

**The influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youth's
perceptions of gender and sexual diversity**

by

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DECLARATION

I, Tercia Botha, declare that:

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- (ii) This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
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Signed T.Botha

Date 14 September 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND DEDICATION

God has blessed me with the opportunity and wisdom to achieve this degree, and I am so grateful for his giving me the strength to overcome all obstacles in my path.

I would like to thank my advisor and mentor, Dr Henry James Nichols, who played a pivotal role in getting me to this point. Without his support and guidance, I would not have been able to accomplish this professional and personal goal.

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ABSTRACT

In recent times, South Africans have started to acknowledge and support counter-normative celebrities; celebrated Gay Pride Parades in cities such as Johannesburg and Cape Town; watched same-sex relationships on popular soap operas such as “Generations”; listened to music from counter-normative performers within the music industry and elected gay and lesbian members in the South African parliament. Role models such as celebrities, parents, teachers, and peers influence the attitudes and behaviours of teenagers and school youth. This can determine what kind of person they become, including their appearance, attitudes, gender and sexual diversity, and goals in life. A key aspect of identity development is the media, specifically social media, and television; hence, there is increasing concern that the youth learn more about gender and sexual diversity outside schools than in the formal curriculum. It is not surprising that the school youth are bound to look at LGBTQ celebrities in the media, in order to form their perceptions based on gender and sexual diversity.

This research study explores the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youth’s perceptions of gender and sexual diversity. Using a case study methodology, semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven Grade 10 high-school learners studying at a co-ed high school in the Free State province of South Africa. Findings reveal that exposure to LGBTQ celebrities does influence their perceptions of gender and sexual diversity; the high-school learners expressed a need to be taught about gender and sexual diversity for their peers and teachers to have a better understanding; they revealed that they educate themselves on social media and learn more about gender and sexual diversity outside the schoolyard rather than in the formal curriculum; religion, culture and their parents also played a role in their perceptions of gender and sexual diversity.

While the data is clear evidence of the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on their perceptions of gender and sexual diversity, it also revealed that the school youth realised the importance of being taught about gender and sexual diversity in the school system and they expressed a need to be taught for a better understanding.

I conclude by calling on UMALUSI; the Department of Education; the Independent Examinations Board, and the South African Comprehensive Assessment Institute officials and inspectors of schools to pay regular visits to schools to ensure that the codes of conduct and policies are implemented thoroughly according to the South African Schools Act of 1996, the South African Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.

OPSOMMING

Onlangs het Suid-Afrikaners begin om teen-normatiewe bekendes te erken en te ondersteun; het Gay Pride-parades in stede soos Johannesburg en Kaapstad gevier; selfdegeslagverhoudings op gewilde sepies soos “Generations” gekyk; na musiek van teen-normatiewe kunstenaars in die musiekbedryf geluister en gay en lesbiese lede in die Suid-Afrikaanse parlement verkies. Rolmodelle soos bekendes, ouers, onderwysers en maats beïnvloed die houdings en gedrag van tieners en skooljeug. Dit kan bepaal watter mens hulle word, insluitend hul voorkoms, houdings, geslag en seksuele diversiteit en doelwitte in die lewe. ‘n Sleutelaspek van identiteitsontwikkeling is die media, spesifiek sosiale media, en televisie. Daarom is daar toenemende kommer dat die jeug meer oor geslag en seksuele diversiteit buite skole leer as in die formele kurrikulum. Dit is nie verbasend dat die skooljeug verplig is om na LGBTQ-bekendes in die media te kyk om hul persepsies op grond van geslag en seksuele diversiteit te vorm nie.

Hierdie navorsingstudie ondersoek die invloed van LGBTQ-bekendes op skooljeug se persepsies van geslag en seksuele diversiteit. Deur gebruik te maak van ‘n gevallestudie metodologie, is semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude gevoer met sewe Graad 10 hoërskoolleerders wat aan ‘n gemengde hoërskool in die Vrystaatse provinsie van Suid-Afrika studeer. Bevindinge toon dat blootstelling aan LGBTQ-bekendes wel ‘n invloed het op hul persepsies van geslag en seksuele diversiteit; die hoërskoolleerders het ‘n behoefte uitgespreek om oor geslag en seksuele diversiteit geleer te word sodat hul maats en onderwysers ‘n beter begrip kan hê; hulle het onthul dat hulle hulself op sosiale media opvoed en meer leer oor geslag en seksuele diversiteit buite die skoolterrein as in die formele kurrikulum; godsdiens, kultuur en hul ouers het ook ‘n rol gespeel in hul persepsies van geslag en seksuele diversiteit.

Terwyl die data duidelike bewyse toon van die invloed van LGBTQ-bekendes op hul persepsies van geslag en seksuele diversiteit, het dit ook aan die lig gebring dat die skooljeug besef het hoe belangrik dit is om oor geslag en seksuele diversiteit in die skoolkurrikulum geleer te word en hulle het ‘n behoefte uitgespreek om meer daarvoor te leer vir beter begrip.

Ek sluit af deur ‘n beroep op UMALUSI te doen; die Departement van Onderwys; die Onafhanklike Eksamenraad en die Suid-Afrikaanse Omvattende Assesseringsinstituut amptenare en inspekteurs van skole om gereelde besoeke aan skole te bring om te verseker dat die gedragskode en beleidsdokumente deeglik geïmplementeer word volgens die Suid-Afrikaanse Skolewet van 1996; die Suid-Afrikaanse Grondwet en die Handves van Menseregte.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration	2
Acknowledgement and Dedication.....	3
Abstract	4
Opsomming.....	5
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	6
<i>LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES:</i>	9
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	10
1.1 Introduction.....	10
1.2 Background of the study.....	11
1.3 Problem statement.....	13
1.4 Rationale.....	14
1.5 Theoretical framework.....	15
1.6 Research questions.....	16
1.7 Research aim.....	17
1.8 Objectives of the study	17
1.9 Overview of Research design and methodology.....	17
1.10 Definition of key concepts.....	18
1.11 Organization of chapters.....	22
1.12 Conclusion.....	23
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	24
2.1 Introduction.....	24
2.2 Queering LGBTQ celebrities' influence on school youths' perceptions of gender and sexual diversity.....	24
2.3 Social media and Queer media as an influence on school youth's perception of gender and sexual diversity.....	26
2.4 The voice and experiences of school youth concerning gender and	

sexual diversity.....	28
2.5 Critically queering education.....	29
2.6 Gender and sexual diversity policies: South African schools.....	31
2.7 Theoretical framework underpinning this study.....	32
2.7.1 Introduction.....	32
2.7.2 Queer theory.....	33
2.8 Conclusion.....	36
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....	37
3.1 Introduction.....	37
3.2 Research Paradigm.....	37
3.3 Research Approach.....	38
3.4 Research Design.....	38
3.4.1 Case study.....	38
3.4.2 Strengths of Case Study.....	39
3.5 Sampling.....	39
3.5.1 Random sampling.....	39
3.5.2 Convenience sampling.....	39
3.5.3 Sample size.....	40
3.6 Data collection procedures.....	40
3.7 Method of data analysis.....	42
3.7.1 Background and demographic of learners at school.....	42
3.7.2 Thematic Analysis.....	42
3.8 Trustworthiness and Credibility.....	44
3.8.1 Credibility.....	44
3.9 Ethical Considerations.....	44
3.9.1 Ethical clearance	45
3.9.2 Permission to conduct the study.....	45

3.9.3 Right to informed consent.....	45
3.9.4 Right to anonymity and confidentiality.....	45
3.9.5 Conclusion	46
CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION.....	47
4.1 Introduction: Data Findings.....	47
4.1.1 Impact of culture, religion and parental influences on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity.....	48
4.1.2 Social Media: Educational platform on school youths' perceptions of LGBTQ celebrities.....	55
4.1.3 Influence of LGBTQ celebrities: The impact on school youths' perceptions of gender and sexual diversity.....	59
4.1.4 Queering education: school youth expressed need to be taught about gender and sexual diversity	62
4.1.5 Paradox versus Policy versus Practice: Chapter 2 Bill of Rights in South Africa and SASA 1996 “Non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.” Silent school culture and school environment brings forward a paradox	64
4.1.6 Conclusion.....	66
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION.....	67
5.1 Introduction.....	67
5.2 Summary of research.....	67
5.3 Summary of Research findings and discussion.....	69
5.4 Recommendations.....	71
5.5 Limitations.....	71
5.6 Conclusion.....	72
REFERENCES.....	74

APPENDICES.....	90
Appendix A: Consent Form for Participants.....	90
Appendix B: Consent Form for Parent/Legal Guardian.....	95
Appendix C: Child Assent Form.....	100
Appendix D: Consent from Principal.....	103
Appendix E: Interview questions.....	104
Appendix F: Letter from School Counsellor.....	105
Appendix G: Approval letter from ethical committee	106

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Table 1: Demographic of learners.....	42
Table 2: Themes	48

CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

In recent years, South Africa's school system has grappled with gender and sexual diversity education in greater depth (Reygan, 2019). This assertion is sanctioned by the South African Republic's Constitution of 1996 (DoJ, 1996), the South African Schools Act, No. 84 of 1996 (DoJ, 1996) (SASA), and the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (DBE, 2011). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) school youth continue to experience heteronormativity, heterosexism, homophobic abuse, bullying, and discrimination, which jeopardises their emotional well-being and educational opportunities (Franics, 2017a; Msibi, 2012; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019). According to Pieterse (2019), educators are unwilling to address sexuality and gender diversity concerns. According to Mayeza and Vincent (2019), educators are hesitant to promote inclusive and secure learning environments because they believe that doing so would undermine society's moral compass. This concept presents a contradiction. Mathenge and Owusu (2017) discovered that despite the fact that homosexuality is not universally accepted, society's general attitude towards it has become more positive in tandem with the growing acceptability of various sexual orientations.

Croteau and Hoynes (2014) contend that the media, primarily social media and broadcasting, play a crucial role in identity formation. Consequently, there is growing concern that youth learn more about their identity outside of the classroom than in the formal curriculum. It is crucial to acknowledge that education, life lessons and cultural norms of youths in school are mostly acquired utilising social learning in their immediate environment, including their family, school, friends, and community. According to Onwuegbuzi, Collins, and Frels (2013), the cultural background and social belief systems have an impact on the development of an individual. Cultural norms may be acquired from your immediate environment, but they are susceptible to change and development throughout time, being passed on from one generation to the next (Creanza, Kolodny & Feldman 2017).

In a similar vein, a recent study conducted by Nichols (2021) found that South African schoolchildren support the teaching and learning of "Queerness" and "Other" concepts. This contradicts current literature.

Although research has been done on the lack of teaching gender and sexual diversity in the formal curriculum, to my knowledge no single study was conducted on the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity, shedding light on the main focus of my study and indicating a gap in literature.

This chapter is focused on the study's context., the problem statement, and the rationale for this research. It also presents the research questions, the aim of the study, and the objectives. The focus includes a brief discussion of the theoretical framework and an overview of the research design and methodology. The chapter also discusses ethical considerations and delimitations and concludes with an outline of subsequent chapters.

1.2 Background of the study

In recent times, South Africans have started to acknowledge and support counter-normative celebrities such as Somizi Mhlongo; celebrated Gay Pride Parades in cities such as Johannesburg and Cape Town; witnessed same-sex relationships on renowned recurrent operas such as "Generations"; listened to music from counter-normative performers within the music industry, and elected gay and lesbian members in the South African parliament such as the DA's Zakhele Mbhele, who became the continent's first openly gay black parliamentarian. President Zuma appointed the continent's first openly lesbian Cabinet Minister, Lynne Brown (DeBarros, 2014; Smith, 2014).

Along with the growth and rapid changes in South Africa, however, there is increasing concern over the safety of LGBTQ individuals. Even though society's general attitude has become more positive, drawing on the ground-breaking survey conducted by Sutherland *et al.* (2016) of what all South Africans think about homosexuality and gender conformity

, calculated estimates suggest that 450,000 South Africans have physically assaulted women who dressed and acted like males in public, and approximately 700,000 have verbally abused (taunted) gender non-conforming individuals (HSRC, 2016:22). Francis, (2017b) asserts, not only have such changes in South Africa concerning the safety of LGBTQ individuals broadened the conversation in society, but they have also made their way into the Life Orientation (LO) classroom. LO was introduced as a subject in the late 1990s (DoE, 2011; 2002), and it is a suitable subject that draws attention to sexual diversity (Francis & DePalma, 2015; Potgieter & Reygan, 2012; Wilmot & Naidoo, 2018).

Despite South Africa's constitutional allegiance to gender and sexuality equality, which set the tone for what must occur in schools, as well as educational policies mandated by the South African Schools Act, No. 84 (DoE, 1996; 2000; 2002; 2011), there is a lack of

inclusivity related to gender and sexuality diversity in schools. Furthermore, there is a current discussion on the safety of sexual diversity among students in heterosexual schools in light of a 17-year-old learner's headmaster who nicknamed him a "pervert" and said he "looked homosexual"? The learner committed suicide (Lalbahadur, 2018). In the same vein, Ngubane (2018) discovered that two girls in schools had been expelled for "kissing each other."

Bhana (2012:314) concurs, by indicating that "most teachers...strongly disapproved of homosexuality on the grounds of the Christian religion". Similarly, Pieterse (2019) found that teachers fear addressing sexual and gender diversity issues. In his article on gender studies, Nichols (2021:100) points out that, "although not always acknowledged, schools contribute significantly to the psychosocial development of young people". Fine and McClelland (2006:327), supports this notion and indicates that school youth spend 30% of their day in school, making classrooms "exactly the places where youth can engage in safe, critical dialogue about bodies, sexuality, and relationships...as a human right." In this case, "all young people can acquire the skills of critical inquiry and democratic participation."

Gender and sexuality diversity is conceptualised through normalised notions of heteronormativity not only in South African schools, but also in United Kingdom schools. The concept of gender and sexuality diversity is often viewed or framed in a way that assumes heterosexuality as the norm, and this perspective is not limited to one specific country South Africa but is also observed in schools in the United Kingdom. This suggests that these schools may not fully recognize or accommodate the full spectrum of gender and sexual identities, instead favoring a more traditional or mainstream perspective.

A recent study by Bradlow, Bartram, Guasp and Jadva (2017) provides evidence of this notion. The absence of education on gender and sexuality diversity topics among the school youth has received considerable critical attention, indicating the importance of the media in representing LGBTQ identities. The importance of the media representing LGBTQ celebrities and identities amplifies the lack of LGBTQ education presented to those emerging as queer (Bradford, DeWitt, Decker, Berg, Spencer & Ross, 2019).

There is consensus among scholars such as Bradford *et al.* (2019) as well as Woods and Hardman (2021). According to Woods and Hardman (2021), queer media plays an important role in educating and validating emerging LGBTQ people.

Evidently, in an article by Woods and Hardman (2021), this is depicted in the following narrative:

'It's somewhat comforting to observe individuals who share the same sentiments and identify somewhat differently in terms of gender and sexuality.'
(Harry). (p.5).

Moreover, some added that portrayals of homosexuality in the media may cultivate acceptance among heterosexuals:

'People would change their perceptions of people who were LGBTQ and hopefully people then would stop bullying or being homophobic, which would be, ideal' (Elsie). (p.5).

These narratives stress the importance of LGBTQ celebrities and media representation to educate the school youth about sexual and gender diversity. The book *Celebrities share their coming out stories* had a thoughtful and similar review as the aforementioned review. Sarah Walters argues that it is essential for any young person, despite his or her sexuality, to perpetually follow his or her heart (McDermid, Davis, Kimber, Duffy, Burston, Harvey, Arnold & Stoke, 2013). Such books can help stop homophobic, heterosexist, and transphobic bullying, as well as name-calling, labelling, and non-conforming gender expressions in schools, shedding light on the main focus of this study – the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity.

Although LGBTQ awareness has clearly grown to be more obtrusive in the media, it is thus important to note that the battle of society to be more conscious and mindful of non-normative and non-heterosexual individuals is far from over. I have had the opportunity to teach learners from various backgrounds and sexual orientations. In my experience as a teacher, I personally saw how LGBTQ learners have been bullied and victimised to such an extent that their peers place labels on them such as "there is the gay guy, or look, that girl is a lesbian she is going to hell". Even though I have experienced such incidences, I can also verify with great delight that in one of the subjects that I teach – Design Studies, to Grade 12 learners, the topic for this year's Year Project (Practical Project) is 'Challenging Stereotypes' and most of my learners have chosen LGBTQ as the stereotype they are challenging. I find it fascinating and view this as a beacon of hope.

1.3 Problem statement

It is not surprising that the school youth are bound to look at LGBTQ celebrities in the media, in order to form their perceptions based on gender and sexual diversity. According to GLADD (2005; 2019), in the 2005 television season, compared to 2019, just over two percent of characters identified as LGBTQ.

DePalma and Francis (2014) argue that the issue of gender and sexual diversity in the official school curriculum, particularly in the Life Orientation subject, is inadequately addressed in schools.. The assertion will be justified in Chapter 2. In the same vein, Nichols (2020) states that the youth get their information from the informal curriculum and not from the formal curriculum, since there is a prevalent lack of discussion regarding gender and sexual diversity issues in schools. In consensus with this assertion, Francis (2019b) points out that pupils with same-sex sexual orientations need to hide and remain quiet, in order to shield themselves from harm, due to the constant abuse in and around their learning spaces. This reflects a clear message of exclusion, which directly relates to my research topic: the impact of LGBTQ celebrities on how young people in schools perceive gender and sexual diversity. It is evident that some students hide their true selves and experience a sense of unwelcomeness, which influences their ability to form their own perspectives on this matter. South Africa's Constitution provides safeguard and reassurance for a variety of sexual orientations, but discrimination persists despite this. Mayeza and Vincent (2019) found that teachers often exhibit reluctance in creating safe and inclusive learning environments. Their hesitance stems from the concern that such efforts might be perceived as a challenge to societal moral values.

Considering this, one may ask the question: What is the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity.

1.4 Rationale

The motivation to conduct this study emanates from the fact that, pertaining to the field of scholarship, international and South African literature discusses LGBTQ celebrities and their influence, however there is a lack of research on school youths' perceptions of gender and sexual diversity particularly in relation to the influence of LGBTQ celebrities . The influence of celebrities and celebrity idolisation have been of significant research interest over the past decade (Brooks, 2018). Previous research has focused on adverse psychological effects (Sansone & Sansone, 2014), cognitive impairments and social challenges related to exorbitant celebrity worship (Houran, Navik & Zerussen, 2005). Few empirical studies examine the influence of LGBTQ media representations on adolescent audiences, as well as the role of gender and sexual diversity in adolescents' responses to these narratives.

There is a considerable gap in much of the literature that assesses gender and sexual diversity in schools; therefore, various international and local scholars have uttered the need for the gender binary system to be disrupted. These scholars also explored media

representations of gender-diverse individuals (Ngo & Kwon, 2015; Francis, 2014; Ray, 2014).

Rather than depicting the same questions from numerous studies conducted in the field of gender and sexuality studies on the impact of LGBTQ education on learners, this research frames the influence and perception of school youth of LGBTQ celebrities.

In particular, the field of gender diversity studies will benefit from this thesis' contribution to the small body of existing knowledge. The influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youth is not yet clear. This indicates a need to understand the various perceptions of LGBTQ celebrities among the youth. As the intent of my research is to obtain a deeper understanding of the discussed research problem, this is essentially an exploratory study.

1.5 Theoretical framework

The primary theoretical lens used is queer theory to explore the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity. Queer theory queers against what is 'normal'. It acknowledges the contentions of queer advocates (Butler, 1990; De Lauretis, 1991; Sedgwick, 1990), that gender and sexualities are performed behaviours because the fundamental nature or identity they appear to express is constructed and maintained by social, political, and cultural means. Similarly, according to Leonard (2020), our society has been conditioned to see the normative and a gender and sexual binary system as either male (masculine) or female (feminine), and heterosexual ('straight').

In their recent study, Nichols and Brown (2021) pointed out that a queer theoretical lens is significant, considering the foregrounded literature that presents the South African schooling system as heterosexist and heteronormative. In addition, Nichols and Brown (2021:630) point out that "queer theory aims at deconstructing the deep-seated power social structures where heterosexuality is the only acceptable expression simultaneously producing diverse sexual orientations as normal and a living reality throughout its social ecologies. After all, inclusive education of diverse sexual orientations is to prepare young people for an inclusive society."

This theory provides a framework for comprehending how queering social norms affects school youth's views of gender and sexual diversity. In consensus with the aforementioned scholars, Muthukrishna (2008) states that, in the South African education system, queer

theory ultimately produces an understanding of systemic oppression, how it works, how it is sustained, and how it can be contested.

Rothmann and Simmonds (2015) argue that, if schools are located in intolerant societies, these beliefs govern how sexuality and gender diversity are perceived. In addition, they emphasise the fact that institutions are microcosms of society at large, wherein the values of that society are transmitted, reinforced, and perpetuated within the school culture.

Literature studied by Francis (2019b) contends that schools are heterosexist and heteronormative spaces that privilege heterosexual youth (as the norm), positioning queer youth as “the other”. Nichols (2020) agrees with this assertion, he argues that that schools should be environments where coercive and gender-based practices are tolerated, and in certain cases, even disregarded. . In relation to this study, the school youth are queering their gender and sexual diversities. They seek answers and find it in the informal curriculum, on platforms such as social media and queer media, where they encounter LGBTQ celebrities.

There are many different critical theories, but queer theory is best suited for this study. It questions and queers the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youth’s perceptions of gender and sexual diversity. Queer theory aims to question whether LGBTQ celebrities do influence school youth or not.

1.6 Research questions

To address the research problem, the following research questions were established.

1.6.1 Primary research question

What is the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youth’s perceptions of gender and sexual diversity?

1.6.2 Secondary research questions

1. What are the perceptions among school youth of LGBTQ celebrities?
2. What influence do the LGBTQ celebrities have on school youth’s perceptions of gender and sexual diversity?
3. How do these perceptions and influence manifest in the lives of the school youth, within and outside the schoolyard?

1.7 Research aim

The study aims to explore the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity.

1.8 Objectives of the study

To explore what perceptions the school youth have of LGBTQ celebrities and discover what influence the LGBTQ celebrities have on school youth. I also wish to determine how these perceptions and influence manifest in the lives of the school youth, within and outside the schoolyard.

1.9 Overview of the research approach and design

The interpretative paradigm guided the study's focus. Golafshani (2003) contends that research paradigms are the lenses through which we view knowledge or comprehension. Dudovskiy (2018) points out that this paradigm interprets feelings and perceptions from the participant's point of view. This paradigm thus allowed me to capture and interpret school youth's unique feelings towards and perceptions of LGBTQ celebrities and enabled me to see the significance of LGBTQ celebrities in the lives of school youth. A qualitative approach was employed to explore school youth's perceptions towards LGBTQ celebrities. According to Kumar (2019), the qualitative approach seeks to describe and narrate the feelings, perceptions, and experiences of participants. Therefore, this approach was best suited for the study because it allowed me to describe the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity.

This study was an exploratory case study in one high school. Exploratory case study design was found suitable in this study because it was exploring a topic that has no pre-determined outcomes (Niewenhuis, 2016). In addition, Robert (2014) adds that a case study is used to acquire a real-world comprehension of the problem.

Both convenience and random sampling methods were used to select my participants. According to Etikan, Musa & Alkassim (2016), convenience sampling is used to select participants who are accessible and available. Grade 10 learners from a private high school in Kroonstad, the Free State were selected for their convenient geographic proximity. Eleven Grade 10 learners were used for random sampling. I placed a list with their names in an envelope and handed the envelope to the principal to select seven names. This ensured trustworthiness, validity, and credibility.

To gather information, semi-structured interviews have been used. From the selected learners, a total of eleven learners were interviewed. Semi-structured interviews enabled me to gain insight into the school youth's attitudes and reactions because they included open-ended questions that allowed me to ask probing questions (Maree, 2017; Widavsky & Hammer, 2018). I audio-recorded learners' answers to obtain a true record of the interviews. I also took field notes to supplement the recorded data (Tessier, 2012). Smith (2015) adds that semi-structured interviews help the respondents introduce issues the researcher may not have considered, thus allowing flexibility of coverage and the production of rich data.

I applied the thematic analysis model of Braun and Clarke (2006) to analyse the data. I first collected and organised the data, assigned codes to my data, searched for repeated patterns or themes in the codes, reviewed, and named themes. The advantage of using thematic analysis is that it is very flexible however, its flexibility can be regarded as a limitation since it allows a wide range of analytic options (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). However, I avoided a wide analysis by always reflecting on my research questions. A detailed methodology is provided in Chapter 3.

1.10 Definition of key concepts

For this study, the term LGBTQ is used to refer to non-heterosexual and cisgender identities. I use the word "queer" as a comprehensive designation including a diverse range of marginalised sexual identities. Further elaboration on this topic may be found in the Literature review by Jagose (1996). I have used the term LGBTQ since it accurately represents my participants, who self-identified as LGBT and queer. I refrain from using the acronym LGBTQ in some contexts when a more precise or alternative abbreviation is used. Throughout the study, I refrain from using the word 'homosexual' because of its potentially negative connotations, unless this term is used by the references cited in this work.

When a scholar's definition of a term is used, a citation is provided. The following terms are frequently used throughout the study and are defined according to scholarly definitions and how they are used in this study.

LGBTQ

LGBTQ is an abbreviation that is often used to denote persons and groups that identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and/or Questioning. It is important to note that LGBTQ is sometimes misused as a substitute for "non-heterosexual," which is an inaccurate assumption as it disregards the fact that transgender is not a sexual orientation but rather a gender identity.

Lesbian

Lesbian refers to a female who is attracted sexually, emotionally or romantically to other female-identified women, or transgender women (WHO, 2016).

Gay

Gay refers to a male who is attracted sexually, emotionally or romantically to other male-identified men or transgender men (WHO, 2016).

Bisexual

WHO (2016) defines bisexual as a person of any gender who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to males and females, as well as people with different sexual and gender identities.

Transgender/Trans

The American Psychological Association (APA) (2012) defines transgender as a person who changed sex organs to align with a choice of gender. According to WHO (2016), some transgender people choose to have surgery or hormone therapy to align their bodies with their gender identity.

Queer

This is an umbrella term used to refer to LGBTIQ persons (Long *et al.*, 2003). It can also be used to refer to anyone who rejects labels and classifications.

LGBTQ Celebrity

Guilbert, (2018:2) defines this term as “someone famous or found in popular media who is also proudly part of the LGBTQ+ community.”

Gender

Gender is defined as what a person, society, or legal system considers being female or male (Cameron & Kulick, 2003). Gender is said to be social in the sense that society determines what is appropriate masculine and feminine behaviour for those with male and female bodies (WHO, 2022). Thus, gender is not ‘natural’, but rather a social construct.

Gender identity

An individual's "deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth" (WHO, 2016:1). For example, when a person's gender identity matches his/her sex, s/he is referred to as cisgender.

Genderqueer

Pertains to an individual whose gender identification is outside the confines of the traditional gender binary, meaning they do not exclusively identify with either male or female genders, or they may identify with both. Genderqueers may also use the phrase "gender fluid" as a means of identification, but often disavow the term "transgender" due to its connotation of transitioning between gender categories. Intersex refers to a variety of problems linked to unusual development of physical sex traits (APA, 2006)

Genderfluid

Genderfluid refers to an individual whose gender identity or expression fluctuates between masculine and feminine, or lies midway between this range (APA, 2006)

Sexual orientation

- Sexual orientation refers to an individual's emotional, psychological, physical, and/or sexual attraction towards other individuals. Individuals may experience attraction towards individuals of the same sex, those of the opposite sex, individuals of both sexes, or individuals without considering their sex or gender. Additionally, there are individuals who do not encounter initial sexual desire and may self-identify as asexual. As an illustration: A gay individual has sexual attraction towards individuals of the same sex or gender.
- Heterosexuality refers to the sexual attraction that an individual has towards individuals of the opposite sex or gender.
- Bisexuality refers to the sexual attraction towards individuals of both the female and male sexes or genders (APA, 2006)

Sexuality

Sexuality refers to the stable erotic preference of individuals of the same sex (homosexual) or the opposite sex (heterosexual), as well as the social identities founded on having such a preference, such as lesbian and queer (Cameron & Kulick, 2003).

Sexual diversity/sexuality diversity

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2016) defines sexuality diversity as the differences in people's ability to feel intense emotional and sexual attraction to people of the same gender, the opposite gender or more than one gender.

Heteronormativity

Heteronormativity asserts that heterosexuality is the preferred or normal sexual orientation (White, 2018).

Compulsory Heteronormativity

Compulsory heteronormativity, also known as comphet, posits that a patriarchal and heteronormative society assumes and imposes heterosexuality on individuals. Adrienne Rich popularised the phrase in her 1980 article "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." (Rich, 1980)

Heterosexism

Heterosexism is a term used "to describe all forms of discrimination against people who encompass lesbian, gay, or bisexual sexual orientations" (WHO, 2016:4).

Gender and sexual diversity (GSD),

Also known as sexual diversity, encompasses the many variations in sex traits, sexual orientations, and gender identities, without the need of explicitly specifying each individual identity, behaviour, or attribute that constitutes this multiplicity (Meyer, 2010).

Gender Identity

Gender Identity refers to an individual's innate and profound perception of themselves as either male (boy/man) or female (girl/woman), or as a different gender altogether (such as genderqueer or gender non-conforming). This perception may or may not align with the sex assigned to them at birth or their physical characteristics associated with their reproductive system.

Homosexuality

According to Msibi (2012), the term homosexuality was introduced in the West to control social relationships by labelling people engaged in same-sex relationships as deviant.

Heterosexuality

Heterosexuality refers to individuals who are attracted to people of the opposite sex (Manning, 2009).

Cisgender

WHO (2016) defines a cisgender individual as one whose gender identity and expression correspond to his/her biological sex assigned at birth. For instance, a woman who identifies as a woman.

Non-Binary

Non-Binary refers to a range of gender identities and expressions that reject the notion of a gender binary, which assumes that gender can only be categorised as either male/men/masculine or female/woman/feminine based on biological sex at birth. Common terms used to describe nonbinary gender identities include "agender," "bigender," "genderqueer," "genderfluid," and "pangender."

1.11 Organisation of chapters

There are five chapters in this thesis.

Chapter 1

This chapter provides the background of the study. It also includes the problem statement, the rationale, research questions, aim and objectives. An overview of the research design and methodology as well as the layout of chapters are briefly discussed. I briefly discussed the theoretical framework and why it is best suited for this study.

Chapter 2

This chapter reviews both local and international literature under the following themes: (1) queering LGBTQ celebrities' influence on school youths' perception of gender and sexual diversity; (2) social media and queer media as an influence on school youths' perceptions; (3) the voice and experiences of school youth concerning gender and sexual diversity; (4) critically queering education: (a) teachers silencing concepts of gender and sexual diversity in the formal curriculum; (b) hegemonic structure of cisnormativity embedded in schools, and lastly, (6) school policies.

The second part of this chapter provides the theoretical framework underpinning the study. Queer theory was the most appropriate theoretical lens for this study because it questions and queers the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youth's perceptions of gender and

sexual diversity. Queer theory aims to question whether LGBTQ celebrities do influence school youth or not.

Chapter 3

The methodology of the investigation is discussed in this chapter. It describes the research strategy, design, sampling, and data acquisition methods used in this study. The chapter also outlines trustworthiness and ethical issues adhered to by the study.

Chapter 4

Analyses of the data, conclusions, and comments are presented in this chapter.

Chapter 5

This chapter provides a summary, conclusions, and recommendations based on Chapter 4's findings. This chapter also endeavours to answer the following research question: How do LGBTQ personalities affect school youths' perceptions of gender and sexual diversity?

1.12 Conclusion

This chapter introduced the study's background and rationale, as well as the problem statement, objectives, and research questions that guided the study. The significance of this investigation is also described. This chapter also provided an overview of the research's methodology and design.

The following chapter examines the literature regarding the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on high school students' perceptions of gender and sexual diversity and discusses the study's theoretical framework.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This study seeks to explore the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity. To achieve this aim, the literature review includes current and past literature, both locally and internationally. I emphasise the existing voids in the literature on LGBTQ, pertaining to heteronormative, heterosexist, and how the hegemonic structure of cisnormativity is embedded in schools, as well as the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youth's perceptions of sexuality.

The literature review is organised in the following themes: (1) queering LGBTQ celebrities' influence on school youths' perception of gender and sexual diversity; (2) social media and queer media as an influence on school youths' perception; (3) the voice and experiences of school youth concerning gender and sexual diversity; (4) critically queering education: (a) teachers silencing concepts of gender and sexual diversity in the formal curriculum and (b) hegemonic structure of cisnormativity embedded in schools, and lastly, (6) school policies

The second part of this chapter provides the theoretical framework underpinning the study. Queer theory was considered to be the most appropriate theoretical lens for this study because it questions and queers the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity. Queer theory aims to question whether LGBTQ celebrities do influence school youth or not.

2.2 Queering LGBTQ celebrities' influence on school youths' perception of gender and sexual diversity

According to Armelin (2012:4), "questioning just who and what celebrities are, has taken a paradigmatic shift". Furthermore, Guilbert, (2018:2) defines this term as "someone famous or found in popular media who is also proudly part of the LGBTQ+ community."

Prior to the Internet, the distance and separation between a celebrity and their audience was maintained through traditional media such as the press, film, and television. Numerous ordinary individuals have gained popularity by communicating with an audience on a personal level via social and user-generated content platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. Furthermore, Armelin (2012) argues that celebrities are an essential aspect

to study in academia, not only because of their social and political implications, but also because of the ever-changing dimensions and traits that are evident when fame occurs.

According to Beller (2021), celebrities become precious and celebrated because of the attention attracted from ordinary people and the media. Similarly, Agyepong (2016) argues that a celebrity is a person who stands out as a result of their visibility, which has been obtained by mass media, notably television, and has resulted in them becoming well-known and recognised to a wide range of audiences. He points out that celebrity is a social construct, making it difficult to comprehend and define. Given that, there is still a stigma and discrimination associated with the LGBTQ community, it is important to analyse how school youth perceive and engage with the LGBTQ celebrities (Sabala, 2020).

Sports champions, film and television actors and actresses, broadcast personalities, music icons, and political or spiritual figures are all idolised by school youth because they originate from various walks of life. (Kimathi, 2013). Furthermore, Kimathi (2013) also discovered that role models such as celebrities, parents, teachers, and peers influence the mindsets and conduct of a significant percentage of individuals, notably school youth. This could establish gender and sexual diversity, as well as goals in life. Indeed, according to Marshall (2006:6), “celebrity discourse in contemporary culture allows us to explore the articulation of identity, individuality, values, and norms, whether seen in the real world or online”. Furthermore, Marshall (2006) argues that a celebrity has become the lens through which we view numerous challenges, disciplines, and issues. On the other hand, Marwick (2010) argues that a celebrity has an influence and a high status among school youth. Despite the fact that being homosexual is legal in South Africa, the majority of the community remains hostile to non-conforming gender identities and sexual orientation individuals. Nonetheless, some South African celebrities have been happy to represent and speak out about their gender identity and sexual orientation. LGBTQ celebrities are widely considered to be the most significant social movement for LGBTQ+ visibility and community building, and the primary platform to campaign for social, political and legal change (Peterson et al., 2018). In South Africa, Scott (2017) found that LGBTQ celebrities aims to raise the visibility of LGBTQ+ people in South Africa and campaign against homophobic violence. Johannesburg Pride is an example of campaigns and activism for gender and sexual diversity in South Africa. According to Conway (2022), pride in South Africa is characterised by the country's history of activism and its persistent divides along racial, gender, and economic lines. Johannesburg Pride originated from the wider context of global LGBTQ+ activism, as well as specific practices of South African resistance against apartheid.

Based on these findings, it is possible to conclude that LGBTQ celebrities do have an influence on school youth's perception of gender and sexual diversity. Therefore, school youth should have a correct usage of the concept of LGBTQ celebrities and treat celebrity endorsements rationally.

2.3 Social media and queer media as an influence on school youths' perception of gender and sexual diversity

Valkenburg and Piotrowski (2017) discovered that the topic of school youth and media has acquired great significance in academia. Furthermore, over the past few decades, Valkenburg and Piotrowski (2017) have argued that there are a number of studies on the effect of media on school; yet, however paradoxically, there is still much to learn.

According to World Wide Worx (2015), Facebook is the dominant social networking site in South Africa, with YouTube and Twitter following closely behind. It is noteworthy that a minimum of 22% of the 12 million Facebook users in South Africa are school youth aged 13 to 18 years (BusinessTech, 2015). It is important to note that even in rural areas, South African youth have access to social media, a study conducted by Roux and Dalvit (2014) in rural South Africa (Keiskammahoek) revealed that 76% of respondents who did not own a cell phone, which is the most commonly used device for accessing social media, were able to access one through sharing.

Social media in South Africa has emerged as a significant platform for communication among friends and family members, as well as a new medium for exchanging knowledge (Ng, 2016). This knowledge includes school youth actively engaging in self-education about gender and sexual diversity in various media outlets (Valkenburg & Piotrowski, 2017)

Notably, Gomillion and Giuliano (2011) discovered that respondents stated that media models influenced their self-discovery, coming out, and identification to the extent that media models served as a source of optimism, inspiration, and solace.

Rideout (2015) discovered that, in the 1990s, children and school youth in the US spent four hours a day with media on average. These estimates have now changed to an average of nine hours a day (citation needed). A concern with social and queer media is that contemporary school youth and teens spend more time with media than they do at school (Valkenburg & Piotrowski, 2017). In consensus, according to Gottlieb (2009:1), "school youth spend significantly more time watching TV than they do in school. Around 14,000 hours are spent on official educational teaching, yet 16,000 to 20,000 hours are spent watching television on average."

Moreover, Valkenburg and Piotrowski (2017) found that the school youth had never before been capable of finding such a huge amount of information related to the development of intimacy and gender and sexual diversity. Nevertheless, Valkenburg and Piotrowski (2017) argue that school youth can look up information about their celebrities and idols, and find supporting self-help groups on social media and queer media. In consensus, being more specific, Craig and McInroy (2014) discovered that LGBTQ youth also search for support groups through social and queer media communities, to develop their gender and sexual diversity through the support of peers that share empowering coming out ideas.

Fox and Ralston (2016) analysed the teaching experiences and informal learning of school youth on social media and how that can affect the process of building one's gender and sexual diversity, as well as personal identity. Similarly, Craig and McInroy (2014) analysed how new media influenced identity development and coming out for school youth. Indeed, the above studies demonstrate that the school youth will benefit from new media to build their gender and sexual identity and be more secure of their coming out process.

Furthermore, the Suicide Prevention Resource Centre (2008) found that increasing the visibility of marginalised groups, such as LGBTQ, through social media is advantageous in relation to the epidemic of suicide among LGBTQ school youth. According to a study conducted by Grey (2009), school-aged teenagers seek out queer media in order to develop, reveal, and validate their gender and sexual identity.

Nonetheless, Woods and Hardman (2021) agree with previous studies that queer media, social media, and culture have the potential to transform, inform, and influence school youths' perception on gender and sexual diversity identities and encourage acceptance. Likewise, Watson (2019) established that scholarships on celebrities in explicitly prescribed terms, queer media studies generate hegemony/counter-hegemony tension. School youth use social media to satisfy multiple needs. Initially, the primary drive behind using social media is the pursuit of information.

Numerous research has found that social media platforms provide individuals with access to pertinent information that may be absent in offline settings, such as classrooms, leading school youth to acquire knowledge about queer culture, sexual health, and gender and sexual diversity (Craig & McInroy, 2014; Harper et al., 2016).

2.4 The voice and experiences of school youth concerning gender and sexual diversity

School youths' voice and experiences concerning gender and sexual diversity is increasingly recognised as a serious, worldwide concern. In a recent article, Nichols (2020) surprisingly shows that the South African school youth (regardless of their sexuality) is in favour of learning about, "queerness" and about the "other", a contrast to current literature. Furthermore, Nichols (2020) has paradoxically established a startling occurrence, contrary to what is depicted in the literature, peers being predominantly homophobic (Msibi, 2012; McArthur, 2015; Francis, 2016). For instance, one of the participants gave a detailed account:

I feel strongly about this. I believe we are all humans and treated equally. Some people treat people, you know like other people, gays, like animals. Like animals I tell you. I have seen it here (at school) and outside. They also have feelings like straight people. But the school does nothing about it. (Nichols, 2020:26).

The above narrative echoes the research conclusions conducted by Nichols (2020), where one of the eleven participants clearly stated that peer homophobia is wrong. Moreover, the youth participants were open to learning about gender and sexual diversity and they recognise the need for counsel strategies to grasp it better. One participant raised her concern to learn more about sexual diversity:

"I would wonder how a person becomes gay. I would like to learn about these types of things and whether other people are also feeling like learning about these different sexualities. I would just love to experience it." (Nichols, 2020:26).

Drawing on the findings of Nichols (2020), Nichols and Brown (2021) agree that the South African school youth is in favour of LGBT content in South African schools. Moreover, Nichols and Brown (2021) evidently found that the young people, who participated in their study, are receptive to sexuality and gender education. They also found that the participants understand the need for support mechanisms. To illustrate this point, one participant in their study mentions:

"I would like to learn about the various varieties of genders, how others feel about them, and how they came to be homosexual. I simply enjoy experiencing it." (Nichols & Brown, 2021:633).

It is evident that learners are inquisitive and asking questions about gender and sexual diversity. Nichols and Brown (2021) established that the youth in schools are more open-minded and eager to learn about sexual diversity.

2.5 Critically queering education

2.5.1 Teachers' silencing concepts of gender and sexual diversity in the formal curriculum

The purpose of sexuality education in South Africa, included in the life orientation (LO) curriculum, is to provide learners with essential skills and to advocate for principles of social justice and inclusivity regarding gender and sexuality (Department of Basic Education, Republic of South Africa, 2011:4). Schools and teachers often fail to address matters related to sexual diversity, resulting in an environment that is not supportive for students with non-normative sexual orientations. Furthermore, the pervasive prevalence of homophobia in South Africa significantly impacts both explicit and implicit attitudes and occurrences of homophobic and heteronormative conduct among teachers (Brown, 2020).

Teachers are powerful influences in a school system and play a significant role in queering education if concepts of gender and sexual diversity is silenced in the prescribed curriculum, as Quinlivan and Town (1999) point out that it is indeed possible for schools where the topic of sexuality is openly discussed, rather than presumed. In support of this assertion, scholars such as Potgieter and Reygan (2012) as well as Wilmot and Naidoo (2018) highlight the need to promote critical dialogue on gender and sexuality, pointing out that this is only possible if teachers thoroughly and accurately address and include the topic in the curriculum, acknowledging that they are the agents of teaching the concepts of gender and sexual equality, working against the oppressed.

Unfortunately, in the above assertion, this is certainly not the case, as Francis and Msibi (2011) found that South African teachers are reticent to teach about the intersection of sexuality and gender for various reasons, including their biases. This is pointed out by Bhana (2012:314), who found that "most teachers strongly disapproved of homosexuality on the basis of their Christian religion". Similarly, Reygan and Steyn (2017) found that the role of religion elicits a level of discomfort among educators. This view is supported by DePalma and Francis (2014), for example, who reported on religious discourses and the belief that homosexuality is curable or preventable. This resulted in a further religious discussion on intolerance.

In a study conducted by Francis (2018:8), a teacher named Mosoeu, from a small rural school, referred to queer adolescents as “lost sheep” and educators as the “shepherds who must teach them the right way”, i.e. heterosexuality. Khau’s (2012) study found that some teachers avoid teaching about sexual diversity issues, because they are afraid of being labelled as corrupting children. In support of this view, Francis and Le Roux (2011) established that teachers avoid topics such as gender and sexual diversity, resulting from inadequate levels of preceding education and support.

Francis (2018) also points out that gender and sexual diversity is a component of the Life Orientation (LO) curriculum. However, education point out that gender and sexual diversity are not realising in school, even though they are included in the prescribed textbooks. According to the Department of Education (DoE, 2011), the sexuality education component of the LO curriculum is comprised of various sections. The sections that shed light on gender and sexual diversity includes: (1) gender differences and inequalities; (2) relationships and sexual activities; and (3) gender and sexual violence.

Nonetheless, with the major issues concerning teachers who silence certain concepts, Nichols (2021:98) “advise that school governing bodies should affirm learners with diverse sexual orientations through the various policies”. The policies are detailed in section 2.6 of the literature review. The need for teachers to include topics such as sexuality diversity and sexual diseases into the curriculum, to acknowledge the impact of social class on the learning of sexuality education, and to encourage thoughtful conversations about gender is not just the responsibility of LO teachers. It is important to define the specific topics covered in sexuality education within the national curriculum and enhance the training provided to instructors of Life Orientation (LO) in order to better assist them.

2.5.2 Hegemonic structure of cisnormativity embedded in schools

Beukes (2020) argues that hegemonic cisnormativity places the group that goes against gender norms into a hierarchical structure with unequal power relationships. The term ‘cisnormativity’, considers cisgender to be the “natural and normal” state. Moreover, cisnormativity is ignorant towards identities and expressions of gender that queer the gender binary of men and women (Worthen, 2016).

Msibi (2012) discovered that the obstacles of compulsory heteronormativity, cisnormativity, and homophobia in educational institutions are real. Likewise, Bhana (2014) found that schools are sexual arenas, in which a hierarchy of dominance is carried out. Furthermore, in their study concerning parental dissonance, Ngabaza and Shefer (2019) found that

parental dissonance towards gender and sexual diversity learning content is derived from a hegemonic belief that the school systems are geographies where all bodies are meant to be heterosexual, and that this sexual orientation is “normal” and “good”.

Nichols and Brown (2021) discovered that the insights provided by learners and parents concerning gender and sexual diversity learning content furthers their understanding of how schools reinforce deeply ingrained heteronormative patterns that marginalise individuals who deviate from hegemonic forms of sexuality. This is supported by Francis’ (2019a) findings, which show that teachers promote heterosexuality as normal, while portraying counter-normative sexualities as abnormal and deviant. Such perceptions give heterosexuality power and privilege, leaving LGBTQ students powerless and vulnerable to discrimination, emphasising the hegemonic structure of cisnormativity embedded in schools (Francis & Msibi, 2011). Moreover, Beukes (2020) established the significance of gender-diverse individuals to challenge the rigid gender binary system and subvert the pervasiveness of cisnormativity in schools. Mahlape (2022) asserts that schools have a responsibility to provide all students, regardless of gender identity and sexual orientation, with safe and supportive learning environments. However, many LGBTQ students feel unsupported in their schools. Michelle (2017) and Kosciw (2016) hold the view that LGBTQ school youth are more likely than their heterosexual and cisgender peers to have low academic achievement, lack educational inspirations, and experience discrimination. As stated earlier, schools are heteronormative spaces where a compulsory culture is perpetuated (Francis, 2019b).

2.6 Gender and sexual diversity policies: South African schools

Over two-thirds of African nations continue to outlaw same-sex acts, and evidence suggests it has been observed that African societies exhibit somewhat lower levels of tolerance towards homosexuality compared to other regions globally Jones, 2019. However, Jones (2019) discovered that South Africa stands out in the African region for its protection and its early policy protection of LGBTQ rights.

In recent years, South Africa has mandated a number of policies and frameworks concerning the incorporation of sexual and gender diversity in institutions - Care and Support for Teaching and Learning (CTSL) incorporates such frameworks for LGBTQI learners as a vulnerable group (Reygan, 2019). In addition, the Department of Basic Education has developed guidelines for gender and sexual diversity inclusion. Schools are required to have an anti-bullying policy that protects all school community members, including LGBTQ

students (DBE, 2015). The purpose of these policies and frameworks is to develop an education system that rejects all forms of unjust discrimination and intolerance. Moreover, in 2011, South Africa introduced to the UN Human Rights Council the 2011 resolution calling for international legislation prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in education (Vance, 2011).

Furthermore, the South African Department of Basic Education collaborated with local academicians to distribute 60,000 copies of *Better Secured Schools for All: Contesting and Striking at Homophobic Bullying*, providing anti-homophobic anti-bullying information to educators, pupils, and administrators (Reygan, 2016). Moreover, the DBE circulated a National School Safety Framework (NSSF) to aid national and provincial education departments in developing anti-violence structures and policies against homophobic bullying and making school spaces safer (DBE, 2015). Moreover, this policy is evident in the DBE's recommendation that homophobic abuse be assessed in the school conduct and the LO curriculum (UNESCO, 2016).

On the other hand, by contrast to DBE's recommendation of homophobic bullying, the South African Teachers' Union and the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP) have threatened to sue the DBE, claiming that it is the job of parents, not schools, to educate children about gender and sexual diversity (MoeT, 2020).

Nichols (2020) is critical of the conclusions drawn from the gender and sexual diversity policies in South African schools, arguing that, despite these proactive initiatives and legislation, South African institutions continue to remain heteronormative and heterosexist spaces.

2.7 Theoretical framework underpinning this study

2.7.1 Introduction

A theoretical framework that addresses identity, sexuality, and the consequences of defining one's identity is necessary for a rhetorical analysis of the influence of LGBTQ personalities on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity. This research study thus engages the literature and contribution of queer theory. However, Sharples (2015) argues that defining queer theory is no simple task. Muñoz (2009:1) asserts that "we have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an idealist that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future". Moreover, Spargo (2000) points out that the concept of "queer" can serve as a noun, an adjective, or a verb, but in each instance, it is defined in opposition to "normal" or "normalizing." At its most essential, Sharples (2015) asserts that queer theory

is a postmodern, cross-disciplinary area of study that seeks to destabilise the boundaries and identifications between gender, sex, and sexual orientation. This implies that from a queer perspective the school youth are in constant interaction in the school system where the boundaries of gender and sexual diversity need to be destabilised, where hegemonic cisnormativity in school spaces needs to be queered, and where gender fluidity needs to be present.

2.7.2 Queer theory

Queer theory, situated within the realms of postmodernism and poststructuralism, prioritises the deconstruction of identities, the questioning of binary categorizations such as gay/straight, and the focus on non-normative perspectives (Halperin, 2003; LeFrangois, 2013).

Plummer (2007) mentions that this theory is a post-structural practise to gender and sexuality, invented in queer and feminist study fields by intellectuals such as Butler (1990, 1993a), Sedgwick (1990), Jagose (1996), and Halberstam (2005). Poststructuralists believed that it was impossible to identify a single explanation or solution for social oppression that could account for its influence on all groups or people. This is because oppression affects diverse groups in various and interconnected ways (Crenshaw, 1989). Poststructuralism posits that individuals are not only passive recipients of the societal structures that surround them, but rather have the capacity to actively engage with the environment in order to transform oppressive institutions (Namaste, 2000). This emphasises the significance of being capable of analysing and questioning language and identity labels, as well as criticising the dependence of structuralism on opposing pairs (Kirsch, 2000; Mullaly & Dupre, 2018). Furthermore, Epprecht (2008:15) describes queer research “as an approach that identifies and values diverse gender identities and sexual orientations”.

Queer theory questions the hegemony of heterosexism and rejects the gender category of either masculine or feminine. This critical theory questions hegemonic, normative, and oppressive systems. Critical Theory, has been influenced not only by postmodern ideas but also by the philosophical traditions of structuralism and poststructuralism. The latter, which includes scholars like Foucault, Bourdieu, and Derrida, has played a significant role in shaping the evolution of CT (Agger, 1992). Drawing upon the concepts put forward by Agger (1992), Dominelli (2010), Mullaly and Dupre (2018), and Webb (2019), we have additionally uncovered the following shared themes in Critical Theory: (1) A clear recognition of societal oppression and marginalisation; (2) A thorough examination of the underlying causes of

oppression and inequality; and (3) A critical rejection of the scientific traditions of positivism and functionalism (the belief that all aspects and institutions of society have a specific purpose).

Therefore, the queer theory serves as framework for understanding the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youths' perceptions of gender and sexual diversity, because the school youth form part of a binary system in schools that questions and queers if gender is viewed as either masculine or feminine. Celebrity media influences the societal and traditional aspects of one's life and is a site for the negotiation of ethical and social standards and values (Gorin & Dubied, 2011; Turner, 2014).

The critique of norms has been a focus of queer theory. Therefore, the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youth's perceptions cannot be understood unless queer theory is the framework underpinning this study. Incorporating queer theory into school youths' perceptions of gender and sexual diversity through LGBTQ celebrities might facilitate the dismantling of the notion that homosexuality is antithetical to heterosexuality, since it recognises the existence of a continuum of sexual orientations that highlights the diversity and fluidity of individuals' sexual identities.

Butler (1990), De Lauretis (1991), and Seidman (1994) are queer theorists who question and queer the normative social order that emphasizes how masculinity and femininity define a binary gender system. The heterosexual matrix introduced by Butler (1990) is related to this. The heterosexual matrix refers to the societal

... institution of a compulsory and naturalised heterosexuality [that] requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine is differentiated from the feminine, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire (Butler, 1990:30).

Moreover, individuals who do not fit the expectations of the hetero-cis-normative society experience oppression and marginalization. To oppose this cisnormativity approach, this research positions this privilege as partisan. Furthermore, this study disputes the lack of discussions surrounding the experiences of gender-diverse school youth.

a. *Exploring the links between norms and queer theory*

Queer theory has focused on the critique of social conventions. Basic to queer theory is the correlation of norms and heteronormativity. Yep and Lescure (2015:93) distinguish norms, normalisation, and normativity in the following way:

“Norms operate in our social practices through normalization – the process through which norms are made commonsensical and unquestionable in the social domain. Normativity is sustained through the creation of ‘others’, that is, what is normal in a social system is maintained through the ongoing marking and vilification of what is considered abnormal.”

Norms can adapt and change over time (Warner, 1999). Heteronormativity is the set of norms that endorses heterosexuality over other sexual orientations; it is synonymous with "general culture." (Berlant & Warner, 1995:349). Furthermore, Berlant and Warner (1998:555) defined queer theory as being preoccupied with heteronormativity and being viewed as a “sense of rightness” embedded in most aspects of the norms and arrangement of social life.

Homonormativity draws on heteronormativity, arising from the hegemony of heterosexuality (Watson, 2019). Homonormativity refers to the act of giving preferential treatment to heteronormative norms and concepts within the context of LGBT culture and identity. It is based on the belief that the norms and values of heterosexuality should be imitated and shown by gay individuals (Halperin, 2012). Indeed, Watson (2019) asserts that homonormativity seeks to find ways to include gay people within a normative society.

b. Critique of queer theory

According to Green (2002:539), queer theory is an “underdeveloped analysis of the effects of the social on the sexual”. Moreover, Green (2002:540) criticised that queer theory may create the illusion that “sexual orientation by itself defines the totality of institutionalized identities that one may occupy”.

Indeed, queer theory has played a significant role in destabilising and dismantling certain heterosexist norms. Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1994:453) pointed out that, in the realm of queer theory, the notions of individualised and compartmentalised sexualities are rendered obsolete due to the absence of a discernible subject and a definitive demarcation between these categories. In consensus with the above scholars’ assertion, Penney (2013) asserts that queer theory only focuses on discourse. Penney (2013) contends that queer theory has great potential but ultimately fell short in its accomplishments. Critics argue that post-structuralism often dismantles established institutions and discourses, however neglects to put forward constructive or alternative frameworks for comprehending society, culture, and power relations. Post-structuralism questions the presence of immutable meanings and

truth, pushing for the notion that meaning is flexible and contingent on context. Critics contend that this results in an excessive kind of relativism and scepticism, which poses difficulties in establishing mutual comprehensions or standards for communication and social engagement. This might serve as a significant criticism of queer theory - the notion of questioning and contesting dichotomies and classifications is intricate and arduous, and a feasible resolution has not been proposed. Simultaneously, "queer" also functions as a classification.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed local and international literature on the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity. The chapter also discussed the legal frameworks in schools.

The last section of this chapter discussed queer theory as the theoretical framework guiding this study.

The research design and methodology are discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The literature review was discussed and the theoretical framework was set out in the previous chapter. This chapter provides a comprehensive explanation of the methodology that was used in this study. It is discussed under the following sub-headings: the research paradigm, approach, research design, data-collection method, data analysis, credibility and trustworthiness. The ethical considerations to which the study adhered are also discussed.

Furthermore, the methodological decisions taken for the current thesis were thought to be the most necessarily appropriate for aiding the processes required to respond to the study's main research question: What is the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity?

3.2 Research paradigm

This study was guided by the interpretivist paradigm. Lapan *et al.* (2012), state that qualitative research is interpretive in nature because it focuses on uncovering participants' views. Dudovskiy (2018) points out that the interpretivist paradigm acknowledges that knowledge is socially constructed. Therefore, the interpretivist paradigm allowed me to capture and interpret school youth's unique feelings towards and perceptions of LGBTQ celebrities. It also allowed me to describe the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity.

The interpretivist paradigm seemed appropriate for answering the research questions, as it seeks to uncover and understand why people behave the way they do. A research paradigm is not just a method or approach chosen by a researcher for a study. Instead, it incorporates a more comprehensive outlook or worldview that influences how a researcher understands reality, truth, and knowledge. The interpretivist paradigm also allowed me to interpret school youth's expression of their feelings and perceptions towards LGBTQ celebrities and allowed me to obtain their subjective beliefs and perceptions. Khaldi (2017) contends that several subjective factors influence human behaviour.

3.3 Research approach

Within the interpretivist paradigm, a qualitative research approach was chosen to respond to the research questions in this study, given that the aim of this study was to explore the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity. Unlike the quantitative approach, the qualitative approach seeks "to describe and narrate feelings, perceptions and experiences" (Kumar, 2019:14). The use of a qualitative approach, therefore, allowed me, a cisgender woman, to explore the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity.

Qualitative research is an inquiry in which researchers interact with selected persons in their normal settings and collect data in face-to-face situations. According to Berg (2003), in qualitative research design, the interview procedure is one of the key points of departure because it offers in-depth information pertaining to participants' experiences of and viewpoints on a particular topic. They outline three forms of interviews: informal conversational interview, general interview guide approach, and standardised open-ended interview. The standardised open-ended interview is used to obtain primary data for this case study. This interview is done by asking a particular group of participants structured identical questions, but "the questions are worded so that responses are open-ended" (Turner, 2010:756).

3.4 Research design

It is important to design a path to follow throughout the entire research process, before conducting a research study. According to Hammarberg *et al.* (2016), a research design is a procedure the researcher follows when carrying out the study, in order to obtain valid and accurate answers that will respond to the research questions. In short, Kumar (2019) asserts that a research design addresses questions that determine the path a researcher proposes to take in his/her research journey. In this study, a case study design was used.

3.4.1 Case study

As proposed by Dudovskiy (2018), a case study can be exploratory, explanatory, or descriptive. For the purpose of this study, the exploratory case study design was used. An exploratory case study design attempts to explore a topic that has no pre-determined outcomes (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). One of the most significant benefits of a case study is that it allows a researcher to understand the complexities of life by breaking it down into manageable chunks (Thomas, 2021). Therefore, this design allowed me to closely examine the data within a high school and gain insight into the influence of LGBTQ

celebrities on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity. The primary emphasis is placed on acquiring a comprehensive comprehension of the thing, topic, or subject (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

3.4.2 Strength of the case study

For a case study to be acknowledged, the design has to aim at either “creating, elaborating, extending, or testing a theory” (Ridder, 2017:283).

3.5 Sampling

Welman and Kruger (1999:47) assert that it is impractical and uneconomical to involve all the population in the research project. Therefore, the researcher had to choose a sample. Sampling in case studies is “the selection of specific data sources from which data are collected to address the research objectives” (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg & McKibbin, 2015:1775). It has to be a representative part of the population in such a way that they represent the large group from which they were selected and “best help [the researcher] to understand the case” (Stake, 1995:56).

In this study, “random and convenience sampling strategies” was employed (Robinson, 2014:31). I placed the admission numbers of all the Grade 10 learners in an envelope and asked the principal to draw 7 admission numbers. Every learner had the same chance to participate in the study.

3.5.1 Random sampling

According to Maree and Pietersen (2007:172),

to draw a simple random sample it is necessary to have a complete and up-to-date sample frame available. On this list, each population element has to be numbered sequentially such that each element can uniquely be identified. The actual drawing of the sample involves the generation of a predetermined number – the sample size – of random numbers.

Thus, the admission numbers of the Grade 10 learners were placed in an envelope and the principal had to draw 7 admission numbers from the envelope.

3.5.2 Convenience sampling

I used a sample of Grade 10 learners from a private high school in Kroonstad, in the Free State province, for their convenient geographical proximity. The school was easily accessible for me for time and financial reasons. The outcomes may be affected by the

particular school environment since it is located in Kroonstad, the Free State, which is a rural region. The pupils may not possess the same level of expertise as learners in schools located in major cities like Johannesburg or Cape Town. The school was selected based on its convenient location and close proximity. I had a position as a teacher at the school. The research may have been influenced by the Hawthorne effect, as participants may have been apprehensive about being evaluated and hence inclined to react in a favourable way owing to my role as their instructor. The phenomenon, as described by Oswald, Sherratt, and Smith (2014:53), refers to “a change in the participants normal behaviour that can be attributed to the knowledge that their behaviour is being watched or studied.” Another contributing

3.5.3 Sample size

According to Robinson (2014), the sample size of a qualitative project may be flexible; however, an approximate, or exact sample number has to be decided upon. This study was conducted at a private high school in Kroonstad, in the Free State province of South Africa (School A). The sample size included seven Grade 10 learners (n=7). Three females and four males participated in the study.

3.6 Data-collection procedures

Yin (2014) proposes that data sources for a case study may include documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical objects. The procedure used for collecting data in this study was “semi-structured interviews”.

This study uses the Standardized Open-Ended Interviews. These are “extremely structured in terms of the wording of the questions” (Turner, 2010:756). In this study, participants were asked identical questions (see Interview Scheduled, APPENDIX D).

I spent 20 days collecting data and participation was completely voluntary. Prior to the interviews, I met with the principal and school counsellor to request permission to hold interviews with the learners under their jurisdiction. I explained the purpose of the study to the principal and the counsellor and, after granting me permission to conduct my study in the school, I requested the administration lady to print the class lists for the Grade 10 learners with their admission numbers. I placed the admission numbers of the male learners in an envelope and the female learners in another envelope. I went to the principal to draw the seven Grade 10 learners from the envelope. I then called the participants and met face-to-face at school where I provided them with details of the research and requested

each one to sign a consent and assent form with their parents and return it to me if they are willing to participate. Interviews began 2 weeks after I received all the necessary documentation.

In the first phase of data collection, I explained the purpose of the research, which was to explore the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and they lasted 20 to 30 minutes. As indicated in the consent form and assent form, my responsibility as a researcher was to maintain the confidentiality of participants' information. Therefore, I assured them that their answers will be kept safe. Interviews took place at a time convenient to participants, after school, to avoid them missing out on work from their various subjects. I used open-ended questions to obtain valuable information because they are more focused and "allow the participants to contribute as much detailed information as they desire and it also allows the researcher to ask probing questions as a means of follow-up" (Turner, 2010:756).

The interview questions asked were guided by an interview schedule in keeping with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) principles. Smith (2005) explains that the aim of IPA is to explore in depth how participants make sense of their personal and social worlds.

Interview questions focused on eliciting information about the realities of LGBTQ celebrities, their knowledge of sexuality and gender diversity, as well as their perceptions and experiences regarding LGBTQ celebrities in and outside the schoolyard. The interviews allowed me to explore 'what' they said and 'how' they said it. At the end of every interview, I transcribed the answers. All interview transcripts and audio files were stored in a flash drive as back-up storage.

3.7 Method of data analysis

Raeburn, Schmied, Hungerford and Cleary (2015:6) propose that data sources for a case study may include "documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation and physical objects". According to Archer (2018), the purpose of data analysis in a qualitative study is to bring meaning and some type of order to the data. In this study, participants' interview transcriptions were analysed using thematic analysis. The interviews were given pseudonyms.

3.7.1 Background and demographics of learners at the school

The research study had a total of seven individuals, with one individual identified as coloured, one as Indian, and the other participants identified as black. The individuals had proficiency in four distinct languages and demonstrated a diverse array of cultural origins, linguistic skills, and life experiences.. Table 1 profiles the learners who took part in the study. I included pseudonyms, age, native language, language of instruction, and racial/ethnic background/country of origin.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the learners.

Participant	Pseudonym	Sexual Identity	Age	Home language	Language taken as home language at school	Race/country of birth
1. Female	Wendy	Bisexual	16	Afrikaans	English	Coloured/South African
2. Male	Kea	Straight	17	Sotho	English	Black/South African
3. Female	Divya	Straight	17	English	English	Indian/South African
4. Male	Leo	Cisgender	17	Sotho	English	Black/South African
5. Female	Zwane	Queer	16	Zulu	English	Black/South African
6. Male	Tumelo	Straight	17	Sotho	English	Black/South African
7. Male	Retshi	Gay	17	Sotho	English	Black/South African

3.7.2 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis guides a researcher to identify, interpret and make sense of the emerging themes (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). My focus during data analysis was to uncover the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity. The purpose was to identify and extract common themes within the learners' interview transcripts (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). According to Maguire and Delahunt (2017), a theme contains important information about the data that relates to the research questions. Therefore, I coded the themes in a way that they answer my research questions. My analysis was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis, which are: to become familiar with the data, to generate initial codes, to search for, review, define, and name the themes, and to write the report.

In phase one, I listened to the recordings several times for clarification, in order to familiarise myself with collected data before transcribing them *verbatim*. I read the data (transcriptions) carefully and thoroughly and used a highlighter to note initial ideas for coding. After reading and re-reading the data to reflect on its overall meaning, the coding process followed.

In phase two, I organised data, looked for patterns in the data, then assigned initial codes to my data. Rossman and Rallis (2012:34) contend that "coding is the process of organizing the data by bracketing chunks (or text or image segments) and writing a word representing a category in the margins". I coded themes manually, using a highlighting pen to highlight participants' phrases with similar patterns; I did not use specific software to code.

In phase three, I searched for repeated patterns or themes in the codes and gathered all data relevant to each potential theme.

In phase four, I identified and reviewed themes that emerged in my data. I read the transcripts thoroughly to search for additional themes.

In phase five, I generated definitions and names for each theme.

In the final phase I analysed data according to each participant to highlight categories extracted from participant's semi-structured interviews.

3.8 Trustworthiness and credibility

Credible qualitative research is central to trustworthiness and credibility. According to Dudovskiy (2018:88), “credibility is the extent to which research findings represent a trustworthy interpretation of the data drawn from the original data”. On the other hand, Lochmiller and Lester (2015) assert that trustworthiness is obtained by presenting data collection, analysis and findings in a thorough and verifiable manner. Meyer (2001) attests that trustworthiness goes with confidentiality in building trust between the researcher and the interviewees.

3.8.1 Credibility

Several strategies ensure credibility, namely member verification, engaged time in field, audit logs, triangulation, and peer debriefing. (Dudovskiy, 2018). I ensured the credibility of the results by audio-recording participants’ responses and taking the interview transcriptions back to the participants to check for accuracy; this technique is called member-checking (Dudovskiy, 2018). On the other hand, Sacco (2011) calls this process peer debriefing. I also used peer debriefing to establish the credibility of the findings to ensure trustworthiness. Peer debriefing allows a colleague, who is not part of the research study, to ask critical questions related to the researcher’s process and biases (Flynn & McDermott, 2016; Mutch, 2013). Credibility was also ensured by using secondary data (interview transcriptions). According to Dudovskiy (2018), secondary data increases the levels of credibility in qualitative research because it avoids typical problems called reactivity, which are the consequences of the researcher’s biases shaping all forms of researcher-generated data. I used interview transcriptions; therefore, there is no reactivity.

3.9 Ethical considerations

According to Raeburn *et al.* (2015), ethics deals with what is right or wrong. This research used human beings to obtain data for the study. “Research ethics are the manner in which the researcher treats people involved in the research relating to informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and courtesy” (Walliman, 2017:43). Alderson and Morrow (2021) posit that being ethical in research means that participants are protected. Therefore, I protected my research participants by adhering to certain ethical considerations endorsed by the General/Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of the Free State. The following ethical issues were followed.

3.9.1 Ethical clearance

Prior to conducting the study, I sought approval through the General/Human Research Committee (GHREC) of the University of the Free State. The study obtained the approval and the ethical clearance registration number is **UFS-HSD2023/0328/23** [APPENDIX G].

3.9.2 Permission to conduct the study

Permission to do research was requested in writing to the principal. Approval was granted to me by the principal [APPENDIX D]. Furthermore, permission was requested for the recording of the interviews.

3.9.3 Right to informed consent

Prior to the collection of data, I issued informed consents to participants [APPENDIX A]. According to Babbie (2016), participants need to sign informed consent forms before providing data. Lee (2018:222) explains that “informed consent ensures the welfare of the participants by protecting them from any harm and informing them about the risks they are exposed to by taking part in a study”. I also issued a parental assent form to participants to give to their parents to sign [APPENDIX B]. A Child Assent form was attached for the learners to sign [APPENDIX C]. A letter from the registered school counsellor, to assist learners in case they need it was also attached to the parents form [APPENDIX F].

Furthermore, I provided them with leaflets containing information that acknowledges the protection of their rights. The information includes: the identification of the researcher, the purpose of the study, the duration, the nature of participation in the study, the potential benefits of taking part in the study, the anticipated inconvenience of taking part in the study, the guarantee of confidentiality and privacy, the assurance that the participant can withdraw at any time, as well as the provision of names and contact details of the supervisor to contact if questions arise. Participants were not coerced in signing the consent forms but were given time to go through the information leaflets alone and sign consent forms in their own time. Participants were guaranteed that, whenever they wished to withdraw from the research, they were free to do so and may not answer a question with which they do not feel comfortable. Anonymity and confidentiality were observed. Signed consent forms were obtained from the participants before conducting the interviews.

3.9.4 Right to anonymity and confidentiality

According to Creswell (2014), qualitative researchers make use of aliases or pseudonyms to protect the identities of participants and places. In this study, anonymity was ensured by

using pseudonyms for participants and schools to ensure that their identities are not compromised. Confidentiality was ensured by informing participants that their answers will not be shared in any context outside of the study. During the transcription of the data, I omitted descriptors such as the name of the school to ensure anonymity. Kumar (2011) asserts that the researcher must ensure that his/her participants are not identified.

3.9.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the methods and methodology and how they are applied in this study. Qualitative research was discussed as an approach, along with interpretative paradigm, sampling techniques, data-collection procedure, ethical considerations.

In the next chapter I present the findings of the study pertaining to the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction: Data findings

In Chapter 3, I discussed the methodologies used in this study. This chapter includes the results of the analysis and discussion of the textual data that emerged from semi-structured individual interviews that were audio recorded. I explored the data numerous times to become familiar with it before coding and categorizing it according to the themes that appeared. The analysis is based on the queer theory used to analyse and interpret the data, which also drew from the available literature to support or refute the findings.

Several themes emerged from the collected data and gave deeper insight into the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity. The pupils shared their thoughts, scenarios, and beliefs on a range of issues pertaining to LGBTQ celebrities' influence on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity. I gathered qualitative data using a non-probability random and purposive sample of learners who had the opportunity to ruminate, share, and, ideally, broaden their understandings in order to acquire new information on these topics.

This chapter presents the findings of the qualitative data collected from these young people's interviews.

Research questions and context

I present the data to answer the three research questions that frame and guide my study, in order to better understand and explore the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on these school youths' perceptions of gender and sexual diversity:

1. What are the perceptions among school youth towards LGBTQ celebrities?
2. What influence do the LGBTQ celebrities have on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity?
3. How do these perceptions and influence manifest in the lives of the school youth, in and outside the schoolyard?

Table 2 provides an overview of the themes that emerged from the data-analysis process. Five broad themes emerged from the analysis. This will help me answer the three critical questions that guide my study. Archer (2018) and Harding (2018) elaborate on data

analysis as a process that relies on a core idea of detecting prevalent themes or patterns. This is achieved by dissecting data into smaller elements and reorganising them into coherent themes. The themes were derived inductively from the responses provided by the participants during the interview. Therefore, this study utilised an inductive methodology to investigate the meanings and gain deeper understanding of a specific situation. This approach employed various techniques to explore the reasons behind people's thoughts, emotions, reactions, and behaviours. Additionally, it aimed to comprehend the process of opinion and attitude formation (Mohajan, 2018). Semantic themes focus only on the explicit meanings sent by the data, without delving into any more information beyond what the participant has explicitly said. On the other hand, hidden themes go beyond the surface level and aim to uncover and analyse underlying concepts or assumptions included in the data (Braun and Clark, 2006).

Table 2: Themes

<p>Theme 1: Impact of culture, religion and parental influences on school youth's Perceptions of gender and sexual diversity</p>
<p>Theme 2: Social media: Educational platform on school youths' perceptions of LGBTQ celebrities</p>
<p>Theme 3: Influence of LGBTQ celebrities: The impact on school youths' perceptions of gender and sexual diversity.</p>
<p>Theme 4: Queering education: School youth expressed the need to be taught about gender and sexual diversity</p>
<p>Theme 5: Paradox versus policy versus practice: Chapter 2 Bill of Rights in South Africa and SASA 1996 "Non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation". Silent school culture and school environment brings forward a paradox</p>

4.1.1 Impact of culture, religion and parental influences on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity

Bhana (2014) asserts that religion is the most accurate predictor of homophobic attitudes. The perception of gender-diverse people is either accepted, not homophobic, or entirely rejected by participants, with culture and religion appearing to be major contributing factors.

The participants' sense of gender and sexual diversity was influenced by their parents in addition to culture and religion.

High school students were asked the following question during the interviews: *“Tell me what are your feelings towards people who are not gender and sexually normative, as well as in your household and parent’s point of view?”*

Divya (Female): *“They're OK because I feel like mostly me, me not being homophobic is because of them, because they're not as well. They have gay friends, lesbian friends, so they're accepting like I am.”*

Leo (Male): *“My father taught me that men should only date women and men can't date men as it is wrong in the eyes of God and women can only date men as well. Yes, so I myself only date girls only.”*

Zwane (Female): *“My parents are like blatantly uhm homophobic.”*

Tercia: *“How so?”*

Zwane: *“Every time a LGBTQ presenting person comes up on TV or they see them uhm physically, they... they act some type of way, they say no we don't like this, this is not allowed in Christianity and all of that.”*

Retshi (Male): *“Uhm how they are feeling, like the parents, they were coming out of a place of fear cause they were raised in a community where these things are not out in public to them. So they were coming out of a place of fear. For me, my parents I would say they are judgemental but my aunt is the person who is very supportive. She managed to sit me down and talk. Accept yourself and the community will accept you she said. We are your parents, we love you. As a parent accepting your gay child, it is a gift from God.”*

Tumelo (Male): *“Male for me is a person that has a biblical set of mind whereby a guy dates a woman and a woman dates a guy.”*

Tercia: *“Can I just elaborate quickly on that? You mentioned a biblical mindset, so it means it comes down to religion?”*

Tumelo: *“I believe so because everyone I believe everyone grew up in a religious household and they have been taught about the Bible. So, the Bible actually states that men date women and women date men.”*

These extracts indicate that the participants have different perceptions about gender and sexual diversity and this implicates culture, religion, and their parents' views. One unanticipated finding was that Retshi, a 17-year-old Black African male, mentioned that his parents are judgemental and scared because of the community in which they were raised. It is important to note that this might be because his ethnicity is black and he can refer to the fact that being gay is not allowed in the Black community. However, he mentioned that for a parent to accept his/her gay child is a gift from God. This is an indication of his religion. According to Bhana (2014), an aspect of the learner's understanding of sexuality is anchored in religion.

Secondly, it is apparent that Divya was the only participant who mentioned that her parents are not homophobic and, because of them, she is not homophobic. This indicates a paradox to Retshi's cultural background because Divya comes from an Indian background. This result may be explained by the fact that there is a cultural difference. Culture, for this participant, seemed to be a strong determinant of her perception and her parents' perception of gender- and sexually diverse individuals.

From the perspective of the participants, such as that of Leo and Tumelo, it is clear that they strongly believe in the Bible and its teachings. On the other hand, another learner, Divya, is indifferent and tolerant and is not seen as homophobic. The participants' assimilation into their religious upbringing influenced their views on gender and sexual diversity. These attitudes are consistent with the findings of Nzimande (2017) and Msibi (2011), which demonstrate how religion and social processes influence an individual's perception of non-normative sexuality as aberrant, resulting in the reproduction of these perceptions in their daily lives.

Although these results indicate that culture, religion, and parents play a role in school youths' perceptions of gender and sexual diversity, the most striking result to emerge from the data is that all the learners were familiar with LGBTQ celebrities. It is interesting to note that another surprising aspect of the data was that only 1 participant (Tumelo) was not familiar with the term LGBTQ and could not elaborate as much as the other 6 participants. While conducting the interviews, it is apparent that learners participating in the study have well-informed notions of LGBTQ celebrities and of the term 'LGBTQ'. There is evidence to

suggest that a notable percentage of persons involved in the pursuit of knowledge or skill acquisition has the ability to effectively communicate terminology and ideas related to LGBTQ issues and sexuality (citation needed). Moreover, a few learners also mentioned the term 'homophobic'. For example, the majority of the learners understood LGBTQ as categories of sexuality, indicating their knowledge of gender and sexuality. However, only 1 of the learners mentioned that it is for people who are not gender fluid or non-binary, and who do not follow traditional roles. However, these results differ from a study conducted by Francis (2016), who found that most of the young people seem to find it difficult to articulate and explain the words 'gay' and 'lesbian', while Francis noted difficulties among participants in a study he conducted.. On the question as to whether they are familiar with the term 'LGBTQ', all learners stated:

Wendy (Female): *“Yes, because I am bisexual and I know L stands for lesbian, G stands for gay, B stands for bisexual, T stands for transgender and Q stands for queer.”*

Kea (Male): *“Yes, I am aware of the concept LGBTQ, formally known as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer.”*

Divya (Female): *“Yes, I am. Yes, I know they are abbreviations of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer.”*

Leo (Male): *“Yes, I am acquainted with the acronym LGBTQ. The LGBTQ for me is people who do not necessarily follow traditional roles that was set by religion or seen culturally such as a man dating a woman and vice versa. For example, people who are in the LGBTQ community can for example date women and women only relationships or men and men relationships or they can do both where sometimes they can date men and sometimes they can date women as well, or some are gender fluid or non-binary, meaning they don't use pronouns such as he or her, they prefer they or them or they've introduced this new set of pronouns such as Zee, Zir and if I'm not mistaken it's Zi.”*

Zwane (Female): *“Yes, I am familiar with that acronym, and it stands for lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual and gay.”*

Retshi (Male): *“I am familiar with the LGBTQ for me meaning it’s (uhm), it’s categories of our sexualities, and yes I’m acquainted, I fall under it actually yes.”*

What is interesting in this data is that only 1 learner of the 7 participants was not familiar with the term. However, he mentioned that there is a trend with LGBTQ:

Tumelo (Male): *“Yes, there is a trend right now, the LGBTQ is trending actually. No, I don’t know what it stands for.”*

The single most striking observation to emerge from the data comparison was that only 1 participant of the 7 participants,

Leo commented that he identified himself as a cisgender boy. A possible explanation for this result can be that he mentioned that, at his previous school, they celebrated pride month, and he had a lesbian teacher. These factors may explain the relatively good correlation between himself and his sexuality. Furthermore, he also mentioned what his father taught him. When I asked them in which category they see themselves and what it means, Leo stated:

Leo (Male): *“I identify myself as a cisgender boy.”*

Tercia: *“Okay, and what does it mean to be a cisgender boy?”*

Leo: *“A cisgender boy means to date only biological men or biological female, for example as I’m a boy in traditionally seen or in my household my father taught me that men should only date women and men can’t date men as it is wrong in the eyes of God and women can only date men as well, so I myself only date girls only.”*

The majority of the 6 learners clearly stated in which category they see themselves and expressed what it means when I asked them:

Wendy (Female): *“Bisexual.”*

Tercia: *“What is your understanding of being a bisexual?”*

Wendy: *“Uhm, I find both genders attractive, physically, sexually and emotionally.”*

Kea (Male): *“I don’t identify myself in none of the factors above.”*

Tercia: *“How do you identify yourself?”*

- Kea:** *"I would say I am a straight male. Being a straight male means you are doing the right things, men dating women and women dating men and you being true to yourself and sticking to the person that you are and sticking to your character."*
- Divya (Female):** *"I would like to believe that I am straight."*
- Zwane (Female):** *"I don't like to categorise myself but if I would have to choose, I would choose to identify myself as queer."*
- Tercia:** *"Tell me if you say queer, why would you say queer, what does it mean?"*
- Zwane:** *"Because, I'm kinda like still exploring the whole concept of being in the LGBTQ community."*
- Tumelo (Male):** *"I identify myself as a straight person."*
- Tercia:** *"Please tell me in your understanding, what is a straight person?"*
- Tumelo:** *"A person that has a biblical set of mind whereby a guy dates a woman and a woman dates a guy."*
- Retshi (Male):** *"G. Gay."*
- Tercia:** *"If you say you are G, can you please tell me your understanding of saying you are a gay male?"*
- Retshi:** *"I am a gay male it means that I only date men. Nothing with women or transgender or what, only male."*

Moreover, yet another surprising aspect about the data is that learners could articulate and categorise themselves according to their sexuality. However, the interviews suggest that learners all learn more about gender and sexual diversity outside the school. These results match those observed in earlier studies. Francis and Msibi (2011) contend that minimal work seems to have been done to empower teachers to teach sexual orientation in the classroom, and as a result, they actively disregard issues of sexual diversity. Beyond the school, learners reported that they are exposed to diverse sexualities on social media. In the school, learners reported that they have not been exposed to gender and sexual diversity. Of the 7 participants, 2 responded in the affirmative when I asked them whether

they were ever exposed to gender and sexual diversity during their school career, the majority of the learners stated:

Wendy (Female): *“Noo. My school does not provide support, do you understand and I would say my school is also a discriminatory environment for gender diverse children.”*

Kea (Male): *“No, I have not been exposed to gender and sexual diversity during my school career.”*

Divya (Female): *“Uhm no, I’ve not. No, not at all.”*

Tumelo (Male): *“I learned about it at school from someone who falls under the category.”*

Retshi (Male): *“No. Nothing so ever. I have never done it.”*

Although Wendy stated that her school does not provide support and that it is a discriminatory environment for gender-diverse children, it is apparent that Leo’s response is different as he mentioned his previous school and how they celebrated people who identify as part of the LGBTQ community. The trend in the responses may be attributed to the lack of comprehensive sexuality education or even basic exposure to sexual and gender diversity among most participants. Furthermore, Zwane also mentioned that she has been exposed to gender and sexual diversity. When I asked them: *“Were you ever exposed to gender and sexual diversity during your school career?”*, Leo and Zwane stated:

Leo (Male): *“Yes, yes I have been. So, whenever it was pride month in our old school, we would dedicate a certain day to celebrate people who identify as part of the LGBTQ community, we were also taught about it in subjects such as LO and just in general because in 6th grade my Natural Science teacher was lesbian, so I got to experience a LGBTQ member in person.”*

Zwane (Female): *“Yes, I was exposed to sexual diversity for about 4 years and I had a gay friend once, and there was also a lesbian in grade 11. And currently we had a discussion about transgender women in sport, so that’s how I got exposed to sexual and gender diversity.”*

4.1.2 Social media: Educational platform on school youths' perceptions of LGBTQ celebrities

The study is motivated by the hypothesis that the school youths' perceptions towards LGBTQ celebrities are largely influenced and shaped by their interaction on social media. This theme draws attention to how social media influences how participants perceive LGBTQ celebrities. LGBTQ celebrities use their status in media to advocate for LGBTQ+ rights, disclose their own experiences of coming out, question societal conventions about gender and sexuality, and serves as a pedagogical medium to impart knowledge to young people about matters of gender and sexual diversity. Two interviewees explicitly said that their schools are oppressive institutions, which is a significant observation to consider. This might be a reason why queer celebrities are crucial and serve as a resource in educating school-age individuals about gender and sexual diversity:

"No. My school does not provide support, do you understand and I would say my school is also a discriminatory environment for gender diverse children. (Wendy, Female)

One of my peers, I've seen one of my peers actually being bullied by an educator. Because they fall under the LGBTQ, yeah thingy." (Wendy, Female)

As learners assert that they are not taught about gender and sexual diversity during their school career, I asked them: *"Do they believe they are more exposed to LGBTQ people and LGBTQ celebrities during their school career or via social media?"* All 7 participants expressed the belief of social media to acquire knowledge about gender and sexual diversity due to hegemonic cisnormativity embedded in schools. This is a clear indication that these young individuals rely on informal curriculum as a source of information for sexual and gender issues, as they have very little exposure to sexual and gender diversity at school:

Wendy (Female): *"Via social media because a lot of children at school are members of the LGBTQ and on social media you see people coming out and it's just nice, it's a platform where when people are judging you, there are people who can back you up."*

Kea (Male): *"I am a social media activist so I would say I am exposed to LGBTQ members more on social media, yeah, more on social"*

media than via my school career. I come across social media activist that are part of LGBTQ community and these are the things that's trending in this generation and more people are exposed to it on social media."

Divya (Female): *"Ah yes, via social media, uhm, people like Somizi Mhlongo, Lasizwe, Caster Semenya, so I am exposed. Only on social media though, only on social media. But I have a few friends at school that are gay and lesbian and that."*

Leo, clearly said "I learn and educate myself about this":

Leo (Male): *"Via school career I would say no but via social media yes. There have been protests going around in the US, where people now identify as women but they don't go through surgical surgeries and then people are fighting whether its fair or not for them to compete in female or male sports. So I've been learning and educating myself about that."*

Zwane (Female): *"I am more exposed now since I am in high school, what's helping me with that is social media. There are like different celebrities there are films that portray LGBTQ sometimes they portray them in a negative way but anyway it still does contribute to that."*

Tumelo (Male): *"I am exposed to LGBTQ celebrities via social media."*

Retshi (Male): *"Via social media, I think on social media you following them, they are influencers, you are liking their lifestyle you are like motivated about them, you like oh here is this person she/he is gay they are doing this so and so, they are living their life, they are not boxed about the things they are doing, because locally you are giving side eyes, on social media you can even search LGBTQ gay means this gay means that, so you are more exposed to them via your phone. You express yourself in a more manner, it's between you and your phone because people are morose."*

These extracts reveal that the school, which these high-school learners attend, does not expose them to gender and sexual diversity. Therefore, they turn to the media for answers and inspiration. These findings further support the idea of Valkenburg and Piotrowski (2017) who argue that nowadays school youth spend more time on social media than they do at school.

When the participants were asked in Question 7: *“Do you know any LGBTQ celebrities”?*, the overall response to this question was very positive. Furthermore, in Question 8, I asked: *“Do you see them as different from your gender or sexual orientation?”* It is worth noting that there was a common view of perceptions among the interviewees. This result may be explained by the fact that school youth spend more time watching TV than they do in school (Gottlieb, 2009). The vast majority of them mentioned names of local and international LGBTQ celebrities and perceived them as no different from their own gender or sexual orientation. Divya and Zwane mentioned that they view the LGBTQ celebrities as unique. This illustrates that none of these learners are critical of LGBTQ celebrities:

Wendy (Female): *“Miley Cyrus; Jaiden Smith; Sam Smith; Mohale.”*

Tercia: *“Do you see them as ‘different’ from your gender or sexual orientation?”*

Wendy: *“No. Because uhm sexual orientations refers to a person’s pattern of emotional, romantic and sexual attractiveness to people. There is nothing different about this because they also intimacy and affection in the same way as a man and a female when they having sex.”*

Kea (Male): *“I have come across 2 gay men in South Africa, which is Somizi Mhlongo and Lasizwe Dambuza.”*

Tercia: *“Do you see them as ‘different’ from your gender or sexual orientation?”*

Kea: *“No. I consider them as people, because we are all people, whether its lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer. I’ll identify them as people because we are all people.”*

Divya (Female): *“I do, as I said Somizi Mhlongo, Bala, Caster Semenya, Lasizwe. Yeah, I know a few.”*

- Tercia:** *“Do you see them as ‘different’ from your gender or sexual orientation?”*
- Divya:** *“No, I don’t feel like they are different in a way that we shouldn’t be accepting of them or it’s a taboo, I just feel like they are different and diverse and unique in their own way.”*
- Zwane (Female):** *“Yes, I do know quite a lot, there’s Sade Giliberti; there’s Somizi Mhlongo, Ellen DeGeneres, Letoya Makhene etc.”*
- Tercia:** *“Do you see them as ‘different’ from your gender or sexual orientation?”*
- Zwane:** *“No, not really. I don’t know, for me I find it as a normal thing, yes they are unique, I’d say they are unique, they not different.”*
- Tumelo (Male):** *“I’m exposed to LGBTQ celebrities via social media. I can name a few from Hollywood which are Sam Smith; Matt Danner and Nathan Ray.”*
- Tercia:** *“Do you see them as ‘different’ from your gender or sexual orientation?”*
- Tumelo:** *“No, they are not different from mine. The only difference between me and them is what type of people or genders they are attracted to and what I’m attracted to. So, that’s the only difference that I see between me and them.”*
- Retshi (Male):** *“I know some, which is Lasizwe who I follow even on Instagram, uhm who’s this one bathong, I like some of the lesbians, I follow them, Big Prince, she is like the American lesbian that I follow, I follow Xoli from Jo’burg, she is a transgender, I follow them, like their lifestyle, how they generate money.”*
- Tercia:** *“Do you see them as ‘different’ from your gender or sexual orientation?”*
- Retshi:** *“I don’t see them different, they are living the lifestyle that we are living, the problem is they are exposing it to us, so they are giving us the encouragement to like reveal yourself, be you, do you, so they are not different.”*

Of the 7 participants who responded to questions 7 and 8, Leo, a Black cisgender male, reported a difference in gender and sexual orientation towards LGBTQ celebrities. A possible explanation for this might be that he categorises himself as cisgender and that he mentions his father's influence and also a form of Christianity. It is important to note that the participant Leo's responses consistently reflect a cultural, religious, and personal perspective that conflates gender and sexuality, reinforces compulsory heterosexuality for cis-identifying individuals, and deems same-sex sexual orientations as unbiblical or unmanly, among other views. The response to the questions included:

Leo (Male): *"I can name a few. Harry Styles, James Charles, Somizi and Ellen DeGeneres."*

Tercia: *"Do you see them as 'different' from your gender or sexual orientation?"*

Leo: *"Yes, as they have chose to go against, I'll say tradition and they have decided to date only their type of gender such as Harry Styles, Harry Styles only dates men and James Charles, he identifies as a gay men."*

4.1.3 Influence of LGBTQ celebrities: The impact on school youths' perceptions of gender and sexual diversity

De Wee (2021) argues that some South African celebrities are happy to represent and speak out about their gender identity and sexual orientation. Learners believed that LGBTQ celebrities do have an influence on a person's perception of gender and sexual diversity. It is encouraging to compare this result with that of Kimathi (2013) who found that role models such as celebrities, parents, teachers, and peers influence the attitudes and behaviours of many people, especially teenagers and school youth. This can determine what kind of person they become, including their appearance, attitudes, gender and sexual diversity, as well as goals in life. There was a sense of agreement among the interviewees. A common view among the learners was that LGBTQ celebrities influence people to be free and be themselves. Wendy, a 17-year-old Coloured female, also mentioned that many people in South Africa are homophobic and that this influence will change their perceptions and opinions. It is interesting to note that, of the 7 participants, only 2 (29%) (Kea and Leo) mentioned that both positive and negative influences can be exerted on youth by celebrities. These students both identified as male and straight. Moreover, 2 of the 7 participants view LGBTQ celebrities as role models and semi-gods. This finding

corroborates the idea of Beller (2021), who suggests that celebrities become celebrated and precious because of the attention attracted by the media.

In Question 9, I asked them: *“In what ways do you think exposure to LGBTQ celebrities can influence your perception or opinion on gender and sexual diversity?”* The overall response to this question was very positive. It is important to mention that the respondents had a same perspective on perceptions. Most of them saw LGBTQ celebrities as indistinguishable from those who share their own gender or sexual orientation, and two of the seven participants classified them as unique. This signifies the acceptance and visibility of queer celebrities: :

Wendy (Female): *“Overall, the influence is self-realization, pride, and confidence. This helps changing people’s opinions and perceptions. Many people in SA are homophobic, but many have become comfortable with having members of the LGBTQ around.”*

Kea (Male): *“Celebrities are very influential, especially members that are with the LGBTQ society, celebrities can have a positive influence on youth; they can even serve as role models. However, famous people, including singers, actors, and other celebrities, can also provide unhealthy examples; celebrities influence on body shaming and substance use is frequently detrimental to youth and mental health, so in this way people can be influenced much more faster.”*

Divya (Female): *“Uhm with celebrities I feel like they...they promote trends and ideas because they are sociable and we wanna be like them, as teenagers, as peers, we wanna be like celebrities, we wanna live that life so I feel like they have a lot of uhm influence in our perspective and opinions because we want to be like them, we value them, we see them as semi-gods, I could say, yeah so we value them, so I feel like most of their opinions are... I think I became more accepting of other people when I saw celebrities owning their sexuality, so I feel like they had a lot of perspective, they influence my perspective and opinion on anything.”*

Retshi (Male): *“They can, locally people are not homophobic to like local influencers because they have money, it is status that’s talking. If we are more exposed to them, it means everyone is more exposed, they can express, they can collaborate like being in a cohesive environment because accepting like... if I am influenced by this person, I would be like adjusting to their lifestyle, you influencing me, I am inspired by you, so more people, even more people are inspired by gay people who have money because they made it in life, so they will be more exposed to them.”*

Tumelo (Male): *“Yes, some might, some of them might be influenced based on this because they may be scared of showing the world of who they truly are, so this might be a good way of allowing them or to show them who they truly are and what they want in life.”*

In response to Question 9, the single most striking observation to emerge from this question was that 1 respondent elicited from the news and mentioned gender roles and how this could impact on young children.

Leo (Male): *“Celebrities can positively or negatively impact[our] lives, as for example on the news recently, there has been this celeb, Dylan Mulvaney who is a man and now identifies as a woman and he was, he was advertising for women’s underwear for Nike, so it could impact young children to see that underwear is for... that underwear... I would say that since he was wearing female underwear it could, I don’t know lead young children in the wrong direction about where they fit in, in society and it could allow people to, aah, I would say question themselves about what gender they are and if they would like to identify as part of the LGBTQ community.”*

One learner stated that she feels educated and LGBTQ celebrities will increase her knowledge.

Zwane (Female): *“I feel like uhm, the way celebrities express themselves and stuff are only help us to be more educated about the LGBTQ*

community instead of changing, it will make me grow in a way and increase my knowledge.”

There are parallels between the perspectives conveyed by the respondents in this study and those described by Craig and McInroy (2014), who discovered that LGBTQ youth also search for support groups through social and queer media communities, in order to develop their gender and sexual diversity through the support of peers who share empowering coming-out ideas. Furthermore, the above extracts show a common view among the interviewees. Moreover, two discrete views emerged from this. First, LGBTQ celebrities can have both a positive and a negative influence on the youth. LGBTQ celebrities can also be viewed as ‘semi-gods and role models’. Secondly, the influence of LGBTQ celebrities can help stop homophobic behaviour towards LGBTQ individuals. The findings of the study indicate that LGBTQ celebrities play a crucial role in raising awareness about LGBTQ+ issues, including discrimination and the fight for equal rights. Moreover, the findings revealed that LGBTQ celebrities disrupted notions of compulsory heterosexual and cisgendered beliefs. This awareness among school youth will inspire some to become more socially and politically active in advocating for LGBTQ+ rights. Queer celebrities have the potential to foster views that are more inclusive and tolerant, so serving as a catalyst for inspiring activity aimed at promoting social change. The concept of performativity in Queer Theory corresponds to the idea of celebrities as active actors in questioning societal norms. LGBTQ celebrities defy normative norms, utilize their platforms to fight oppressive institutions, and campaign for LGBTQ+ rights, affecting the school youth. The Queer theory questions fixed categories reveals power systems and examines societal norms that lead to the marginalization of non-heteronormative and non-cisnormative identities.

4.1.4 Queering education: School youth expressed the need to be taught about gender and sexual diversity

This theme emerged, for example, in discussions on question 4 when I asked the learners whether they were ever exposed to gender and sexual diversity during their school career. The majority of the learners indicated that they have not been exposed. These learners expressed the need to be taught about gender and sexual diversity. It is encouraging to compare these results with those of Nichols (2020), who found that the South African youth, regardless of their sexuality, indeed is in favour of the teaching and learning of gender and sexual diversity. Moreover, by drawing on the findings of Nichols (2020), Brown and

Nichols (2021) established that the school youth who participated in their study understand the need for support mechanisms. These findings further support the result found in Kea's answer, who mentioned that suicide can occur if they are not taught about gender and sexual diversity. Furthermore, the response to the question correlates with the Suicide Prevention Resource Centre (2018) who found that increasing visibility through social media and schools of marginalised groups such as LGBTQ is beneficial under the epidemic of suicide among LGBTQ school youth.

The connection or relationship between understanding gender and sexual diversity and education becomes evident when considering that most learners reported a lack of exposure to gender and sexual diversity during their school career. However, they could articulate and elaborate on their sexuality and LGBTQ celebrities.

These adolescents confessed they do not get taught about gender and sexual diversity at school and that they are more exposed to LGBTQ celebrities and LGBTQ people via social media, since it is not addressed in the school's formal curriculum. A range of responses was elicited when I asked: "Why do you think it is important to be exposed to gender and sexual diversity during your school career?". It is worth noting that these learners believe that there is a great need to be taught, and to have a better understanding, as evident in the following 4 narratives:

Wendy (Female): *"Yes because I feel as if everybody should understand where these people are coming from, they were born like that, they just didn't wake up one day and be like okay I am gay. People will just understand."*

Kea (Male): *"I think it is important for an individual that is influenced by LGBTQ, that they are comfortable with their sexuality and their perception, if not, things like suicidal thoughts and suicide can take place."*

Divya (Female): *"I believe we should be taught about. Because I feel like many people don't know about them and they don't have so much knowledge, I just hear and say mouth, I mean word to mouth. So I believe that if we get educated, we get knowledgeable and would be more accepting and have more knowledge on what's really going on or who they are."*

Retshi (Male): *“Yes, it is important because we are going to be taught about what's going on in the outside world about sexualities and not boxing things as all traditional things as people may tend to box them. They need to add it to the curriculum even in life orientation, they need to in because it's life. So why choose certain topics to be in life orientation then certain topics to be not. So they need to change the curriculum, teach, teach us, and involve teachers minds because some teachers would be homophobic inside and shoving it than saying it because they would say showing it would be abusing you verbally.”*

The participants highlighted how LGBTQ celebrities disrupted stereotypical gender and sexual norms. They spoke of how these celebrities had helped them question and break down rigid boundaries, leading to a more inclusive perspective on gender and sexuality. This demonstrates that LGBTQ celebrities are challenging traditional ideas of heterosexuality and cisnormativity among pupils since all of these learners, with the exception of one, do not question or critique LGBTQ celebrities

4.1.5 Paradox versus policy versus practice: Chapter 2 Bill of Rights in South Africa and SASA 1996 “Non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation”. Silent school culture and school environment brings forward a paradox

Van Vollenhoven and Els (2013) state that South Africa's Constitution was the first in Africa to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and to guarantee equality for LGBTQ people. Section 9(3) of Chapter 2 of the Bill of Rights states explicitly that:

The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth (South African Bill of rights, 1996).

This theme endeavours to acquire a deeper comprehension of the silent school culture and the school environment that brings forward a paradox, regardless of the Bill of Rights and how it is implemented to embrace and promote respect towards gender- and sexually diverse learners. When the participants were asked in question 4: *“Were you ever exposed to gender and sexual diversity during your school career?”*, three of the participants (Wendy, Divya, and Retshi) were very explicit and mentioned the school environment in which they

found themselves, with specific reference to educators in their school. It is apparent to see how all three participants referred to teachers:

Wendy (Female): *“My school does not provide support. And I would say my school is a discriminatory environment for gender diverse children.”*

Tercia: *“Okay. But why would you say that?”*

Wendy: *One of my peers, I've seen one of my peers actually being bullied by an educator. Because they fall under the LGBTQ, yeah thingy.”*

Divya (Female): *“I feel like teachers are ignorant or they don't just pay attention to that.”*

Retshi (Male): *“So they need to change the curriculum, teach, teach us, and involve teachers minds because some teachers would be homophobic inside and shoving it than saying it because they would say showing it would be abusing you verbally.”*

The response from these 3 participants shows that there is a silent school culture in the classroom. This finding agrees with Bhana and Msibi's (2012) findings, which showed that South African schools are homophobic, and that teachers view LGBTQ learners as invisible. Veriava, Thom and Hodgson (2017) assert that the policies and regulations of institutions must be in accordance with the South African constitution. However, this brings forward a paradox, as noted in the above extracts.

It can be argued that educators do not believe that gender- and sexually diverse rights are important enough to follow the policies in place. Gender- and sexual diversity rights of the LGBTQ youth are guaranteed in Sections 9 and 10 of the Constitution of our country as well as the South African Schools Act of 1996 (SASA), in section 5, explains that the public admission policy should admit pupils and meet their educational needs without unjust discrimination. None of these policies are implemented as evidently shown in the extracts from the 3 participants. The aforementioned results are consistent with the theoretical framework that forms the basis of this research. Jagose (1996) argues that queer theory emphasizes the need of confronting and transgressing heteronormativity, the binary nature of gender and sexuality, and resisting dominant systems of gender and sexuality. Butler (1993) labels this phenomenon as "the heterosexual matrix." Jagose also recognizes that queer theory aims to dismantle the persistent use of classifications and designations that

perpetuate stereotypes and cause harm to those occupying marginalized positions, such as those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT). School youth are exposed to binary frameworks that are pervasive in school environments. The Queer theory questions fixed categories reveals power systems and examines societal norms that lead to the marginalization of non-heteronormative and non-cisnormative identities.

4.1.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented an analysis of the data generated from the semi-structured individual interviews that led to the emergence of five themes.

The data revealed that the participants' cultural and religious beliefs influence how they view gender and sexual diversity. Furthermore, the data revealed that LGBTQ celebrities also have an influence on the school youths' perceptions of gender and sexual diversity. The data revealed a paradox versus policy, due to the school environment that has homophobic teachers, and that most of the participants felt that the teachers' attitude regarding gender-diverse learners is ignorant and negative. These results indicate that young students are being exposed to and tolerant of queer celebrities, both within their local communities and on a worldwide scale. The majority of participants saw LGBTQ celebrities as indistinguishable from those who share their own gender or sexual orientation, but two out of the seven participants regarded them as distinct. This indicates the acknowledgment and prominence of LGBTQ public figures. Two interviewees explicitly said that their schools are oppressive institutions, which is a significant observation to consider. This might be a reason why queer celebrities are crucial and serve as a resource in educating school-age individuals about gender and sexual diversity. These narratives underscore that school youth turn to the media and queer celebrities for answers to educate themselves on gender and sexual diversity due to hegemonic institutions. These findings further support the idea of Valkenburg and Piotrowski (2017) who argue that nowadays school youth spend more time on social media than they do at school. This finding agrees with Bhana and Msibi's (2012) findings, which showed that South African schools are homophobic, and that teachers view queer learners as invisible.

The next and final chapter discusses the main findings of the study and draws conclusions. It will provide a summary of the entire study and make suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the analysis of the findings. This chapter provides a summary of this study, the key findings of the research, as well as recommendations and limitations of the study. The direction of the investigation was guided by three fundamental inquiries:

1. What are the perceptions among school youth towards LGBTQ celebrities?
2. What influence do the LGBTQ celebrities have on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity?
3. How do these perceptions and influence manifest in the lives of the school youth, in and outside the schoolyard?

5.2 Summary of research

My motivation to conduct this research stemmed from my experience as a high school educator. My experiences and observations have revealed that there are homophobic professionals with negative perceptions and attitudes towards gender-diverse learners at the school.

However, this study particularly aimed to explore the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity. It was also influenced by my experiences and reading of academic studies focusing on educators not teaching gender and sexual diversity topics that form part of the LO curriculum. Therefore, the school youth look at the informal curriculum to educate themselves, such as social media.

This study's research topic, "The influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity", was introduced in Chapter 1. This study was conducted by responding to the three primary research questions mentioned in the introduction. Chapter 1 also addressed the study's research problem. In addition, it provided the study's context by citing relevant literature and the rationale for conducting the research. Also included were the research questions, research design, and methodology to be used in the study.

In terms of gender and sexual diversity issues, the literature presented in Chapter 2 provided insight into the current status of international and South African educational environments. Chapter 2 also provides the theoretical framework that was employed, where the queer theory served as an analytic prism to examine the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school-aged children's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity. In addition, the literature reveals that the overt curriculum examines the intentional curriculum, whereas the covert curriculum works by suppressing sexual orientation-related issues and averting conversations. It supports heteronormativity frequently (Nichols, 2016). Youth therefore turn to social media and LGBTQ personalities for information on gender and sexual diversity issues.

The research methodology used for the study was described in Chapter 3. It provided a thorough account of how the research was conducted. It included a thorough description of the research design, the study's context, participant samples, data-collection methods, data analysis, ethical considerations, the study's limitations, and how the study's validity and reliability were maintained and observed. The study implemented qualitative research and was set within the interpretivist paradigm, allowing me to gain a deeper comprehension about the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). The objectives of the study were addressed with 7 Grade 10 learners from a high school in Kroonstad, Free State province, South Africa. This chapter presented the research design and methodology used in this study and outlined that qualitative research was used, as it sought to understand the participants and why they feel, react, and perceive the LGBTQ celebrities the way they do and also sought to understand how the LGBTQ celebrities' influence is formed. The interpretivist paradigm, which emphasises an understanding of secondary school pupils and how they interpret the world around them, guided the study. Furthermore, the interpretivist paradigm allowed me as the researcher to elicit the multiple socially constructed truths and realities of the participants. This paradigm was useful for comprehending the school adolescents' perspectives because it allowed me to gain a more in-depth comprehension of the high school students' individual and holistic attitudes towards LGBTQ celebrities. To generate data to address the research questions, I used semi-structured interviews and observation as data-collection methods. The data analysis was informed by queer theory. This theory has one main principle, namely to question and queer issues of sexuality and gender.

The fourth chapter presented the study's findings and discussed the research findings. This chapter utilised queer theory to either support or refute the study's findings. Utilising thematic analysis, the data collected during the research process was analysed. In the summary of research findings, the primary findings are presented.

This concluding chapter seeks to discuss the findings of the research, discuss the drawbacks encountered during the study and provide suggestions for future research initiatives.

5.3 Summary of the research findings and discussion

Five primary themes emerged from the data analysis, which sought to achieve the study's three objectives namely, to explore what perceptions the school youth have towards LGBTQ celebrities and discover what influence the LGBTQ celebrities have on school youth. I also wish to determine how these perceptions and influence manifest in the lives of the school youth, in and outside the schoolyard. The five key findings emerged from the data analysis was discussed thoroughly in chapter four.

5.3.1 The role of culture, religion, and parents on school youths' perceptions of gender and sexual diversity

The majority of participants held religious beliefs that influence their acceptance, judgement and discrimination of gender and sexual diversity. Many participants indicated that their parents also play a role in forming their perceptions of sexuality. According to the participants, the Bible's teachings assert that a man should be with a man and a woman with a woman. Furthermore, the majority of the participants mentioned traditional roles and cultural roles which exclude gender and sexual diversity. Some participants mentioned that they are not homophobic because their parents are not. However, some mentioned that their parents are blatantly homophobic.

5.3.2 Social media: Educational platform on school youths' perceptions of LGBTQ celebrities

The participants revealed that they are more exposed to gender and sexual diversity on social media than in the formal school curriculum. Some of them mentioned that they educate themselves on social media and that issues of LGBTQ are trending now on social-media platforms.

5.3.3 Influence of LGBTQ celebrities: The impact on school youths' perceptions of gender and sexual diversity

The study revealed that LGBTQ celebrities do have an influence on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity. The findings reveal that some participants acknowledged that LGBTQ celebrities can have both a positive and a negative influence on school youth. The majority of the participants mentioned that LGBTQ celebrities can be viewed as role models and idols. The study also found that exposure to LGBTQ celebrities can change individual perceptions of gender and sexual diversity, and can help with the coming-out process and stop homophobia.

5.3.4 Queering education: School youth expressed the need to be taught about gender and sexual diversity

Some of the participants mentioned that the school environment is homophobic and that teachers are ignorant. Therefore, they do not get taught about gender and sexual diversity. This theme emerged from the participants' point of view that they want to be taught, to have a better understanding and for bullying to stop. Most of them mentioned that LGBTQ issues are trending on social media and that is where they get educated. Most of the participants expressed the need to be taught about gender and sexual diversity. This is an indication that it is an issue that needs serious consideration.

5.3.5 Paradox versus policy versus practice: Chapter 2 Bill of Rights in South Africa and SASA 1996 "Non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation". Silent school culture and school environment brings forward a paradox

The participants' responses revealed that teachers practise their own rules in their classrooms and disregard the Bill of Rights. The teachers are arrogant and ignore topics of gender and sexual diversity. The participants mentioned that the school environment is discriminative, and that issues of gender and sexual diversity are not considered in the curriculum. This brings forward paradox versus practice. All of the participants addressed the need to be taught. Moreover, silent school cultures were found in the data. However, all of the participants knew what the acronym LGBTQ stands for and they could categorise themselves without any hesitation. As mentioned earlier, some of the participants stated that they educate themselves on gender and sexual diversity on social media and not in the formal curriculum.

5.4 Recommendations

The following proposals are made based on the findings of the study:

- Teachers cannot be ignorant about gender and sexual diversity issues, as the constitution clearly mandates that it should be implemented, and that no discrimination can take place. Furthermore, to ensure that teaching takes place, schools that follow the CAPS curriculum should be inspected by the DBE (Department of Basic Education) officials; schools that follow the IEB (Independent Examinations Board) should be inspected by IEB officials, and the schools that follow the SACAI (South African Comprehensive Assessment Institute) should be inspected by SACAI officials to ensure that policies are in place and that it is taught at school level, specifically in the LO curriculum. These institutions should train teachers to address gender and sexual diversity to be non-discriminatory to gender-diverse learners and to avoid silent school cultures.
- The topic of LGBTQ covers the news platforms; video clips can also be shown in classrooms, it cannot simply be included in the LO classroom; it can be extended to English Home Language classrooms, as well as to First Additional Languages so that learners can have debates or oral topics based on gender and sexual diversity.
- More research needs to be done in both private and government schools to establish the challenges and to ensure that all policies are in place. Parents also need to be included in this research to ensure that the code of conduct is met accordingly. This could also assist in support mechanisms for schools.
- It is important to note that all stakeholders play a part in changing stereotypes and breaking the status quo of gender and sexual diversity. This includes the management of the school, the parents, and the learners.

5.5 Limitations

Several restrictions may have affected the results:

- The nature of the study resulted in some learners not willing to participate, as well as their parents being uncomfortable for them to participate, due to disapproval of LGBTQ that forms part of our society. I had to reassure both parents and learners who agreed to participate that confidentiality would be maintained at all times and that pseudonyms would be used to secure their identities. I also had to make use of the registered school psychologist for emotional support.

- As an educator in the same school where I conducted the research, I interacted with learners in the classes I teach. It is possible that the Hawthorne effect influenced the study, as the learners' dread of being judged may have prompted them to want to respond in a desirable way or in a way they believed would be more acceptable to me, especially given the sensitivity of the study.
- The findings of my study were limited to a small sample of seven Grade 10 students from the same educational school in a suburb of South Africa's Free State province. I solely addressed the learner's opinions on gender and sexual diversity based on the influence of LGBTQ celebrities. I have not addressed the perceptions of other stakeholders such as teachers, parents, or school management.
- I would also acknowledge that there was a language barrier. I conducted the interviews in English, which is not their native language in the majority of cases, despite the fact that English is their primary language in school. This may have led to confusion and misunderstanding of the terms and concepts in this study. In addition, the sample size was restricted to a small number of high school males and girls; consequently, the findings of this study cannot be generalised.

5.6 Conclusion

The researcher realised that, although gender and sexual diversity forms part of the LO curriculum in the school system, the participants learn more about gender and sexual diversity on social media than in the formal curriculum. The researcher also realised that LGBTQ celebrities do have an influence on school youths' perceptions of gender and sexual diversity. However, this influence can be both positive and negative. The researcher found that school youth expressed the need to be educated on LGBTQ topics and that they want to learn more and questioned the school's education system for not including it in their curriculum. Moreover, the researcher also realised that the school youth found their educators to be ignorant and their school environment to be discriminative towards gender-diverse learners. This then puts the learners at a disadvantage in terms of them educating themselves on social media and other factors outside the schoolyard. Religion, culture, and the influence from their parents also played a role in their perceptions of gender and sexual diversity. My findings indicate that LGBTQ celebrities do have an influence on school youths' perceptions of gender and sexual diversity. The learners are inquisitive and are requesting more information about gender and sexual diversity, and they mentioned

that they need to be taught about it so that people can understand it better. This is an indication that it must be implemented properly to form part of the school culture.

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APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

Research study information leaflet and consent form

Date: 26 May 2023

Title of the research project

The influence of LGBTQ Celebrities on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity

Principle investigator / researcher(s) name(s) and contact number(s):

Miss Tercia Botha 2010050181 0825873571

Faculty and Department:

Name of Faculty: Education

Name of Department: Education Psychology

Study leader(s) name and contact number:

Dr Henry James Nichols
0612069469

What is the aim / purpose of the study?

The study aims to explore the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity

Who is doing the research?

Miss T. Botha. I am a Masters student at the University of the Free State in the field of Education Psychology

Has the study received ethical approval?

This study has received approval from the Research Ethics Committee of UFS. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher.

Approval number: UFS-HSD2023/0328/23

Why are you invited to take part in this research project?

We would like you to participate with us in this research as you adhere to the criteria of school youth as the main focus of this study. You will form part of a group of 11 participants, selected from the group of learners I taught in the past 3 years.

What is the nature of participation in this study?

The study involves a semi-structured interview. The interview will be approximately 20 minutes. 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. The school counsellor will also be present to take precautions for emotional distress.

The interview questions to be asked include:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Could you please provide me with some detail about yourself such as your age, gender, and how you experience school?
2. Are you acquainted with the acronym LGBTQ?
3. In which category do you see/identify yourself?
4. Were you ever exposed to gender and sexual diversity during your school career?
 - If YES, in what ways were you exposed to gender and sexual diversity?
 - If NO, why do you think it is important to be exposed to gender and sexual diversity during your school career?
5. Do you believe that you are more exposed to LGBTQ celebrities and LGBTQ people during your school career or via social media?
6. What are your feelings towards people who are not gender and sexually normative?
7. Do you know any LGBTQ celebrities? Please give some names of these celebrities.
8. Do you see them as "different" from your gender or sexual orientation?
9. In what ways do you think exposure to LGBTQ celebrities can influence your perception or opinion and other people's perception and opinion on gender and sexual diversity?
10. Do you believe gathering more information about LGBTQ celebrities will change your perception of gender identity and sexual diversity?

Can the participant withdraw from the study?

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. 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.

What are the potential benefits of taking part in this study?

I am sure that you will benefit from this study, through which your voice, perspectives and opinions will be heard regarding the influence of celebrities on your perception of gender and sexual diversity as well as the teaching of LGBTQ content. Your opinion will be combined with that of other participants, and this information will lead to a better understanding of LGBTQ in the schooling context

What is the anticipated inconvenience of taking part in this study?

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

Will what I say be kept confidential?

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

How will the information be stored and ultimately destroyed?

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet at the Faculty of Education for future research or academic purposes. The electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable

Will I receive payment or any incentives for participating in this study?

No incentives will be given for participating in this study.

How will the participant be informed of the findings / results of the 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 counsellor (the school counsellor) is present.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Consent to participate in this study

I, the undersigned,

_____ (participant's full names to be included), (the "Participant")

confirm that I voluntarily agree to participate in the research study referred to as the

_____ (the "Study") in relation to

_____ and which Study is being conducted by

_____ (insert the name of the researcher), (the "Researcher").

I, the undersigned Participant, further confirm that-

1. the Researcher has explained the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of my participation in the Study;
2. I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the Study as explained in the attached information sheet;
3. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the Study;
4. I understand that my participation in the Study is entirely voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable);
5. I voluntarily provide the UFS and the Researcher with my personal information and consent to the UFS and the Researcher collecting, disclosing and processing my personal information in order to conduct the Study and any related activities in relation thereto;
6. I hereby acknowledge and confirm that I understand the purpose for which the UFS and the Researcher may collect, store, use, delete, destroy, outsource, transfer or otherwise process, as the context and circumstances may require and as contemplated in terms of POPIA, my personal information as set out herein;
7. I am aware that the findings of the Study will be anonymously processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings and that my personal information will be aggregated and deidentified at such stage;
8. I also give the UFS permission to share, without notification, the collected data with other researchers at the UFS or other Higher Education Institutions. This permission is dependent on the same principles of ethical research practices, anonymity/confidentiality, safekeeping of information, and other issues listed above applying.

I, the Participant, agree to the recording of the semi-structured interview.

Full Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Full Name(s) of Researcher(s): _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM FOR PARENT/LEGAL GUARDIAN



Research Study Information Leaflet and Parental Consent Form

Date: 26 May 2023

Title of the research project

The influence of LGBTQ Celebrities on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity

Researcher's name(s) and contact number

Miss Tercia Botha 0825873571

Faculty and department

Name of Faculty: Education
Name of Department: Education Psychology

Study leader's name and contact number

Dr Henry James Nichols
0612069469

What is this research project all about?

The research project aims to explore the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity

Why has your child been invited to take part in this research project?

We would like your child to participate with us in this research as you adhere to the criteria of school youth as the main focus of this study. Your child will form part of a group of 11 participants, selected from the group of learners I taught in the past 3 years.

Who is doing the research?

Miss T. Botha. I am a Masters student at the University of the Free State in the field of Education Psychology. I have a Study leader/Supervisor who will guide me in the research, his name is Dr Henry James Nichols. His contact details are 0612069469.

Has the study received ethical approval?

This study has received approval from the Research Ethics Committee of UFS. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher.

Approval number: UFS-HSD2023/0328/23



What will happen to your child in this study?

Your child will form part of a semi-structured interview process. The study involves a semi-structured interview. The interview will be approximately 20 minutes. 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. The school counsellor will also be present to take precautions for emotional distress.

The interview questions to be asked include:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Could you please provide me with some detail about yourself such as your age, gender, and how you experience school?
2. Are you acquainted with the acronym LGBTQ?
3. In which category do you see/identify yourself?
4. Were you ever exposed to gender and sexual diversity during your school career?
 - If YES, in what ways were you exposed to gender and sexual diversity?
 - If NO, why do you think it is important to be exposed to gender and sexual diversity during your school career?
5. Do you believe that you are more exposed to LGBTQ celebrities and LGBTQ people during your school career or via social media?
6. What are your feelings towards people who are not gender and sexually normative?
7. Do you know any LGBTQ celebrities? Please give some names of these celebrities.
8. Do you see them as “different” from your gender or sexual orientation?
9. In what ways do you think exposure to LGBTQ celebrities can influence your perception or opinion and other people’s perception and opinion on gender and sexual diversity?
10. Do you believe gathering more information about LGBTQ celebrities will change you perception of gender identity and sexual diversity?

Can anything bad happen to your child?

No, nothing bad can happen to your child. Should any difficult personal issues arise during the course of this research, I shall endeavour that a qualified expert (being the school counsellor, Mrs Albertina Phooko) be contacted and assist you confidentially.

Can anything good happen to your child?

I am sure that your child will benefit from this study, through which your voice, perspectives and opinions will be heard regarding the influence of celebrities on their perception of gender and sexual diversity as well as the teaching of LGBTQ content. Your child's opinion will be combined with that of other participants, and this information will lead to a better understanding of LGBTQ in the schooling context.

Will anyone know your child is part of the study?

Confidentiality will be safeguarded by asking your child, to choose an alias (anonymous) name.

Who can you talk to about the 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 counsellor (the school counsellor) is present.

What if you do not want your child to do this?

Should your child choose to take part, and an issue or question arises which makes them uncomfortable, you may terminate their participation at any time, with no further repercussions. While I greatly appreciate your child's participation in this important study and the valuable contribution they can make, your consent and allowing them to participate is entirely voluntary and they are under no obligation to take part in this study.

Please return this section

Name of child: _____

Name of Parent: _____

- Do you understand this research study and are you willing to let your child take part in it? Yes No
- Has the researcher answered all your questions? Yes No
- Do you understand that the child can withdraw from the study at any time? Yes No
- I give the researcher permission to make use of the data gathered from my child's participation Yes No

Signature of Parent

Date

I, the undersigned Parent, further confirm that–

1. the Researcher has explained the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of my participation in the Study;
2. I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the Study as explained in the attached information sheet;
3. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the Study;
4. I understand that my participation in the Study is entirely voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable);
5. I voluntarily provide the UFS and the Researcher with my personal information and consent to the UFS and the Researcher collecting, disclosing and processing my personal information in order to conduct the Study and any related activities in relation thereto;
6. I hereby acknowledge and confirm that I understand the purpose for which the UFS and the Researcher may collect, store, use, delete, destroy, outsource, transfer or otherwise process, as the context and circumstances may require and as contemplated in terms of POPIA, my personal information as set out herein;
7. I am aware that the findings of the Study will be anonymously processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings and that my personal information will be aggregated and deidentified at such stage;
8. I also give the UFS permission to share, without notification, the collected data with other researchers at the UFS or other Higher Education Institutions. This permission is dependent on the same principles of ethical research practices, anonymity/confidentiality, safekeeping of information, and other issues listed above applying.

I, the Parent, agree to the semi-structured interviews.

Full Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Full Name(s) of Researcher(s): _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C: CHILD ASSENT FORM

Child Assent Template

Participant Information Leaflet and Assent Form



Title of the research project: **The influence of LGBTQ Celebrities on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity**

Researchers' names: Miss Tercia Botha

Address: 20 Brauckman Street, Kroonheuwel, Kroonstad

Contact number: 0825873571

What is *Research*?

Research is something we do to find new knowledge about the way things (and people) work. We use research projects or studies to help us find out more about disease or illness. Research also helps us to find better ways of helping sick children.

What is this research project all about?

The research aims to explore the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity

Why have I been invited to take part in this research project?

We would like you to participate with us in this research as you adhere to the criteria of school youth as the main focus of this study. You will form part of a group of 11 participants, selected from the group of learners I taught in the past 3 years.

Child Assent Template

Participant Information Leaflet and Assent Form



Title of the research project: **The influence of LGBTQ Celebrities on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity**

Researchers' names: Miss Tercia Botha

Address: 20 Brauckman Street, Kroonheuwel, Kroonstad

Contact number: 0825873571

What is *Research*?

Research is something we do to find new knowledge about the way things (and people) work. We use research projects or studies to help us find out more about disease or illness. Research also helps us to find better ways of helping sick children.

What is this research project all about?

The research aims to explore the influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity

Why have I been invited to take part in this research project?

We would like you to participate with us in this research as you adhere to the criteria of school youth as the main focus of this study. You will form part of a group of 11 participants, selected from the group of learners I taught in the past 3 years.

Can anything good happen to me?

I am sure that you will benefit from this study, through which your voice, perspectives and opinions will be heard regarding the influence of celebrities on your perception of gender and sexual diversity as well as the teaching of LGBTQ content. Your opinion will be combined with that of other participants, and this information will lead to a better understanding of LGBTQ in the schooling context.

Will anyone know I am in the study?

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



Who can I talk to about the study?

You can talk to your parents in case any difficulty arises or you can talk to my study leader, I indicated his contact information above. Also take note, as mentioned previously, the school counsellor will be present during the study.

What if I do not want to do this?

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.

Do you understand this research study and are you willing to take part in it?

YES

NO

Has the researcher answered all your questions?

YES

NO

Do you understand that you can pull out of the study at any time?

YES

NO

Signature of Child

Date

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM FROM PRINCIPAL

NOTRE DAME

ST PETER'S SCHOOL Est. 1907

6 March 2023

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This letter serves to confirm that Miss Tercia Botha, Student Number 2010050181, has my permission, in my capacity as Executive Head of School, to conduct her Research Study with Grade 10 learners of Notre Dame St Peter's School, an Independent School, serving the community of Kroonstad and surrounding areas.

Yours sincerely



Zunelle de Ru

Executive Head of School

Educating for Life

oldconvent.co.za

T: +27 (0) 56 2122302/3 | E: spchs@oldconvent.co.za / Primary.School.spcps@oldconvent.co.za
C/O Retief & Jordaan Street, Jordania, 9499, South Africa | P.O. Box 62, Kroonstad, 9500, South Africa
PBO Registration Number: 930006832

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

THE INFLUENCE OF LGBTQ CELEBRITIES ON SCHOOL YOUTH'S PERCEPTION OF GENDER AND SEXUAL DIVERSITY

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Could you please provide me with some detail about yourself such as your age, gender, and how you experience school?
2. Are you acquainted with the acronym LGBTQ?
3. In which category do you see/identify yourself?
4. Were you ever exposed to gender and sexual diversity during your school career?
 - If YES, in what ways were you exposed to gender and sexual diversity?
 - If NO, why do you think it is important to be exposed to gender and sexual diversity during your school career?
5. Do you believe that you are more exposed to LGBTQ celebrities and LGBTQ people during your school career or via social media?
6. What are your feelings towards people who are not gender and sexually normative?
7. Do you know any LGBTQ celebrities? Please give some names of these celebrities.
8. Do you see them as “different” from your gender or sexual orientation?
9. In what ways do you think exposure to LGBTQ celebrities can influence your perception or opinion and other people’s perception and opinion on gender and sexual diversity?
10. Do you believe gathering more information about LGBTQ celebrities will change your perception of gender identity and sexual diversity?

APPENDIX F: LETTER FROM SCHOOL COUNSELLOR

NOTRE DAME

ST PETER'S SCHOOL Est. 1907

To whom this may concern

I am a mental health professional and qualified as a school counsellor and psychometrist. I am writing this letter to offer support to the participants who will form part of Tercia Botha's research study. I will be on standby during the study in case one of the participants experience emotional or psychological distress. Feel free to contact me for anything that is unclear.

Cell phone: 0720801912

Email: ahbloem100@gmail.com

Registration number: 0097764

Kind regards,

Albertina Phooko

Educating for Life

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PBO Registration Number: 930006832

APPENDIX G: APPROVAL LETTER FROM ETHICAL COMMITTEE



GENERAL/HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (GHREC)

16-May-2023

Dear Mej Tercia Botha

Application Approved

Research Project Title:

The influence of LGBTQ celebrities on school youth's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity.

Ethical Clearance number:

UFS-HSD2023/0328/23

We are pleased to inform you that your application for ethical clearance has been approved. Your ethical clearance is valid for twelve (12) months from the date of issue. We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your study/research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure ethical transparency. Furthermore, you are requested to submit the final report of your study/research project to the ethics office. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension. Thank you for submitting your proposal for ethical clearance; we wish you the best of luck and success with your research.

Yours sincerely

Dr Adri Du Plessis

Chairperson: General/Human Research Ethics Committee

**Adri
Du
Plessis**
Digitally
signed by Adri
Du Plessis
Date:
2023.05.18
20:35:38
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