. The changes were made, returned to the Department of Education, and the final ethical certificate was issued.

Data storage was also important. The data of the interviews was and still is safely stored in a safe at the school where I am teaching. There is a 24-hour camera surveillance. All the transcripts will be shredded once the requisite period of five years has lapsed.

### *3.1.3 Conclusion*

In this chapter I first explained the methodology and methods used to obtain the data. Thereafter, I explained the data analysis and ethics of the study.

I shall present the findings in the next chapter and endeavour to answer the following research questions:

1. What are high school learners' attitudes towards, and experiences of the teaching and learning of sexual and gender diversity?
2. How do these attitudes and experiences manifest in, and beyond the school?
3. How do these attitudes and experiences contribute to a heteronormative and heterosexist school culture?

## **CHAPTER 4: DATA FINDINGS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In Chapter 3, I discussed the methodologies used in this study. In this chapter, I shall present the findings of the data. It should be noted that I divided the findings (chapter 4) and analysis chapter (chapter 5) in two separate chapters.

The purpose of this study was to explore learners' attitudes towards, and experiences of the teaching and learning of sexuality and gender issues in a high school setting. The learners shared their perspectives, experiences, beliefs and attitudes regarding a variety of topics dealing with the teaching and learning of sexuality and gender. I collected qualitative data using a non-probability random and purposive sample of participants where the learners had the opportunity to reflect, share, and ideally broaden their own understandings in order to acquire new perspectives on these topics. The inclusion of sexuality and topics of atypical gender behaviour in the classroom remains a controversial and stigmatized issue in South Africa. In this study, learners started by sharing their views and their own life experiences with people who are or are perceived to be LGBT. At the start of this research study, I aimed to explore these young people's opinions on the teaching and learning of LGBT content. Once the interviews commenced, it was clear that the learners had hardly any understanding of bisexuality and no idea of the meaning of 'transgender'. Some learners mentioned "transvestites", but did not know what this meant. For this reason, the acronym LG (lesbian and gay) will be used instead of LGBT. In Chapter one, I explained why I make use of the terms 'heteronormativity' and 'heterosexism' instead of 'homophobia'. In this chapter, however, I use the term 'homophobia', because the learners used and understood this term. From the start of the interviews, it was my intention to do my best to win the participants' trust and make them as comfortable as possible, so that I could extract as much rich data as possible from them.

In this study, I used semi-structured interviews to gather the qualitative data. This chapter presents the findings of the qualitative data gathered from the interviews with these young people. In order to elucidate the different narratives and meanings offered by the learners, this chapter has been divided into three critical questions, each with a theme found when analysing the data.

### **Research questions and context**

I present the data in order to answer the three research questions that guide and frame my study to better understand and explore these young people's attitudes towards sexuality and gender education at high school level:

1. What are high school learners' attitudes towards, and experiences of the teaching and learning of sexual and gender diversity?
2. How do these attitudes and experiences manifest in, and beyond the school?
3. How do these attitudes and experiences contribute to a heteronormative and heterosexist school culture?

Table 4 highlights the themes that emerged from the data-analysis process. This will help me answer the three critical questions that guide my study.

**Table 4: Themes**

Heteronormativity and heterosexism: stigma and lack of knowledge
Teaching and learning of sexual and gender diversity
Silent school cultures normalising heterosexuality

#### *4.1.1 Heteronormativity and heterosexism: Stigma and lack of knowledge*

It is apparent from the interviews that the learners participating in the study have negative attitudes towards, and experiences of non-heterosexuality, and that heteronormativity and heterosexism are prevalent in the high school where the study took place. All of the learners who participated in this study reported incidents of heteronormativity and/or heterosexism they had experienced both in, and beyond the school.

The interviews suggest that the learners all have some experiences of LG either individually or in groups in, and beyond the school. In the school, learners reported having experienced and seen a variety of forms of bullying and harassment. Beyond the school, learners reported discrimination against the LG minority group by providing their own experiences.

Name-calling, labelling and harassment of those who are or perceived to be non-heterosexual are present at the school. None of the learners, however, reported any physical harassment or

victimization towards any learners in, or beyond the school. Learners in this study began to identify examples of heteronormativity and heterosexism in their own life experiences and school setting. None of the learners was familiar with the term 'heteronormativity' and only a few with 'homophobia'. I explained the term 'homophobia' to them, and they began to share their awareness of indicators and consequences of this concept.

Throughout the course of the interviews, terms and concepts used in this study had to be aligned to the words they are accustomed to use such as gay and lesbian, instead of LGBT. While conducting the interviews, I noticed that the majority of the learners found it difficult to clearly articulate the terms and concepts such as LGBT and sexuality. For example, the majority of the learners understood sex and sexuality (as inter-related concepts) as being one and the same thing, indicating their lack of knowledge of sexuality and gender. On the question as to what they understood by the term 'sexuality', the majority of the learners stated:

*Linda:* "It is what you feel towards the opposite sex and your sexual hormones."

*Faith:* "It will be different types of gender."

*Thabo:* "Two genders. Both male and female."

*Dyllan:* "I suppose it's like what type of people you go for, I suppose."

*Brenda:* "Man and woman."

*Britney:* "Sex. Male and female."

Throughout the interviews, these young people acknowledged situations in which they overheard or encountered explicit discrimination and harassment against learners who are or are perceived to be non-heterosexual. They provided me with personal experiences. I mention some of the instances these learners could recall:

*Nomsa (Female):* "As we stand in a group like if I was talking to one of my friends (male) it would just happen that I was talking to him (a gay male learner) and they would be like why are you talking to a man ... or are you talking to a man or a woman?"

*Britney (Female):* "There is this one girl, Bonny ... she is a very nice girl ... they call her like Bennie. Because people stereotype they will think that she is a lesbian ... it is because she does not do anything to herself, does not look after herself."



*Lesiba (Male):* “Some will be swearing at them or calling them names and making fun of them like you are gay and do you bend and like such names.”

*Dyllan (Male):* “... because I know many of my friends they always like they would say, no I hate gay people, it’s a disease.”

*Brenda (Female):* “A guy friend of mine was in this school. He is called names like hurting. He looks much happier now (in his new school). I don’t think he gets bullied anymore. He is very shy after everything that has happened.”

There was no mention of physical harassment, but verbal harassment and victimisation were suggested in all of the responses. Learners have hardly any or no knowledge or understanding of what sexuality and gender entails. All 11 of the learners I interviewed spoke about the silence relating to homosexuality in their classroom and school environment. Of the 11 learners, 10 suggested that no teaching and learning takes place on the subject of sexuality and gender education, and none could recall it being mentioned in any of their textbooks or learning material. These young people also acknowledged that they do not have a great deal of knowledge about sexual and gender diversity and that they want to know and learn more about it. Three of the learners acknowledged that they have spoken about sex in the classroom. When I asked them whether they were ever taught about sexuality and gender in school, Vele stated:

*Vele (Male):* “So far no, but we do talk about sexuality and sex, Sir. But when it comes to lesbian and gay no.”

Since the learners claim that they are not taught about sexuality and gender in school during formal lessons and discussions, I asked them where they obtain their current knowledge regarding sexuality and gender. Some learners answered that they obtain their information from friends, parents and the internet. Most of these young people rely on the hidden or informal curriculum as a source of information, since it is not addressed in the school’s formal curriculum.

*Lesiba (Male):* “I’d say the main source where I got my knowledge about it would be my school friends which are actually gay, lesbian and bisexual and that is where you ask questions, you are curious.”

*Kate (Female):* “They (high school learners) get it from their friends. They discuss it amongst themselves. If learners have a good relationship with their family they can go to them and they will

*discuss it together. The media also plays a big role. Many learners learn about LGBT from the media. Some will also go google it.”*

*Dyllan (Male): “I think where I learned most of the stuff from is like friends and people that go and talk about that stuff. And then you ask them what is that and then they tell you ... sometimes I overhear one of my friends saying things and then like I listen and then I ask them are you serious and then they say ja and then other times like I search certain things like on google I would search something related to whatever I was thinking of. And then I would get results from there.”*

*Nomsa (Female): “Like for example we (herself with her parents) would be watching TV and something comes up and we start talking about.”*

Britney was the only learner to mention that sexuality was discussed in the classroom. It is worth noting the context in which the discussion was initiated. I want to emphasise the words from Britney’s narrative: “Satanism”, “AIDS”, “People who do not believe in anything”, and “right and wrong”. This comment from Britney also suggested a connotation between heterosexuality being seen and normalised, compared to non-heterosexuality.

*Henry: “Why would you say the learners will be scared in the beginning of such a discussion?”*

*Britney (Female): “Because some of the learners will not see it as normal. For example if we talk about AIDS and sex all the kids are like ... because it is not something that is talked about every day. Then it just feels a bit weird talking about ... It was in a Life Orientation class and we actually spoke about Satanism and such things and then we got to the point of speaking about people that don’t believe in anything. It eventually got to the point where we spoke about what people perceive as right and wrong and whether homosexuality is right or wrong.”*

It was also evident that a stigma is attached to sexuality and gender and the performance of the allocated gender. Ignorance, gender binary and stereotyping were also obvious. This was explicitly mentioned by seven of the eleven learners. For example, when I asked Linda what she understood by the term ‘homophobia’, she replied:

*Linda (Female): “Homophobia is like bisexual and transgender and when a guy dresses like a girl and the other way around. It’s like my cousin*

*that lives in New-Zealand. She is a lesbian and she is the butch one of the two. So yes, that is what I understand.”*

Thabo also spoke of his confusion concerning the origins of sexuality:

*Thabo (Male): “It’s just like gay people. Like why did you choose that? How did you become that?”*

When specifically examining these heterosexual learners’ reactions to sexual minorities, 10 of the learners expressed how they perceive homosexuality and what a ‘gay’ person should be and act like. Gay and lesbian learners were compared to the majority being heterosexual. A gender was allocated to them and they were expected to obey the gender binary of being either male and acting in a masculine manner, or female and acting in a feminine manner. This was particularly evident among the male students where hetero- and gender patriarchy was enforced. Gay was interpreted as a ‘boy’ wanting to be or act like a girl. Masculinity and femininity were thus indicators of a person’s sexuality. It appears that Linda objects to these individuals performing their sexuality, which they explain as either very feminine or very masculine. In her narrative she refers to her cousin being very “girlish” and that she believes that it is not his fault that he ( her cousin) is a “meisie.

*Linda (Female): “My cousin which is still very small ... stays in Durban and has been very ‘moffierig’ (faggot in English) since he was very small. He never plays with my brother and always with me and my sister ... he is very girlish. My mom used to say ... we are going to visit your ‘moffie’ cousin. I don’t think it is his fault to be a” meisie”(girl).*

The majority of the learners had a perception of what a gay person is; for example, the way in which s/he looks, acts, dresses, and his/her mannerisms. The great majority of the learners expressed this stigma. Dyllan and Kate, for example, link homosexuality with a gender representation that openly flaunts dominant notions of dress, performance, emotions, and identity. This also suggests that social demand makes it difficult to accept a gay male friend, as in the case of Dyllan who has a gay friend, because he does not look gay. There was great confusion between what gender is and what sexuality is, as is evident in the following narratives by Dyllan and Kate:

*Henry: “How do you feel about homosexual people in school?”*

*Dyllan (Male): "I feel ok with them. It's their choice or whatever. If they want to be gay they can be gay but as long as they don't try to make a move on me then it's fine."*

*Henry: "Do you have any gay friends?"*

*Dyllan (Male): "I know one person that I know for sure is gay. He even told me and I'm still friends with him ... I didn't know he was gay because he didn't look like he was gay. He is not a person that, you know, shows his emotions and stuff. It's hard to tell that he was gay."*

*Henry: "What is your perception of, and what do you understand about LGBT?"*

*Kate (Female): "For the girls it means that a lesbian is like a boy. They will totally exclude you (the class) because you aren't supposed to be like that and that you are giving the girls a bad name. The boys feel the same about gay guys and when you look or are perceived as "poeperig" (feminine) you are giving guys a bad name."*

Learners support the 'ideal' of equality. These young people did not understand the principles thereof. There is thus a difference between 'knowing' and 'understanding' equality. The majority of the learners responded that everyone should be treated equally. However, later in the interviews, they showed strong opinions in favour of inequality. Linda was critical of lesbian and gay people. She argued that they must do their thing beyond the school. She also expressed concerns about lesbian and gay people not behaving according to gender norms.

*Henry: "Do you believe in equality and that all people should be treated the same?"*

*Linda (Female): "I do believe that all people are human beings and should not be treated like animals. They have the same feelings that we do."*

It is worth noting that she believes that everyone should be treated equally and that all people are "human beings". The fact that she is referring to "them" also illustrates that there is an already set marginalisation between "us" and "them". However, later in the interview, Linda referred to a girl with whom she became friends, but she then found out that she was lesbian. She describes her feelings and the situation as follows:

*Linda (Female): "There was this matric (grade 12) girl in my school which was a friend ... I would never have thought that she would be a*

*lesbian until I saw her with another girl cuddling at school. It wasn't really weird or funny but was a bit disgusting. I think this is because they sat on the school field where they kissed and stuff. It made everyone feel uncomfortable."*

I asked Linda whether she would have felt the same if it were a boy and a girl. She responded by saying:

*Linda (Female): "I think so because it is normal to see a guy and a girl together. It's like seeing a father and a mother together."*

Linda perceives "boys and girls" as "normal", thus normalising heterosexuality. When moving more specifically into the area of sexual equality, the majority of the learners still mentioned that everyone should be treated equally, except one male learner, Thabo. He was also against any form other than his own gender or sexuality. He said from the start how he felt about equality. He does not believe that everyone should be treated equally. When Thabo was asked about equality and whether he feels everyone should be treated equally, he responded by saying:

*Thabo (Male): "In my opinion I don't think so ... it is just the way we have been brought up. Like sometimes boys are treated higher than girls. That's just the way we were brought up. It is already engraved in our minds ... Boys are always stronger than girls and it is not right for girls to succeed ... straight people should be treated better."*

Thabo's traditional and conservative culture places high constraints on gender and sexual hierarchy, making the performance of homosexuality difficult. Male learners, in particular, deride and vilify those boys who do not demonstrate dominant forms of masculinity. It was thus found that these high school learners have had negative attitudes towards, and experiences of LGBT issues, due to a lack of knowledge causing heteronormativity and heterosexism. Not all is dim, however. While these learners' narratives seem negative towards non-heterosexual people, some of the learners suggested that people should simply accept LGBT people for who they are and let them be. Some of the learners were genuinely concerned about the harassment of homosexual friends and family members.

#### *4.1.2 Teaching and learning of sexual and gender diversity*

The learners suggested that there is no teaching and learning of sexual and gender diversity in their school. None of the learners could recall this topic being included in any formal lesson

or class discussion, and have never come across the topic in any of their school textbooks. These young people are curious and seek answers to their questions on their own. In this instance, the informal curriculum played an integral role.

In general, the learners seemed to support the teaching and learning of sexual and gender diversity, with all learners indicating that they are against the discrimination of homosexuals, even though some of these learners showed heteronormative and heterosexist attitudes earlier in their interviews. These young people are receptive to learning about sexuality and gender, and understand the need for support mechanisms. All 11 of the learners reported that they are curious and eager to learn about sexuality. I asked the learners why they would like to learn about sexuality and gender in school. They answered because they are interested in the topic or would like to understand it better, so that they can help their gay and lesbian friends or family members. The following narratives support this statement:

*Kate (Female):* “I would like to learn about different types of genders and how other people feel about it and how they became gays. I just love experiencing it.”

*Nomsa (Female):* “It will be good sir because you know some people don’t understand, like why they become gay and lesbians so it will be insightful those that do not understand that and don’t have gay or lesbian friends.”

Britney reported her experience. This suggests that learners are starting to think deeper and critically question sexuality and gender discrimination. This was a discussion between her and her gay friend:

*Britney (Female):* “It is like the other day when my friend and I – he is gay – sat in the English class and there was this picture of a brain illustrating all of the things that people think of. There was a part where the book indicated attraction to the opposite sex and he felt discriminated against because he does not have any attraction towards the opposite sex.”

*Henry:* “How did you feel about it?”

*Britney (Female):* “I agree with him because there are many people that are sensitive towards the subject.”

*Henry:* “How did your friend show that he wasn’t happy about this?”

*Britney (Female): "He just asked me if I saw that. I did not know what he was talking about. I only realised what he spoke about when he showed me. For me it is so normal but for him it wasn't right. He then said that it will be better if they said attraction to other people. They should have used different vocabulary."*

They do believe that their family upbringing plays a role in their knowledge and perception of LGBT. Some discussions took place in their homes. The 'learning' about sexuality and gender was, however, neither positive nor constructive.

*Henry: "Where did you get your information about LGBT?"*

*John (Male): "I know it from some series that I used to watch. My parents and family are not racist in anyway so for me watching such stuff was just OK. They would have not minded but there are just some stuff asking your parents are not really ... comfortable."*

*Kate (Female): "Well, I was brought up in a home that we don't really talk about things (sexual diversity) like this."*

These young people made some positive remarks. Some learners revealed that they recognised some type of development either within a person, group or particular situation. Some learners described such instances in the present study. It was noted that some of the learners' views on LGBT and society, culture and religion are changing. Four of the participants described changes to the dynamics in their families of origin as a result of ongoing exposure to sexual minority issues.

*Britney (Female): "I think my family and family background and the way I was brought up makes a difference in how I perceive things. My family is also fine with it and see it as normal. My cousin is gay ... we see it as normal ... other families would be, look there is a guy holding hands with another guy and then their children will also think that it is wrong."*

Learners also spoke of a broader social shift and growing acceptance of homosexuality among the youth. This stems from a growing exposure to, and awareness of diverse sexuality. Only two learners mentioned religion and whether it has/should have an impact on the learners' attitudes towards sexual and gender diversity. Some of the learners talked specifically about changing times and the different views of the older generation on homosexuality. Increasing visibility of same-sex relationships in popular media and culture have helped shift society's attitudes. One participant described the perceived hypocrisy of the

larger religious systems in general. Britney rejects arguments that religion should influence homophobic attitudes, by stating that there are also other “sins” mentioned in the Bible. She views this as double standards:

*Henry:* “Would you say that your family background and religion influence the way you perceive sexuality?”

*Britney (Female):* “Like for many people, we have spoken about it many times. Like with Adam and Eve but then again in the Bible times there were also things that were not right and now people think it is OK and normal. It is like drinking alcohol and smoking. In those days it was wrong but now it is something that everyone is doing.”

*Vele (Male):* “... we should all treat these people in the same way and we should all leave it like that, Sir. So they must never mind who is the gay and who is the lesbian. They must just let the people who they are and just support them and treat them equally.”

The learners’ exposure to discrimination and victimisation of a person close to them makes the learners want to learn more about sexuality and gender.

Learners showed compassion towards LGBT learners and disagreed on the way in which they are treated, even though heteronormative attitudes were suggested initially. All of the learners reported to have either or both a lesbian/gay family member or friend who is treated ‘unfairly’. Upon my once mentioning the issue and prompting more questions from it, their true opinion on non-heterosexual people became clear. All eleven of the participants mentioned that they have a ‘gay’ friend or family member and reported how they disapprove of the way in which their friend or family members are treated. Some learners described situations where generally heterosexual individuals sent specific signals of acceptance or rejection of sexual minority behaviours:

*Henry:* “Have you ever had an experience where someone has been either physically or verbally abused because of their sexuality?”

*Thabo (Male):* “I have a gay cousin. At family meetings they insult him like saying why do you like men and why do you want that if you could have this and they will insult him. They didn’t want to pay for his university fees because he is gay ... they don’t want to pay for his University fees because he is gay and wants to become a chef.”



The learners showed their willingness and eagerness towards the teaching and learning of LGBT and are in the process of developing a critical consciousness concerning sexuality and gender issues.

In the next section, I shall discuss the learners' lack of knowledge about sexuality and gender and the role this plays in their attitudes not only towards their general perception of sexuality and gender, but also towards the teaching and learning thereof.

#### *4.1.3 Silent school cultures normalising heterosexuality*

Learners suggested that they perceive their school to be homophobic. When asked why they view their school as homophobic, their reason was that nobody talks about it. I mention some examples of such narratives:

*Henry:* "Do you see your school to be homophobic?"

*Kate (Female):* "Yes definitely because learners will immediately feel disgusted about such people. I see the people in the school also as homophobic. People don't really talk about it. When it comes to this topic people are very touchy and everyone tries to refrain from the topic as if it is a disease."

*Britney (Female):* "I don't see my school as homophobic because there are a few learners that are out. Nobody does anything about it and it's treated like everyone else as normal. There will be one or two of the boys that if they see two boys holding hands or something, will bully them or so. But I can't say that it is the norm of the school. Most of the teachers do not even know about the learners' sexuality. The learners aren't really comfortable sharing this information because they believe they will be judged."

*Henry:* "Do you think there is a space in the school for LGBT learners to come out or get support?"

*Dyllan (Male):* "I don't think so. No, because there's no-one really to talk about it, it seems. Well, there's like no general discussion about it."

None of the learners interviewed was aware of a school policy or guideline that could assist and support a learner coming out or that speaks to tolerance and acceptance of sexual diversity. In addition, none of the learners could say whether anything would be done if a learner should report an incident of harassment and/or discrimination due to his/her sexuality

or gender. Britney refers to the school's strict gender regime. Valentine balls in South African schools are usually associated with heterosexual partnerships. She reported that the school promoted a culture of heteronormativity and heterosexuality, discriminating against non-heterosexual couples:

*Britney (Female): "I do think that there are times which there are discriminated against them. Like for example, twice a year we have school balls. Once a Valentine's ball and then a mask ball. Then you get a single or a double ticket. Single tickets are for people that go alone and double tickets for couples. The problem is that when you have double tickets you need to go with a person of the opposite sex. We are told that that is the rule. For example, once me and a friend wanted to buy double tickets as if we were each other's dates, because it is cheaper. We were told it is not allowed because we are from the same sex. I don't think that is nice because what if there are two people from the same sex that are in love and wants to go to the Valentine's ball together then they must buy single tickets. Nobody ever complains about it because they are scared and don't want to talk to the teachers or say something."*

Ten out of the 11 learners suggested that the teaching and learning of sexual and gender diversity would make a difference in how learners perceive non-heterosexuality. Only one learner believed that teaching about sexual and gender diversity would not help, but he still wanted to learn and know more:

*Thabo (Male): "Even though you feel that it is not fair because a group of people against you can't, you can't fight them so ... you say this they say that so ... they are going to win even though whether it fair or unfair."*

*Henry: "If I had to ask you as an individual, not in a group or what other people say, would you like to learn about LGBT?"*

*Thabo (Male): "I would like to learn about it yeah."*

*Henry: "Why is that?"*

*Thabo (Male): "To know more on how to help them. Why did they choose that instead of that? Maybe not in front of people, because see, people will start asking why is he gay because why is he asking about it or is he looking for a partner or stuff like that. But alone yes."*

*Linda (Female): "I do think so because then you will see it from a different perspective. But because we have not learned about it, the first thing we would think is that it is wrong. I think that if we learned more about it in school we would feel differently about it."*

*Dyllan: "It's interesting to learn about many people, they hear about it vaguely and get the wrong idea, so that if they learn about it, then they would probably have a much better understanding and probably even more acceptance then."*

#### *4.1.4 Conclusion*

In this chapter, I presented the findings from my data collected. In the next chapter, I shall justify the findings by means of analysis and discussion.

## **CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I reported the findings of the study. I shall now analyse these findings.

It is important to note that, in the design of this study, I intended to explore high school learners' attitudes towards, and experiences of the teaching of LGBT content. The findings in the previous chapter clearly indicate that no teaching and learning took place in their school; the participating learners could not recall sexual and gender diversity being included in any textbook and learning material, and consequently they could not elaborate or discuss any content-related issues. The learners thus spoke in general terms and, in most instances, referred to LGBT and their feelings towards non-heterosexuality.

In essence, this study sought to answer three research questions, which were motivated by my interest in wishing to understand and explore the opinions and experiences of high school learners, regardless of their sexual orientation, as far as LGBT in their school is concerned; how these attitudes manifest both in, and beyond the school, and how these contribute to a school culture of heteronormativity and heterosexism. I shall now indicate how each research question was addressed by the findings in the previous chapter.

#### **Research questions and context**

I present this analysis in order to answer the following three research questions that guide and frame my study in order to better understand and explore the learners' attitudes towards sexuality and gender education at high-school level:

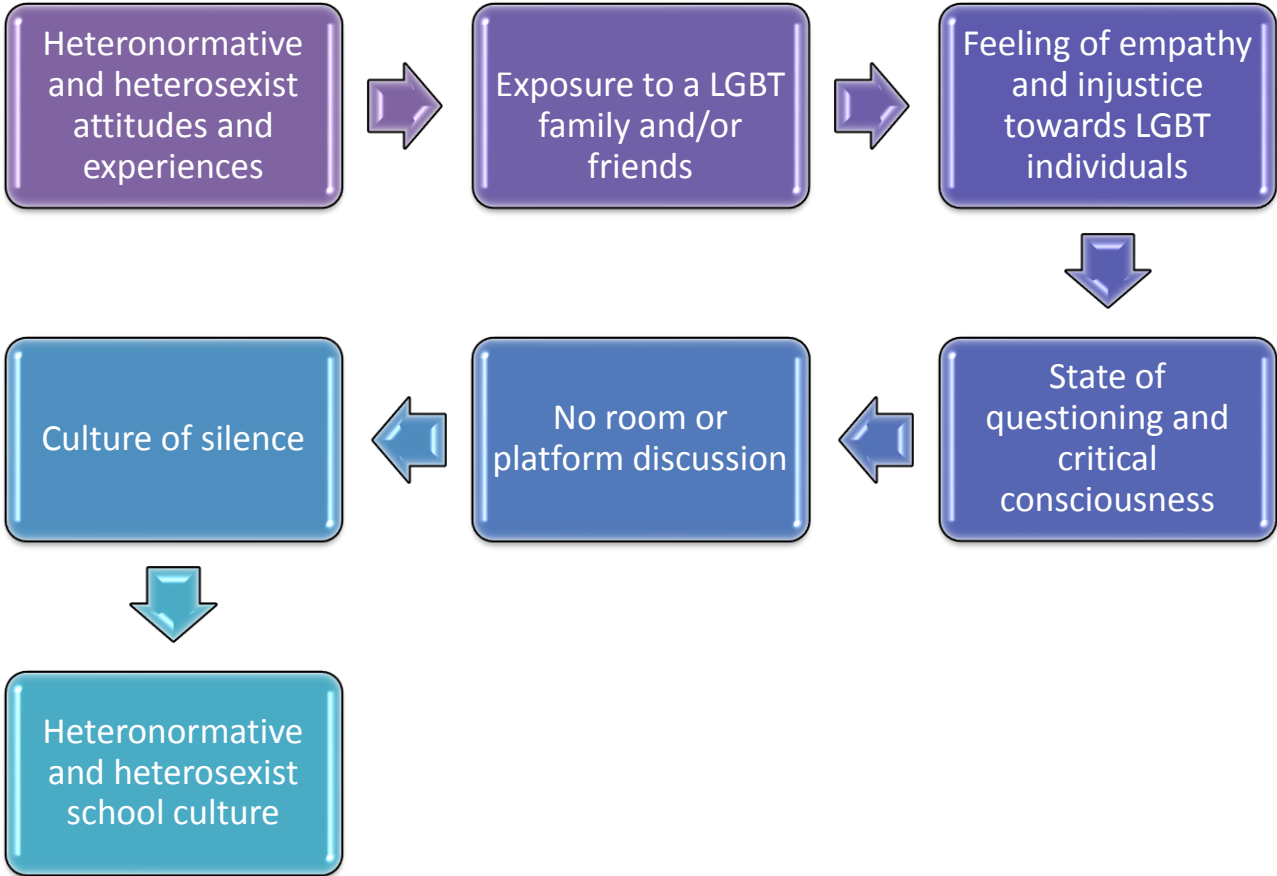
1. What are high school learners' attitudes towards, and experiences of the teaching and learning of sexual and gender diversity?
2. How do these attitudes and experiences manifest in, and beyond the school?
3. How do these attitudes and experiences contribute to a heteronormative and heterosexist school culture?

I have replicated the following table highlighting the themes that emerged during the data-analysis process. These will help me answer the three critical questions guiding my study.

Heteronormativity and heterosexism: stigma and lack of knowledge
Teaching and learning of sexual and gender diversity
Silent school cultures normalising heterosexuality

5.1.1 Conceptual framework

I used the following flow chart as conceptual framework to help me make meaning of the data collected in the previous chapter and answer my three critical questions. I shall first explain the components of the framework. Thereafter, I shall point out the findings of past research in both South African and international literature.



**Figure 1: Flow chart conceptualizing the data collected**

It is suggested (as illustrated in the flow chart above) that high school learners have heteronormative and heterosexist attitudes towards sexual and gender diversity and experience heteronormativity and heterosexism at, and beyond the school such as name-calling, verbal assaults and labelling. It is also suggested that sexual and gender diversity is

not taught at school, and consequently, that their knowledge of/about sexual and gender diversity is either non-existent or very limited. Due to this lack of knowledge, certain assumptions are made about sexuality and gender, leading to ignorance and stereotyping. These assumptions and stereotyping of a person's gender have a major perceived influence on the classification of a person's sexuality. It was found that discrimination was based more on a person's 'perceived' gender than on his/her sexuality. One-on-one exposure to LGBT individuals such as family and friends led to a change in attitude towards, and a general curiosity of sexual and gender diversity among these young people. This type of exposure leads learners to realise the injustice and empathy that motivate the learning of sexual and gender issues in school. This leads to a critical consciousness. This 'need' to learn implicates that the learners are seeking answers and are not finding them in the formal school curriculum. Consequently, they ask and find the answers in the informal or 'hidden' curriculum. This manifests in learners posing questions to teachers; however, due to their own religious values and morals, teachers do not make use of these question opportunities to create a platform for dialogue and discussion. The findings suggest that there is a general silence concerning sexuality and gender. Not only is the silence maintained by a lack of interventions or support programmes, but it is also promoting heterosexuality as the norm through social and cultural events organised by the school. It is suggested that the teaching and learning of sexuality and gender, and providing learners with the knowledge about sexuality and gender result in their attitudes being more open and accepting to LGBT.

### *5.1.2 Discussion*

#### *5.1.2.1 Heteronormativity and heterosexism: Stigma and lack of knowledge*

I realised that the learners found it difficult to articulate the terms and concepts associated with sexuality and gender, and that their understanding was very limited. Francis (2012) and Francis (2016) also found that the majority of young people seem to find it difficult to articulate and explain the words 'gay' and 'lesbian'. As stated in the previous chapter, all of the 11 learners reported that they do not have the knowledge regarding sexual and gender diversity, since no teaching and learning is taking place at school.

Bhana (2014) states that secondary school learners are not only well versed in the language of human rights, but they are also supportive of the democratic ideals of equality and freedom. In terms of the interviews conducted in this study, I agree with Bhana's statement in that the learners are supportive and believe in equality. The statement that learners are well versed in

the language of human rights did not apply in the case of these learners. The learners showed a poor understanding of basic concepts such as sexuality and social justice. This indicated a lack or no knowledge of sexual and gender diversity. It is also obvious that they all remembered hearing or experiencing name-calling or an attitude of negativity or judgement towards LGBT learners. In this study, derogatory language, verbal harassment and exclusion were evident and consistent with research, both in South Africa and elsewhere, suggesting that verbal harassment is rife in the school context and that homophobic attitudes remain strong in schools ( Bhana, 2014). This supports my findings in that there is thus a deep-rooted culture of heteronormativity and heterosexism which is normalised by the negative attitudes of the learners and the school. As with all other forms of oppression, heterosexism is based on the prejudice and assumption that heterosexuality is the only natural, ‘normal’, acceptable sexual orientation (Griffin *et al.*, 2007).

As a result, societal and organizational institutions are designed to award privileges and benefits to members of the dominant group (heterosexuals) at the expense of members of the oppressed and minority group (LGBT). The learner’s concern with the two lesbians ‘cuddling’ at school is simply an example of attempts to hide or silence homosexuality in schools. Linda is also generalising when she states that it made “everyone” uncomfortable and she is expressing her heteronormative and heterosexist attitude, even though she is unaware and ignorant thereof. She is thus not only speaking for her own heteronormative and heterosexist perspective, but she also speaks on behalf of the heterosexual majority.

When asked how the learners react around and towards people of different sexualities to theirs, there were various responses. The majority of the learners stated that people do not treat them differently and view them as ‘normal’. As with equality, the way in which they perceive ‘differently’ is not necessarily accurate. The fact that these learners are saying that LGBT learners are not treated badly is “ignorant”, as is clear from their contradicting statements: from how LGBT learners are discriminated against in their statements at the start of the interviews and then later by them saying that people will not treat “them” differently. It appears that the objection was more about the performance of sexuality than an individual’s sexual orientation. Some learners suggested that homosexuality should be a private issue, because it makes people “uncomfortable”, thus making non-heterosexuality invisible and easier to ignore and marginalise.

Heteronormative constructional processes of compulsory heterosexual male subjects are followed by rejection of femininity and homosexuality, often through openly heteronormative and heterosexist attitudes, discourses and behaviours such as in Dyllan's remark: "I am ok with gays as long as they don't make a pass on me", creating a stigma concerning sexuality. Such pedagogical and curricular processes both produce and feed heteronormativity and heterosexism. For them, the "other" mainly becomes gender and, in order for them to deserve masculine and heterosexual identities, they must behave according to the set of norms and gender binary set by the majority. Learners may be urged to present themselves as something or someone else in order to be treated like the other 'normal' learners. As such, they can be urged to put on attitudes devoted to making them view a person of the same gender as equal and even accept them as a friend. These non-heterosexual learners may even take on the "willingness" to imitate behaviour or attitudes assigned to heterosexuals in order to be regarded as 'normal'. As suggested from the narratives of the interviewed learners, there are thus negative effects and consequences for learners "coming out" and revealing their sexuality. This was evident from Linda's response in which she explained how her friend revealed that she is gay and how people judged her and stated their disparagement on social media.

Such practices not only compel boys and girls to display 'appropriate' behaviour, but also marginalize and stigmatize same-sex desires. Expressions of normative sexuality, such as a heterosexual couple holding hands, are often tolerated in certain schooling contexts, whereas behaviour from a homosexual couple is viewed as unsuitable (Bhana, 2014). In a heteronormative school context, same-sex attracted youth may be stigmatized, as their feelings conflict with the strongly held and widely dispelled normative expectations of appropriate gendered sexuality (D'Augelli *et al.*, 1998). Stigma does not only have to be visible or known to others to be distressing, nor does it have to be incorporated into one's identity (Goffman, 1963). The lack of knowledge and teaching, without discourse and dialogue, results in ignorance and prejudice.

I wish to emphasise three words from Thabo's response to the question of equality: "*higher, stronger and better*". Thabo was showing the power hierarchy of both gender and sexuality. Patriarchal behaviour by both students and staff is one of the many overt and covert ways in which homophobia and heterosexism are maintained (Francis & Msibi, 2011). This participant made it clear how he feels about equality. Not only does he answer the question about sexual diversity, but he also includes gender. Thabo has a strong heterosexist and



heteronormative attitude due to his cultural and social upbringing. Msibi (2012) states that deeply entrenched ideas of patriarchy, in conjunction with ignorance, have rendered queer learners in South Africa invisible. Morrell (2003) also stated that, in patriarchal societies, dominance and competency are viewed as key markers of masculinity. Thabo even goes so far as to say that this is who he is. It is part of him. He views his way as the right and only way. This sets heterosexuality as the norm, thereby stigmatizing and isolating those perceived to be “deviant”. It gives power and privileges to some groups in society, while leaving others powerless and more prone to abuse and discrimination, and making LGBT invisible and silent (Francis & Msibi, 2011). Schools are highly charged sexual arenas in which hierarchies of domination and subordination are played out. Within a hetero-patriarchal society, femininity is associated with subordination and men/boys who display feminine or homosexual characteristics or behaviours are often regarded as presenting an abnormal or lesser form of masculinity and are, therefore, regulated in the position of “the other”. This gender patriarchy forces those learners, who do not conform to the “norm”, to follow the dominant group’s ideology, even if it means pretending to fit into the space in which they find themselves and in order to survive in a “straight” environment. This was particularly the case with the male learners being interviewed. These attitudes reinforce a culture of heteronormativity, heterosexism and gender subordination with woman/gender – nonconforming persons/gay men discursively positioned as inferior to “real” men – that is those men who are viewed as masculine, dominant, and heterosexual (Frosh, Phoenix, & Pattman, 2002).

The gay males who were referred to and ridiculed suggested the way in which masculinity and compulsory heterosexuality combine to create a notion of ‘real men’. Labelling a male learner as gay can thus be read as calling into question his position in the patriarchal social hierarchy, associating boys with supposedly ‘girlish’ behaviours. Pressure is exerted on boys to behave in line with strict gender roles set by the oppressors. This was also evident from the narratives of some of the female learners who were supposed to be feminine and they were not. They were thus classified as being ‘butch’ and ‘lesbian’. It was also suggested that there is an association between gay identities and feminine characteristics. International research also shows that social pressures related to being a ‘real man’ involve ongoing attempts to prove masculinity (Bhana, 2014).

The male learners’ manhood thus has to be proved and maintained, not only in the discussion of LGBT in the classroom, but also as to what they wear, how they talk and simply being too

effeminate. They need to be and act 'normal'. As soon as any non-heterosexual male learner manifests his true sexuality, he is immediately rejected. As with the responses from the learners, "they will not be bullied or harassed, but they must be put 'there', creating a safe distance between the 'us' and 'them'", this leads to the marginalisation of the 'gay' and the 'straight' groups. Males expressing their manhood may also be a reason why the guys are more heteronormative and heterosexist compared to the girls. Evidence from the female learners' side indicates their heteronormative and heterosexist behaviour and attitudes.

Boys who do not meet the social construction of what it means to be 'a man' are subjected to greater violence and discrimination. Richardson (2006) found that same-sex erotic relationships are ignored on condition that those involved conform to the dominant gender norms, fulfil their customary obligations, reject 'gay' and 'lesbian' identities, and do not flaunt their same-sex practices. Many learners noted that they are happy to accept homosexual learners in their school; they also expressed their concerns about sexuality being publicly 'flaunted'. Like other participants, Dyllan established a certain 'norm' regarding LGBT. The fear of being perceived as gay dominates the cultural definition of manhood. Richardson (2009) supports this view in that heterosexual boys might avoid developing emotional closeness with same-sex friends for fear of being labelled homosexual. This was also one of the reasons why the male learners did not want to have class discussions, for fear of being viewed as gay, if they participate in such dialogue. They are aware of the consequences of being labelled homosexual in the schooling context.

#### *5.1.2.2 Teaching and learning of sexual and gender diversity*

Even though these young people are receptive to the teaching and learning of sexual and gender diversity, their understanding of sexuality and gender remains embedded in notions of stigma in that gay learners are expected to respect the dominant status of heterosexuals, and to behave according to the 'rules' such as not touching or hugging other people of the same sex. It appears that this made the learners "uncomfortable". Despite the willingness to accept some homosexual people, these participants were adamant about setting clear limits, a view often stemming from stereotype and stigma such as gay boys wanting to be girls.

Bhana (2014) notes that religion is typically the strongest predictor of negative attitudes towards homosexuality. She also states that some of the learners' understanding of sexuality is rooted in religion. International research indicates that individuals who are more attracted to religious institutions express higher levels of heteronormativity (Olson, Cadge & Harrison,

2006). Acknowledging the fact that my study is on a much smaller scale than that of Olson *et al.* (2006), religion did not seem to be one of the determining factors in their attitudes towards sexual and gender diversity.

#### *5.1.2.3 Silent school cultures normalising heterosexuality*

Schools are important socializing institutions, in which learners find it difficult to define themselves in relation to others and, in particular, their peers. Because sexuality and gender become increasingly central to identity and social relationships as far as the youth is concerned, schools are critical social contexts in which dominant beliefs about sexuality are played out. Schools often mirror the wider structure of society, including the norms and behaviours of acceptable sexuality (Epstein & Johnson, 1998). In schools, as in the wider culture, heterosexuality is often assumed and institutionally enforced through rituals, daily interactions between students and teachers, and the curriculum (Stein, 2005). This insight provided by the learners furthers my understanding of how schools reinforce strongly embedded heteronormative patterns that marginalize individuals who deviate from hegemonic forms of sexuality.

Heterosexual privilege, the social construction of gender difference, and gender inequality are interwoven and intersecting phenomena (Stein, 2005). According to Bhana (2014), schools are highly charged sexual arenas, in which hierarchy of domination is played out. Linda's example of the Valentine's ball supports South African research (Bhana, 2008), which found that school activities are heteronormative and heterosexist. Exclusion of the 'other' is a significant point when considering cultures of discrimination in schools. One way of understanding school-based homophobia may, therefore, be constant pressure on male learners to make visible their normative masculinity.

Some learners noted that no action will be taken if people report homophobic attacks. Others mentioned that the school will act on such claims. Any interventions against or advocating heteronormativity and heterosexism have been silenced. No action is taken to make or rather assist teachers, especially LO teachers, in teaching and discussing sexual diversity in classrooms. The school also promotes heteronormativity and heterosexism in the sense of not allowing learners of the same sex to go to a school event such as the Valentine's ball. When the school itself organises activities and rituals that promote heteronormativity, such as a Valentine's ball, heteronormativity may be institutionally legitimate and enforced. The role the school plays in this process of change should also be noted. The other point was that the

learners perceived their school as being homophobic. Learners mentioned that the reason for this is due to the fact that there is a silence and that sexuality is being silenced. These ‘silent’ classrooms create places that place tight constraints on gender and sexual hierarchies.

Learners contribute actively to sustain these discriminatory environments by reproducing notions of heterosexual domination. Some learners reported severe harassment towards learners who are or are perceived to be LGBT. In addition, the learners did not view the use of language and derogatory name-calling as being homophobic. Heterosexist jokes and name-calling create a powerful hetero-regulatory device in silencing normalisation and marginalisation. The role of both the school and the teachers is to act as agents towards change against oppression against the “other”, or against those who are perceived as not being ‘normal’. They do, however, need to realise and fulfil this role. They also need to recognise their importance in combatting heteronormative and heterosexist bullying and discrimination, and realise their privileged position in advocating the change. They need to realise the consequences of the ‘silence’ they are creating by not addressing or ignoring teaching and facilitating dialogue on sexual diversity.

### *5.1.3 Conclusion*

In this chapter, I discussed my findings and justified the data by means of a flow chart.

## **CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter presented the analysis of the findings. In this chapter, I shall provide implications for policy, practice and future research, as well as the limitations of the study.

This study aimed to explore high school learners' attitudes towards, and experiences of the teaching and learning of LGBT content in a South African co-education school. The focus of my study was directed by three critical questions.

1. What are high school learners' attitudes towards, and experiences of the teaching of LGBT content?
2. How do these attitudes and experiences manifest in, and beyond the classroom?
3. What is the impact of these attitudes and experiences on the creation of a safe, silent, positive and queer school culture?

#### *6.1.1 Implications for policy, practice and future research*

##### *6.1.1.1 Implications for policy*

From the results of this study, I would propose that the school where the study was conducted as well as other high schools invest time in creating policies for safe classrooms and for classrooms where discussions can raise consciousness on sexual and gender diversity. Schools can set and implement a no-tolerance policy, which explicitly states that no discrimination against the sexual minority will be tolerated. This will also emphasize the school's stance and raise awareness (Francis, 2016). These anti-discriminatory policies can be included and advocated in the school's rules and regulations. By creating and implementing such policies as well as anti-bullying policies and initiatives, schools are publicly acknowledging their commitment to the safety and inclusion of all learners.

##### *6.1.1.2 Implications for practice*

It is recommended that school management promote and teachers create a safe space for dialogue and discussion to take place, to develop and implement support programmes and interventions as well as conscience-raising initiatives that promote equality as well as sexual and gender diversity.

Teachers should also be trained to create a learning environment where stereotypes are challenged. The educator should establish a classroom climate, sensitive to sexual orientation, among other diversity issues.

#### *6.1.1.3 Implications for future research*

There are many unanswered questions as far as issues of heteronormative and heterosexist school cultures are concerned. These continue to confront children with atypical gender behaviour. Future research should build on the findings of the current study and endeavour to clarify some of the remaining issues. Although this study only examined and explored high school learners' attitudes towards, and experiences of sexual and gender diversity in one high school in one of the nine provinces of South Africa, I would propose that more studies be done among learners of all sexualities to explore their attitudes and experiences through both quantitative and qualitative research in order to better reflect South African high school learners' attitudes towards, and experiences of sexual and gender diversity. I would also suggest that such study include teachers and the senior management team.

#### *6.1.2 Limitations*

The findings of my study are restricted to a small sample of only 11 Grade 10 learners in the same co-educational school in a suburb in the Gauteng province of South Africa.

I have addressed only the learners' perceptions of the teaching of sexual and gender diversity and not the perceptions of other stakeholders such as teachers, parents or school management.

I should make it clear that I have intentionally not asked the learners about their sexual orientation. Their sexuality was not explored, but only their attitudes towards learners of other sexualities and/or gender.

There was also a language barrier, as I am only fluent in Afrikaans and English, two of the 11 national languages of South Africa. I was able to conduct the interviews in Afrikaans and English, but the remainder of the learners had to answer in English which, in most instances, is not their home language, even though they take English as their home language in school. This may have caused misunderstanding and confusion of the terms and concepts used in this study.

One of the most inherent limitations was seeking depth instead of breadth in the research, as is the norm with qualitative research. The sample size was limited to a small group of high school boys and girls; the results of this study can, therefore, not be generalized.

### *6.1.3 Conclusion*

In this dissertation, I answered the three critical questions that guided my study. I sought to explore high school learners' attitudes towards, and experiences of the teaching and learning of LGBT content in a South African co-ed school. I also explored the understanding and perception of sexuality and gender among the learners being interviewed. It was significant to note that I could not determine their attitudes towards, and experiences of LGBT content, as none of the learners being interviewed have ever experienced formal teaching and learning of sexuality and gender issues or recall it being mentioned in any of their textbooks. For that reason, the general attitudes towards, and experiences of sexuality and gender were explored. From the interviews it was suggested that, due to a lack of knowledge regarding sexuality and gender, there were certain stereotyping and stigmas of people of different sexuality as the 'norm' or majority. My findings indicate that there is a school culture of heteronormativity and heterosexism, due to a general silence and ignorance as far as sexual and gender issues are concerned.

However, given the heteronormative and heterosexist attitudes and experiences of the learners interviewed, in conjunction with the silent school culture, it was noted that there is strong evidence of advocacy for equality and social justice. A critical consciousness of gender and sexuality is present and developed among the high school learners interviewed. Learners are asking questions and are inquisitive about sexual and gender diversity. Learners showed sincere empathy towards family members and friends who are LGBT and strongly disapprove of the way in which this minority group is treated.

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## Appendix A: Consent Form for Participants

**Researcher: Mr H. J. Nichols**  
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-----  
**Study Leader: Prof. D. Francis**  
**T: +27 (0) 51 401 9922**  
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### INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Learner

We would like to invite you to take part in the research project titled: *High School Learners' Attitudes towards, and Experiences of the Teaching of LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) Content in a South African Co-Ed School.*

This study is about the attitudes and experiences of high school learners in respect of the teaching of LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) content during their time in high school.

We would like you to participate with us in this research as you adhere to the criteria of being a Grade 10 learner at the high school at which the study will be conducted.

The reason why we are conducting this study is to gain insight into how high school learners feel towards and experience the teaching of LGBT content; how these attitudes and experiences show or are manifested in, and beyond the classroom, and how these may impact on the creation of a homophobic or anti-homophobic school culture.

The potential risk in your taking part in this study of in-depth interviews would be that there might be questions with which you, as the participant, may not feel comfortable, or would not like to discuss.

In order to protect you from this risk, an experienced educator, who is also the researcher, will be assigned to facilitate the interviews and will guide the process in order to identify any discomfort and provide the assistance that you may need. Should you choose to take part, and an issue or question arises which makes you uncomfortable, you may terminate your participation at any time, with no further repercussions. The interviews will take place at your school.

Confidentiality will be safeguarded by asking you, the learner, to choose an alias name.

I am sure that you will benefit from this study, through which your voice, perspectives and opinions will be heard regarding the teaching of LGBT content. Your opinion will be combined with that of other participants, and this information will lead to a better understanding of LGBT in the schooling context.

While I greatly appreciate your participation in this important study and the valuable contribution you can make, your participation is entirely voluntary and you are under no obligation to take part in this study.

Should you have any questions about the study or need clarification, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher. Should you experience any discomfort or unhappiness with the way in which the research is conducted, please feel free to contact my study supervisor (indicated above).

Should any difficult personal issues arise during the course of this research, I shall endeavour that a qualified expert (being the school counsellor) be contacted and assist you confidentially.

Yours sincerely,

---

Please fill in and return this page. Keep the letter above for future reference.

Study: High school learners' attitudes towards, and experiences of the teaching of LGBT content in a South African co-ed school

Researcher: Mr. H. J. Nichols

Name and Surname of participant/learner:

---

Contact number of participant/learner:

---

- I hereby give free and informed consent to participate in the above research study.
- I understand what the study is about and what the risks and benefits are.
- I give the researcher permission to make use of the data gathered from my participation, subject to the stipulations s/he has indicated in the above letter.

Signature: -----

Date: -----



The following questions will be asked during the individual interviews:

### Interview Schedule

1. Could you please provide me with some detail about yourself such as your age, gender, and grade, and how you experience school?
2. In your own words, what do you understand by the terms ‘diversity’ and ‘social justice’?
3. Do you think that all people, for example people of different race, gender, and sexuality, should be treated equally? Give me some examples as to why you say so.
4. What is your definition of sexuality? Where do you think you obtained that definition or perception?
5. Where do you get information regarding sexual diversity and, in particular, sexuality?
6. What are your feelings towards people who are homosexual or of a different sexual orientation than what you are? Do you show these feelings? If so, how?
7. Do you ever get taught about sexual diversity in class by your teacher? If you do, how does the teacher approach the teaching thereof? If not, why do you think the teacher does not teach it?
8. How do you feel about the inclusion of content on sexual diversity in your Life Orientation textbook? Do you perceive it as educational and constructive? How so?
9. Would you like to learn about sexual diversity? Provide a reason for your answer.
10. How do you react if the topic of sexuality is addressed in class?
11. Do you know the term ‘homophobia’ or ‘homophobic’? Do you perceive yourself and your school to be homophobic? Provide a reason and example, if possible.
12. Do you believe your perspective or opinions on homosexuality would change if you discussed these issues in class? Why do you say so?

## Appendix B: Consent Form for Parent/Legal Guardian

**Researcher: Mr H. J. Nichols**  
**T: +27 (0) 61 206 9469**  
**E-mail: henryjamesnichols@gmail.com**

-----  
**Study Leader: Prof. D. Francis**  
**T: +27 (0) 51 401 9922**  
**E-mail: Francisd@ufs.ac.za**

### **INFORMED CONSENT**

Dear Parent/Guardian

We would like to invite your child to take part in the research project titled:

*High School Learners' Attitudes towards, and Experiences of the Teaching of LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) Content in a South African Co-Ed School.*

This study is about the attitudes and experiences of high school learners in respect of the teaching of LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) content during their time in high school.

We would like your child to participate with us in this research as s/he adheres to the criteria of being a Grade 10 learner at the high school at which the study will be conducted..

The reason why we are conducting this study is to gain insight into how high school learners feel towards and experience the teaching of LGBT content; how these attitudes and experiences show or are manifested in, and beyond the classroom, and how these may impact on the creation of a homophobic or anti-homophobic school culture.

The potential risk for your child in taking part in this study of in-depth interviews would be that there might be questions with which s/he, as participant, may not feel comfortable, or would not like to discuss.

In order to protect him/her from this risk, an experienced educator, who is also the researcher, will be assigned to facilitate the interviews and will guide the process in order to identify any discomfort and provide assistance that may be needed. Should your son/daughter choose to take part, and an issue or question arises which makes him/her uncomfortable, s/he may terminate his/her participation at any time stop, with no further repercussions. The interviews will take place after school hours at the participating school which your child is attending.

Confidentiality will be safeguarded by asking the participating learner to choose an alias name.

I am sure that the learners will benefit from this study, through which their voice will be heard regarding the teaching of LGBT content. Their opinions will be combined with that of other participants and this information will lead to a better understanding of LGBT in the schooling context.

While I greatly appreciate your son's/daughter's participation in this important study and the valuable contribution s/he can make, his/her participation is entirely voluntary and s/he is under no obligation to take part in this study.

Should you have any questions about the study or need clarification, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher. Should your son/daughter experience any discomfort or unhappiness with the way in which the research is conducted, please feel free to contact my study supervisor (indicated above).

Should any difficult personal issues arise during the course of this research, I shall endeavour that a qualified expert (being the school counsellor) be contacted and assist your child confidentially.

Yours sincerely,

Please fill in and return this page. Keep the letter above for future reference

Study: High School Learners' Attitudes towards, and Experiences of the Teaching of LGBT content in a South African Co-Ed School

Researcher: Mr. H. J. Nichols

Name and Surname of parent/ guardian:

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Name of participating learner:

---

Contact number of parent/guardian:

---

- I hereby give free and informed consent for my child to participate in the above research study.
- I understand what the study is about and what the risks and benefits are for my child.
- I give the researcher permission to make use of the data gathered from the participation of my child, subject to the stipulations s/he has indicated in the above letter.

Signature: -----

Date: -----

The following questions will be asked during the individual interviews:

### Interview Schedule

1. Could you please provide me with some detail about yourself such as your age, gender, and grade, and how you experience school?
2. In your own words, what do you understand by the terms ‘diversity’ and ‘social justice’?
3. Do you think that all people, for example people of different race, gender, and sexuality, should be treated equally? Give me some examples as to why you say so.
4. What is your definition of sexuality? Where do you think you obtained that definition or perception?
5. Where do you get information regarding sexual diversity and, in particular, sexuality?
6. What are your feelings towards people who are homosexual or of a different sexual orientation than what you are? Do you show these feelings? If so, how?
7. Do you ever get taught about sexual diversity in class by your teacher? If you do, how does the teacher approach the teaching thereof? If not, why do you think the teacher does not teach it?
8. How do you feel about the inclusion of content on sexual diversity in your Life Orientation textbook? Do you perceive it as educational and constructive? How so?
9. Would you like to learn about sexual diversity? Provide a reason for your answer.
10. How do you react if the topic of sexuality is addressed in class?
11. Do you know the term ‘homophobia’ or ‘homophobic’? Do you perceive yourself and your school to be homophobic? Provide a reason and example, if possible.
12. Do you believe your perspective or opinions on homosexuality would change if you discussed these issues in class? Why do you say so?

## Appendix C: Consent form for Principal and Senior Top Management

**Researcher: Mr H. J. Nichols**  
**T: +27 (0) 61 206 9469**  
**E-mail: henryjamesnichols@gmail.com**

-----  
**Study Leader: Prof. D. Francis**  
**T: +27 (0) 51 401 9922**  
**E-mail: Francisd@ufs.ac.za**

### **INFORMED CONSENT**

Dear Principal and Senior Top Management

We would like to invite you to take part in the research project titled:

*High School Learners' Attitudes towards, and Experiences of the Teaching of LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) Content in a South African Co-Ed School.*

This study is about the attitude and experiences of high school learners in respect of the teaching of LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) content during their time in high school.

We would like your school's learners to participate with us in this research as they adhere to the criteria of being Grade 10 learners at a South African Co-Ed high school at which the study will be conducted.

The reason for our conducting this study is to gain insight into how high school learners feel towards and experience the teaching of LGBT content; how these attitudes and experiences show or are manifested in, and beyond the classroom, and how these may impact on the creation of a homophobic or anti-homophobic school culture.

The potential risk for your learner in taking part in this study of in-depth interviews could be that there might be questions with which s/he, as participant, may not feel comfortable, or would not like to discuss.

In order to protect him/her from this risk, an experienced educator, who is also the researcher, will be assigned to facilitate the interviews and will guide the process in order to identify any discomfort and provide assistance that may be needed. Should the learner choose to take part, and an issue or question arises which makes him/her uncomfortable, s/he may terminate his/her participation at any time, with no further repercussions.

Confidentiality will be safeguarded by asking the participating learner to choose an alias name. In addition, the school's name will never be exposed and will remain unknown.

I am sure that the learners and your school will greatly benefit from this study, through which the learners' voices will be heard regarding the teaching of LGBT content. Their opinions will be combined with those of other participants and this information will lead to a better understanding of LGBT in the schooling context.

While I greatly appreciate your learners' participation in this important study and the valuable contribution they can make, their participation is entirely voluntary and they are under no obligation to take part in this study.

Should you have any questions about the study or need clarification, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher. Should you experience any discomfort or unhappiness with the way in which the research is being conducted at your school or with any of the learners involved, please feel free to contact my study supervisor (indicated above).

Should any difficult personal issues arise during the course of this research, I shall endeavour that a qualified expert (being the school counsellor) be contacted and assist the participant confidentially.

Yours sincerely,

Please fill in and return this page. Keep the letter above for future reference

Study: High School Learners' Attitudes towards, and Experiences of the Teaching of LGBT content in a South African Co-Ed School

Researcher: Mr. H. J. Nichols

Name of school:

---

Name and Surname of the principal:

---

Contact number of the principal:

---

- I hereby give free and informed consent, allowing learners who wish to participate in the school which I'm heading, to participate in the above research study.
- I understand what the study is about and what the risks and benefits are for my learners.
- I give the researcher permission to make use of the data gathered from the participation of my learners, subject to the stipulations s/he has indicated in the above letter.

Signature: -----

Date: -----

The following questions will be asked during the individual interviews:

### Interview Schedule

1. Could you please provide me with some detail about yourself such as your age, gender, and grade, and how you experience school?
2. In your own words, what do you understand by the terms ‘diversity’ and ‘social justice’?
3. Do you think that all people, for example people of different race, gender, and sexuality, should be treated equally? Give me some examples as to why you say so.
4. What is your definition of sexuality? Where do you think you obtained that definition or perception?
5. Where do you get information regarding sexual diversity and, in particular, sexuality?
6. What are your feelings towards people who are homosexual or of a different sexual orientation than what you are? Do you show these feelings? If so, how?
7. Do you ever get taught about sexual diversity in class by your teacher? If you do, how does the teacher approach the teaching thereof? If not, why do you think the teacher does not teach it?
8. How do you feel about the inclusion of content on sexual diversity in your Life Orientation textbook? Do you perceive it as educational and constructive? How so?
9. Would you like to learn about sexual diversity? Provide a reason for your answer.
10. How do you react if the topic of sexuality is addressed in class?
11. Do you know the term ‘homophobia’ or ‘homophobic’? Do you perceive yourself and your school to be homophobic? Provide a reason and example, if possible.
12. Do you believe your perspective or opinions on homosexuality would change if you discussed these issues in class? Why do you say so?

## **Appendix D: Interview questions**

1. Could you please provide me with some detail about yourself such as your age, gender, and grade, and how you experience school?
2. In your own words, what do you understand by the terms ‘diversity’ and ‘social justice’?
3. Do you think that all people, for example people of different race, gender, and sexuality, should be treated equally? Give me some examples as to why you say so.
4. What is your definition of sexuality? Where do you think you obtained that definition or perception?
5. Where do you get information regarding sexual diversity and, in particular, sexuality?
6. What are your feelings towards people who are homosexual or of a different sexual orientation than what you are? Do you show these feelings? If so, how?
7. Do you ever get taught about sexual diversity in class by your teacher? If you do, how does the teacher approach the teaching thereof? If not, why do you think the teacher does not teach it?
8. How do you feel about the inclusion of content on sexual diversity in your Life Orientation textbook? Do you perceive it as educational and constructive? How so?
9. Would you like to learn about sexual diversity? Provide a reason for your answer.
10. How do you react if the topic of sexuality is addressed in class?
11. Do you know the term ‘homophobia’ or ‘homophobic’? Do you perceive yourself and your school to be homophobic? Provide a reason and example, if possible.
12. Do you believe your perspective or opinions on homosexuality would change if you discussed these issues in class? Why do you say so?



## Appendix E: Approval letter from ethical committee



Faculty of Education  
Ethics Office

Room 12  
Winkie Direko Building  
Faculty of Education  
University of the Free State  
P.O. Box 339  
Bloemfontein 9300  
South Africa

T: +27(0)51 401 9922  
F: +27(0)51 401 2010

www.ufs.ac.za  
BarclayA@ufs.ac.za

21 November 2014

### ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPLICATION:

*THE ATTITUDE AND EXPERIENCES OF HIGH SCHOOL LEARNERS ON THE TEACHING OF LGBT CONTENT IN A SOUTH AFRICAN CO-ED SCHOOL*

Dear H Nichols

With reference to your application for ethical clearance with the Faculty of Education, I am pleased to inform you on behalf of the Ethics Board of the faculty that you have been granted ethical clearance for your research.

Your ethical clearance number, to be used in all correspondence, is:

**UFS-EDU-2014-056**

This ethical clearance number is valid for research conducted for three years from issuance. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension in writing.

We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your research project be submitted in writing to the ethics office to ensure we are kept up to date with your progress and any ethical implications that may arise.

Thank you for submitting this proposal for ethical clearance and we wish you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Barclay  
Faculty Ethics Officer



## Appendix F: Approval letter from Gauteng Department of Education



### GAUTENG PROVINCE

Department: Education  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

For administrative use:  
Reference no: D2016 / 022

### GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	7 May 2015
Validity of Research Approval:	7 May 2015 to 2 October 2015
Name of Researcher:	Nichols H.J.
Address of Researcher:	63 Deo Faver Complex; Parsky Street; Anlinn; Pretoria; 0182
Telephone / Fax Number/s:	012 800 1141; 061 206 9469
Email address:	henryjamesnichols@gmail.com
Research Topic:	The attitude and experience of High School learners on the teaching of LGBT content in a South African Co-Ed school
Number and type of schools:	ONE Secondary School
District/s/HO	Tshwane North

#### **Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research**

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to the Principal, SGB and the relevant District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted. However participation is VOLUNTARY.

The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher has agreed to and may proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted:

#### ***CONDITIONS FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH IN GDE***

1. The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s concerned must be presented with a copy of this letter;
2. A copy of this letter must be forwarded to the school principal and the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB);

*Handwritten signature and date: 2015/05/08*

1

*Making education a societal priority*

#### **Office of the Director: Knowledge Management and Research**

9<sup>th</sup> Floor, 111 Commissioner Street, Johannesburg, 2001  
P.O. Box 7710, Johannesburg, 2000 Tel: (011) 355 0506  
Email: David.Makhado@gauteng.gov.za  
Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za