

**An exploration of experiences and sexual orientation of homosexual (LGBTIs) students  
of a TVET college in the Limpopo province, South Africa**

**By**

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**A research dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree  
of Masters of Gender Studies at the University of Venda**

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**Thohoyandou, Limpopo**

**South Africa**

**2016**

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## DECLARATION

I, **Mahasha Kelly**, declare that this dissertation being submitted for Master's Degree in Gender Studies at the University of Venda has never been submitted in any other institution. This is my original work, and that all materials contained therein have been duly acknowledged.

Signed (student).....Date.....

## DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my daughter Miranda Mahasha, my father (Mahasha Thomas), my two mothers (Mahasha Agnes and Mahasha Glory) and not forgetting my siblings (Dolly, Tracey, Cassy, Xinyikiwa and xivono). I say 'thank you' for your support and the words of encouragement you offered throughout my study. I will always love you.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to the following people for their support and contribution to this study:

The Lord Almighty for the strength and being there throughout my studies, without Him I am absolutely nothing.

Special thanks to Dr L.N Maqubela for guiding me through this journey. Your guidance, love, support and encouragement gave me strength. You believed in me even when I did not believe in myself.

My co-supervisor, Dr N.R Raselokoane, thank you for your support.

My family, words fail me when I try to express my gratitude for your unconditional love and support throughout my life. Mom, thank you for your incredible passion, encouragement and for always believing in me. Dad, you have never failed to believe in me also; you are my inspiration. My three younger sisters and my daughter, I say thank you.

My classmates, Dakalo, Kabekwa, Abbie, Mkhabisi, and Nyasha, I say thank you for assisting in my growth, intellectually and professionally.

My friends, Tsebiso, Precious, Ndivhuwo, and Rofiwa; life gives us many treasures, but the most remarkable gift is knowing people who are thoughtful as you are. Thank you for all the love and support throughout this project.

A special thanks to all my research participants.

## ABSTRACT

Through interviews of eight gays and lesbians, this study sought to explore the experiences and sexual orientation of homosexual students of a TVET college. The study aims to explore the effects of discrimination and stigmatization on the academic performance of (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) students and their coping strategies. The study made use of non-probability sampling, purposive methods (i.e. convenient and snowball) to select the sample. Qualitative method approach was used for data collection and self-administered interview guide as instrument for collecting data. Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) was used for data analysis. The study demonstrates that TVET colleges have remained heteronormative as the results illuminates the magnitude of discrimination that is experienced by homosexual students in the TVET sector. The study reveals that homosexuals suffer various homophobic attacks from fellow-students and some academic staff members based on their sexual orientation. Language has been found to be used as a key mechanism to attack or discriminate against homosexual students. Some suffer from sexual abuse because of hetero assumptions to change the behaviour that is socially unacceptable. The findings, however, also show the resilience demonstrated by homosexuals in the face of such challenges, as these students refuse to let such homophobic behaviour negatively impact their academic performance.

**Key words:** Higher education institutions, LGBTI, homophobia, heteronormativity, homonegativity, masculinity.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

- LGBTI- Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender and Intersex
- TVET- Technical and Vocational Education and Training
- USA-United States of America
- UK- United Kingdom

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

#### 1.1 Introduction

College life is always challenging, and the demands can be overwhelming at times. Stress, relationship difficulties and developmental transitions can all interfere with a successful college experience and personal satisfaction. Students who are gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgenders, or those unsure about their sexual orientation experience the same stresses and concerns that affect college students in general, but have the additional stress related to managing the stigma of being a sexual minority (Zubernis & Snyder, 2007). Moreover, while some anxiety related to sexuality is common among all college students, the issues facing LGBTI students are more complicated. In fact, some theorists have described divergent stages of psychosexual development for sexual minorities because of the additional task of trying to resolve the conflict between their sexual and/or gender feelings and societal messages. Even before puberty, many were aware that they were somehow “different” from their peers. As they reach adolescence, there is often a period of identity confusion as teenagers struggle to make sense of who they are (Zubernis & Snyder, 2007). Zubernis & Snyder (2007) further articulate that developing a positive identity as gays, lesbians, bisexuals, or transgenders is complicated by the fact that from early childhood they have learned that the LGBTI identity can be stigmatizing.

Unlike heterosexual peers, they have no built-in support system and cannot automatically assume that their family and friends will not reject them if they share who they are. At some point or another, everyone has asked the questions, “Am I okay?” or “Am I normal?” The college years, in particular, may be time of self-doubt. From the first moment that children begin to suspect that they are different from their peers, it results in self-doubt which can interfere with the development of a positive self-concept and self-esteem. Destructive attitudes absorbed from society can be internalised as homophobia, and LGBTI feel like outsiders, or worse, that they are not okay normal. Challenging heteronormative social spaces within institutions of higher learning is argued as one of the most necessary key aspects of institutional transformation for many LGBTI students in higher education. Inclusivity remains elusive for many LGBTI-identified students, despite the existing policies to promote non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in HEIs (Langa & Kiguwa, 2015:03; Lesch, Brits & Naidoo, 2015)). The legal

framework that was operational prior to 1994 criminalized non-normative behaviour, reducing LGBTI people to social outcasts by denying them basic human rights (Mattyse, 2015:02). Although a very progressive constitution and laws affirm the rights of LGBTI people post-1994, they continue to face extreme discrimination within the educational environment, including tertiary institutions (Munoz-Plaza, Quinin & Rounds, 2002). Prevailing literature shows that LGBTI youth are particularly at risk of suicide, verbal and physical harassment, substance abuse, sexually-transmitted diseases, homelessness and poor school performance (Munoz-Plaza *et al.*, 2002). Through persistent silence, the perpetuation of misconceptions and a blatant disregard for social prejudice against LGBTI people in the education system, a culture of violation of LGBTI peoples' rights to dignity and equality underpinning the South African Constitution, seems more and more justifiable (Matthyse, 2015:02).

Research indicates that the majority of South Africans view LGBTI individuals and same-sex relationships as unacceptable (Lesch, Brits & Naidoo, 2015). Local research indicates that many South African students are still negatively inclined towards LGBTI people. For example, Mwaba (2009:803) found that up to 44% of students were opposed to the idea that homosexuality should be socially acceptable in South Africa, as they considered it to be immoral. An incident that demonstrated the negative student environment regarding the acceptance of LGBTI people was at Stellenbosch University when, in August 2010, the independent student newspaper published on its front page a photo of a gay couple kissing. The picture turned was met with mixed responses, where many students found it offensive and even disgusting, while others, mostly women, supported the newspaper's decision to publish the picture (Lesch, Brits & Naidoo, 2015). It is therefore, clear that HEIs' campuses are still places where negative attitudes and intolerance towards LGBTI people still prevail.

## 1.2 Background of the study

This section discusses the regional, national, international occurrences and perspective surrounding the daily lives of LGBTIs. It will also outline the policies and Acts that criminalise or decriminalize homosexuality, ranging from country to country. Historically, LGBTIs have been profoundly stigmatized and therefore subjected to harassment and discrimination. However, in recent times, most western countries have made considerable attempts to provide legal rights towards sexual orientation and/or gender identity (Sonja, 2008). "The real issue confronting our society today is not why people seek love and understanding as they do, but why some are

unable to love and understand at all”(Van Zyl, Cruchy, Lipinsky, Lewin and Reid(1999) quoting Bryant Welch (1990)

In the United States of America (US), the persistency and normalcy of heterosexuality in social interactions and social institutions play a vital role in shaping western sexuality. Dating back to the nineteenth century, before the term ‘heteronormativity’ was created, the concept existed, male-female intercourse was the only acceptable sexual relationship. Men and women that engaged in same-sex relations were thought of in the same light as sexual infractions that occurred outside the sanctity of marriage, such as adultery. With industrialization on the rise, hostility towards homosexuality became more common and aggressive. Homosexuality was a sin, an abomination against Judeo-Christian traditions, and the law branded homosexuality as a serious crime. Along with criminal sanctioning, the medical community demonized gay men and lesbians; they were perceived as immoral, unhealthy and inferior human beings. Homosexuals lived in fear of social scrutiny and ostracization, and if their behaviour was exposed, they were in danger of criminalization (Brown, 2011:08).

Significantly, a large portion of the older medical community denounced homosexuality as an illness, and psychiatrists placed homosexuality in the sphere of pathology. Doctors and scientists intertwined gender and sexuality and argued that homosexuality violated “laws of nature” by confusing the status of men and women, thus pronouncing heterosexuality as the dominant sexuality. In 1951, the Mattachine Society emerged in Los Angeles, California with the purpose of deconstructing and reconstructing the 1950s’ lifestyle of gay people. The organization was determined to challenge anti-homosexual discrimination in the midst of McCarthyism, an ideology that was aligned to patriarchy, heteronormativity, capitalism and racism. Even so, the 1960s’ homosexuals still inherited the 1950s’ medical label of sexual and gender deviancy. The idea was well established that a homosexual was an abnormal, dangerous, immoral type of a person and the heterosexual was good, clean, and moral (Brown, 2011:11). Furthermore, homosexual behaviour was thought to threaten and undermine masculinity in places like, military services.

As a result, gays were excluded from active service and those already serving were evicted from their ranks. The military and homosexuals, however collided during World War II, and many American service men and women discovered their homosexuality during the war and this ended their isolation, although, military officers still policed effeminate men and masculine women (Brown, 2011:09).

The school environment in the US is also one of the social institutions where homosexuals face rejection and harassment. On January 2, 1999, 14 year old Robbie Kirk-land committed suicide after a four-year struggle fighting to accept and find peace with his homosexuality. The love, acceptance, and support of his family, could not surpass the daily rejection and harassment that Robbie faced at school. Research reveals that there are more than two million such adolescents in US schools which most school districts fail to acknowledge. The shame of ridicule and the fear of attack make school a fearful place for gay and lesbian students, resulting in frequent absences and academic failure. These students often spend an inordinate amount of time and energy wondering how to get safely to and from school, how to avoid hallways surrounded by other students, whether they might be safe in the lunch or locker room, and which rest room they can use and when (Bailey, 2003:46).

In South Carolina, gay and lesbian youth are placed in the difficult position of deciding whether to keep their identity secret, pretend they are “straight” (heterosexual), or “come out” (tell others) about their sexual orientation (Lisa & Belinda, 2001: 17). Available statistics show that 20% of gay and lesbian youth reported being verbally abused by their mothers due to their sexual orientation, while 14% reported verbal abuse by their fathers. Among violent incidents reported against gay and lesbian youth, 46% involved family members. Another 26% of gay and lesbian youth are forced to leave home after disclosing their sexual orientation to their families and those who decide to “come out” at school report experiencing similar difficulties. Studies found that between 30% - 70% of gay and lesbian students experience verbal or physical assault at school. Approximately 28% eventually drop out of school because of harassment based on their sexual orientation. The study further found that gay and lesbian youth students were five times more likely, than heterosexual peers, to be targets of violence or harassment, nearly three times more likely to be injured in a fight, severely enough to need medical attention, and nearly twice as likely to be threatened by someone with a weapon (Lisa & Belinda 2001: 17). When asked what schools could do to make their life at school better, gay and lesbian youth reported that schools should offer support groups for them, that teachers should not allow gay “pull-downs,”

and that students who are always “cutting gays down” should be punished. Gay and lesbian youth added that the topic of homosexuality should be discussed more in class and that teachers should treat the topic with respect (Lisa & Belinda, 2001). Lisa & Belinda (2001) research has further demonstrated that adolescents struggling with issues surrounding their sexual orientation who do not receive appropriate health-care services, accurate information, or support from family, school, and community, are in jeopardy of serious emotional, social, and physical difficulties. Gay and lesbian students in South Carolina often turn to unsafe activities such as alcohol and drug use or high-risk sexual behaviours to cope with their sexual orientation. These high-risk behaviours place gay and lesbian students at greater risk for addiction, unintended pregnancy, sexually-transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. Sadly, too many gay and lesbian students often see suicide as the only means to escape from rejection, abuse, and self-hatred they may experience as a result of their sexual orientation.

The extent to which institutions of higher learning in the United Kingdom (UK) are gay-friendly has received some attention in the press. In the UK’s higher education institutions, homophobia on campus is still a significant problem and therefore universities and colleges are not perceived as ‘safe spaces’ in which to be open about sexual orientation/gender identity (Sonja, 2008). In a survey conducted by Sonja (2008), 23.4% of the students surveyed indicated that they had on at least one occasion been a victim of homophobic harassment/discrimination since being at university. Of these incidents, the most common forms of harassment/discrimination comprised derogatory remarks 77.9%, direct or indirect verbal harassment or threats 47.1%, and threats of physical violence 26.5%. However, it is also worth noting that compared with the US study conducted by Lisa and Belinda (2001) the incidences of homophobic harassment appear to be substantially higher in the UK. Furthermore, less common forms of harassment were also noted, including pressure to be silent about one’s sexual orientation/gender identity 16.2%, being the recipient of written comments containing anti-LGBTI sentiments 13.2%, having been denied services 10.3%, actual physical assault or injury (8.8%), having been threatened to have their sexual orientation exposed 5.9%, and being the target of anti-LGBTI graffiti 4.4% (Sonja, 2008). The survey further reveals that these incidents occur in public spaces such the Student Union or cafeteria 38.2%, in halls of residences 27.9%, or whilst walking around campus 25.0%. In comparison, such incidents infrequently occurred in a class 8.8% or in the office of a staff member 1.5%. Consistent with this, the overwhelming majority of the incidents were perpetrated by students (76.5%), with only a small number being perpetrated by lecturers/tutor 4.4%, admin staff 1.5%, security staff 1.5%, or catering staff 1.5% (Sonja, 2008). Moreover, it was often

difficult for homosexuals to identify the source of the harassment/discrimination due to the fact that their universities were not campus-based which opened up the possibility of incidents being perpetrated by members of the general public as LGBTI individuals moved between university buildings or frequented venues.

Another common site of oppression were student organisations, in particular (although by no means exclusively) religious groups, such as Muslim or Christian societies. These groups were often reported as perpetrating discrimination against LGBTI students/groups. The survey also showed that only 2.7 %, had heard friends and 31.3% other students' stereotyping, making negative remarks, or telling jokes which put down LGBTI people. In addition, despite the fact that actual harassment/discrimination against LGBTI people was widespread on campus, more than half of the students 54.7%, indicated that they thought anti-LGBTI attitudes existed to a little/very large extent, and only 7.9%, indicated that they thought they existed to a great/very large extent. However, a sizeable minority 37.1%, believed that these attitudes existed to some extent. Likewise, only 13.4% of the students thought that LGBTI person was likely/very likely to be harassed on campus, whilst the majority of respondents 79.4%, thought that an LLGBTI person was unlikely/very unlikely to be harassed on campus.

Little is known about homosexuality in contemporary India. Homosexual men in India may be over 50 million with the vast majority of them married and living with their wives. This reflects the cultural situation in South Asian countries, which obliges all men and women to marry members of the opposite sex, whatever may be their sexual orientation. The most common locations of the first homosexual experience in these regions were parks and toilets. Relatives, mostly male cousins and uncles, were the second most common category of first homosexual partners, strangers being the most common category. Mutual masturbation was the most common type of homosexual act. Moreover, strong prejudices against homosexuality in India is enhanced by the popular misconception that it is at least partly responsible for the spread of HIV/AIDS in India. The awareness among some Indian homosexual activists that the government should not continue to ignore homosexuals' needs in its AIDS prevention programs, prompted them to organize homosexuals in formal groups for social and political purposes. The Government of India, however, had already recognized the need for intervention programs among homosexuals and had taken the initiative to collect information necessary for the purpose (Devinder, Thappa, Singh and Kaimal, 2008).

In a study that was conducted by O'Higgins-Norman (2009) among students, parents, teachers, and senior management in six secondary schools in the Greater Dublin area of Ireland, it was noted that schools in Ireland had policies on behaviour, discipline and bullying although over 90% of teachers reported that the policies did not include any reference to homophobic bullying. Teachers were found to be reluctant to address bullying of a homophobic nature, and 41% stated that this type of bullying was more difficult to deal with than other forms of bullying. The same study found that many LGBTI teachers were fearful of how school management might react should their sexuality become known to colleagues, parents or even students. These findings in Ireland are not unique as already indicated above in that they reflect the findings of similar studies in the United Kingdom and the USA, which also found that homophobia was present in most schools and that educators were reluctant to tackle this problem. In addition, the Catholic Church in Ireland views homosexuality as a tendency towards an 'intrinsic moral evil' and consequently we can assume that the relationship and sexuality programmes in Catholic schools will not include any content that would present homosexual behaviour as an acceptable way of life. In 31% of secondary schools in Ireland there has not been a not an introduction of a policy on RSE (O'Higgins-Norman, 2008:73). As a result, the culture of many schools in Ireland, and teachers as part of that culture, tends to 'read' sexuality as innate, fixed and biologically determined (O'Higgins-Norman, 2009:383). In contrast, a sociological perspective that sexual behaviour is socially constructed (Connell, 1995) is not a view that has been often considered or discussed. Research in Ireland has shown that the majority of teachers and students perceive homosexuality as a deviation from the norm and something that is fixed within an individual (O'Higgins-Norman, 2008).

In most African countries many LGBTI individuals experience homophobia, with Uganda being a leading example although homosexuality is criminalized in many African countries. In Uganda, heterosexist continues to be deeply shaped by notions of the patriarchal system that promotes heteronormativity (Boyd, 2013:704). In the midst of the struggle and despite the death of many of the country's LGBTI youth, the Ugandan government has taken strides to further criminalize homosexuality (Rusnak, 2014:09). In 2006, the parliament in Uganda amended the Ugandan Constitution to proscribe that, "marriage between persons of the same-sex is prohibited". In 2009, the parliament introduced what has come to be known as the "Anti-homosexuality Bill", that President Museveni strongly supported (Rusnak, 2014:11). Museveni signed the Anti-homosexuality Bill into Law on February 24, 2014 and it came into force on March, 24, 2014.

The Anti-homosexuality Act, 2014 prohibits any form of sexual relations between persons of the same sex; prohibits the promotion or recognition of such relations and other related matters (Anti-homosexuality Act, 2014). Nyanzi (2013) articulates that the rhetoric of Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Bill reveals something of the paternalistic and myopic protectionism of homogenised, static and illusory African culture characterized by an imagination of a certain cherished traditional heterosexual family. For example, the murder of activist David Kato, an outspoken gay activist and openly gay man living in Uganda, occurred after his name, photo, and address were published in a local periodical under the headline "Hang them". The article accused gay men of "raiding schools and recruiting children to homosexuality". Within two months of the paper publication, David Kato was bludgeoned to death at his home (Kretz, 2013: 217). Section 2 of the Act permits sentences of life in prison for some sexual acts even between consenting adults. Section 11 of the Act also criminalises a person who keeps a house, room, or place of any kind for purposes of homosexuality; the person is liable, on conviction to imprisonment for seven years. According to the World Report/ Uganda Human Rights Watch 2015, the law has also resulted in reduced access to health services and HIV prevention information for LGBTI people. On April 04 2014, police raided Makerere University's Walter Reed Project, a US-funded HIV Research and Treatment Centre that provides health information and services to LGBTI people. The police claimed that the centre was "recruiting" people for homosexuality. Two community-based organisations that provide HIV testing, condoms and lubricants to men who have sex with men also closed their doors after the Bill became law.

In Malawi, sections 153 and 156 in Malawi's British-drafted 1930 penal code remains in effect today. Malawi has banned male-male sexual activity and recently in 2011, the country expanded that ban to also include female homosexual acts. Section 153 prohibits 'unnatural offences' which the courts now interpret as prohibiting homosexual activity. Section 156, hence, bans indecent practices between males and section 137 criminalizes indecent practices between females (Kretz 2013: 223). The country also bans an extensive list of printed publications that could possibly have gay-friendly content. For example, in December 2009, a man and a transgender woman, Steven Monjeza and Tiwonge Chimbalanga were arrested after hosting an engagement party for their upcoming wedding. They were quickly tried and convicted under section 153. Both were sentenced to fourteen years in maximum security prison; it was the harshest sentence possible, after the president judge announced in court that he wished to make an example of them (Kretz, 2013:223). After the unexpected death of the president,

Mutharika, in early 2012, Joyce Banda, the country's first Minister for Gender and Community Services took over the presidency position. In her first speech, she promised to decriminalize homosexual acts and later reversed the decision after considerable public pressure from Malawian religious organizations. Currently, Malawian anti-gay laws remain on the books, with little chance for legislative repeal and police continue to be active in prosecuting those in violation of sections 153 and 156 (Kretz, 2013: 223).

Similarly, Zimbabwe has various overlapping laws, all of which independently prohibit same-sex sexual activity. In its common law, Zimbabwe bans sodomy. In 2006, the Zimbabwean national legislature introduced and passed a "Sexual Deviancy Law", which criminalizes actions that the general public perceive as being homosexual (Kretz, 2013: 226). This law makes a prison sentence possible for anyone seen kissing in public, holding hands, or even hugging a member of the same sex. There are several occasions where the country's President had articulated degrading statements towards homosexuals. For instance, in a proclamation made during Zimbabwe's Independence Day celebrations, Mugabe spent substantial portions of his speech attacking sexual minorities and their "western colonist supporters." He said, in part, *"Homosexuality degrades human dignity. It's unnatural, and there is no question ever of allowing these people to behave worse than dogs and pigs. If dogs and pigs do not do it, why must human beings? We have our own culture, and we must rededicate ourselves to our traditional values that make us human beings. What we are persuaded to accept is sub-animal behaviour and we cannot allow it here. If you see people parading themselves as lesbians and gays, arrest them and hand them over to the police."* (Kretz, 2013: 228). Mugabe is not alone in his anti-gay sentiments. Mugabe's Local Government Minister, Ignatius Chombo, urged traditional chiefs, in May 2012, to banish from their communities people who support homosexuality and take away their land (Kretz, 2013:228). By contrast, Zimbabwe saw the leader of the governing coalition, Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai, pushing to include sexual orientation as a protected sexual status in the new Zimbabwean constitution; he was, unfortunately, thwarted by his governing partners, resulting in the codification of criminal penalties for homosexuality in that very constitution. This leaves LGBTI in Zimbabwean's worse off than they were before Tsvangirai's affirmative push (Kretz, 2013:209-228).

The expulsion of a gay youth from a high school in Port Elizabeth, in 1999, for non-heteronormative behaviour vividly reflects homophobia and promotion of heterosexist in the educational system (Butler & Ausbury, 2005). A heteronormative society in South Africa

perpetuates homophobia (Henderson, 2010). The gay youth was expelled because he “dressed in drag”, entered, and won his high school’s Miss Beauty competition (Butler & Astbury, 2005). This is a demonstration of the gap between the 1996 Constitution and the reality of homophobia, which still exists in South African educational settings.

South Africa has one of the most advanced constitutions in the world. Gender equality and freedom to express one’s sexual orientation is enshrined in the new Constitution of the Republic of South Africa But it is widely acknowledged that much still needs to be done to reach that ideal. Gays and lesbians do not have a special section in the Bill of Rights devoted to their rights; rather the relevant part of section 9 of the constitution entitled “equality”, states that: “the state may not unfairly discriminate directly and indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, colour, marital status, ethnic or social origin, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth”. Gays and lesbians are protected by the inclusion of the right to sexual orientation as one of the grounds upon which unfair discrimination may not ensue (Ngcobo, 2007).

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 2006, South Africa became the fifth country, globally, to legalise same-sex marriage. This happened after the court ruled that the existing legal definition of ‘marriage’ was in conflict with the Constitution because gays and lesbians were denied the rights granted to heterosexuals (Iyayambwa, 2012). This context, however, does not necessarily mean that South African society is free of harassment and discrimination against homosexuals. The LGBTI community, in this country, continues to confront challenges such as physical, emotional, verbal and sexual violence, harassment and murders because of their non-heteronormative orientation and behaviour. Challenges which are faced by these individuals include social stigma, homophobic violence (particularly corrective rapes), and, consequently, high rates of HIV/AIDS infection among LGBTI people. The South African society, like other African countries, still finds it difficult to understand and accept homosexuality (Ngcobo, 2007).

Butler and Astbury (2005) state that homophobic behaviour exists at all levels of South African society, including in HEIs. Anti-gay sentiment is compounded by a strong patriarchal Christian ethics that view same-sex sexual encounters as sinful and wrong. Discriminatory mind-sets result in prejudice, whereby negative attitudes emerge and are directed towards a person or group of people. This is seen in some cultural groups and individuals who do not encourage diverse sexual orientation. Negative opinions are also revealed through various forms of

discrimination towards homosexuals and have harmful effect on the health (both physical and psychological), spiritual and religious well-being of gay and lesbian people (Ngcobo, 2007).

Arndt and Debruin (2006) report that many lesbians and gay men undergo identity change during their university years, where they accept their sexual orientation and come out to others. They further indicate that lesbian and gay students undergo a process that involves shifting their identity from a socially-accepted heterosexual self, to an often socially undervalued, non-heterosexual lesbian and gay self. When these students reveal their sexual identities they often become victims of homophobic attacks.

These anti-homosexual behaviour and attitudes are pervasive in HEIs (D'Augelli *et al.*, 2006; SAHRC, 2007; Nzimande, 2015:07). Schools and HEIs are often the first sites of victimisation for LGBTI youth (D'Augelli *et al.*, 2006; SAHRC, 2007). A negative educational environment due to negative societal attitudes and bias poses a potential risk for the development of mental (psychological) stress for gays and lesbians. This can result in increased risk of depression, suicide, victimisation and substance abuse (D'Augelli *et al.*, 2006). There have been reports and anecdotal incidences in different HEIs around South Africa. A few incidences of homophobia and transphobia have been recorded at the University of the Western Cape, where LGBTI people were invisibilised, pushed to the margins and brutally attacked in a residence (Matthyse, 2015: 09). Language is a powerful tool in which homophobia and heterosexism are entrenched (Msibi, 2011:523). Students are subjected to hate speech and were called derogatory names such as 'moffies', 'faggots' and 'izitabane' (Matthyse 2015, & Msibi, 2011:523). In addition, the South African Police Service refuses to assist and apprehend the perpetrators who commit crimes against the LGBTI individual (Matthyse, 2015:10).

Gender non-conforming students are being refused use of HEIs' facilities such as residences, toilets and recreational establishments on the basis that they are designed and allocated for the use of heteronormative people (Matthyse, 2015:12). This has recently received much public and media attention. A group of male-born individuals dressed up as female went to the toilets designated for males and were harassed by the security guards (Matthyse, 2015:12). Secondly, LGBTI students are also denied the choice of accommodation facilities. A male-to-female transgender student was evicted from the female hostel because of his sexuality (Matthyse, 2015). Thirdly, LGBTI students are also restricted access to health care and any information related to it (Mudzusi & Sandy, 2015). In a study conducted by Nzimande (2015) with pre-service teachers at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, he found that their cognitive understanding

of LGBTI is highly emotive. Participants revealed different kinds of a 'bitter knowledge' that they must have acquired in their early socialization processes. They made responses such "*There is no such thing as LGBTI, they are not born with it, it's just a fashion, these people 'omathandazinto' (they like things), they are just confused, these people 'bayanginyanyisa', (I despise them), this gay/lesbian thing is for white people, blacks are just copy cats*". These are very clear statements of hatred and homophobia against LGBTIs and a notion that homosexuality is associated with a particular race which is seen to be pushing forward the agenda that homosexuality is un-African (Nkosi & Masson 2015:03).

In a study conducted by Mudzusi & Sandy (2015) in a rural university, employees, including lecturers, generally, violate LGBTI students' rights to education. Subsequently, non-heterosexual students are usually ignored and not given the chance to participate in class. Mudzusi & Sandy (2015) also found that some students disrupt their studies because they are denied financial assistance due to homonegativity from the university's financial staff officers. LGBTI students are often discriminated against and excluded from participating in sporting activities like tennis and netball because they are perceived as inferior human beings and or despised by their heterosexual counterparts, including university employees (Mudzusi & Sandy, 2015).

Another study in a rural tertiary institution in KwaZulu Natal, in which the student intake is made up of Africans from traditional backgrounds, found that severe victimisation of LGBTI existed on the campus (Ngcobo, 2007). Homophobia, discrimination, lack of respect for dissimilarities, violation of LGBTIs constitutional rights and stigmatisation were commonplace on the campus. Ngcobo's (2007) study revealed that LGBTI hate crimes are condoned by strong authoritative permission for transgression of prescribed gendered roles; such sanctions are used as a way to discipline gender non-conformity and deviations from heterosexuality (Currier 2011).

Homosexuality appears to be more acceptable in the urban parts of South Africa as exemplified by events such as the Annual Gay Pride held along the streets of Johannesburg and Cape Town (Nkosi & Masson 2015: 06). In recent years HEIs have increasingly been vocal in advocating for LGBTI equality. The University of Witwatersrand publicly declared its opposing stance on the recent anti-homosexual legislation in Nigeria and Uganda, which criminalises women and men involved in relationships other than those defined as heterosexuals (Nkosi & Masson, 2015). The University also denounced the targeted violence that has accompanied this legislation in these and other countries. In addition, the University launched the Wits Safe Zones

programme in the weeks leading to the Wits Gay Pride Event (Nkosi & Masson, 2015). The programme supports members of the LGBTI community at Wits University and ensures a campus atmosphere that is supportive, informative and welcoming to all members of the community (Nkosi & Masson, 2015: 06).

### 1.3 Problem statement

Higher education institutions continue to be among the key spaces where heteronormative behaviour and culture are pervasive and at times perpetuated. LGBTI students are often met with homonegative attitudes and/or violent reaction from other students, and sometimes lecturers in higher education spaces (Nzimande, 2015:03). Despite the fact that South Africa has put in place the most progressive legislations and policies towards homophobic attacks against LGBTIs, they continue to experience violent reactions. The dislike for homosexuals is still highly prevalent in educational settings, as the social context of these institutions is patriarchal in nature (Butler and Asbury, 2005); they also experience isolation and rejection. To give an illustration, a first year student in Beloit College decided to legally change his name and gender. He was frustrated that professors kept on calling him by his female name even though he presents as male so he asked to be called by his initial name. The student felt isolated and considered leaving school (Beemyn, Curtis, David and Tubbs, 2005).

They experience minor to severe forms of harassment from others, in these settings, based on their perceived sexual orientation. Harassment starts from registration dates whereby gender non-conforming students are given less preference compared to gender conforming students. The safety of LGBTI students is no longer guaranteed because they are brutally attacked in residential areas and the security will be watching from a distance. To give an illustration, in October 2012, the University of the Western Cape made headlines when gender non-conforming students were brutally attacked and the security stood and just watched from the security booth (Matthyse 2015:10). LGBTI students also have problems with access control and toilet use within institutions of higher learning. Some male-born students even decide to dress up in clothing typically associated with female-bodied persons so that they can have access to female toilets. Similar challenges also escalate to the classrooms, where lectures are seen to be playing a huge role in perpetuating homophobia and transphobia, even when they have the best intentions since they have been sensitised to LGBTI matters. To give yet another illustration, a progressive lecturer addressed the student as 'Mr' at the University of the Western Cape and subsequently continued to apologise suggesting that he may have used the incorrect title

(Matthyse 2015:15). In the light of the above, it is clear that LGBTI students experience a vast array of challenges within the institutions of higher learning and that these discriminatory experiences might be differently perceived.

## **1.4 Purpose of the study**

### **1.4.1 Study aim**

The aim of this study was to explore the challenge of being a homosexual in a TVET College of the Limpopo Province, South Africa.

### **1.4.2 Objectives of the study**

- To explore the challenge of being homosexuals in a TVET college.
- To determine the effects of stigmatization and discrimination on academic performance.
- To investigate the strategies used by homosexuals to cope with stigmatization and discrimination in a TVET college.

### **1.4.3 Research questions**

- How do homosexuals experience social discrimination in Institutions of Higher Learning?
- To what extent do stigmatization and discrimination affect their academic performance?
- How do they cope with stigmatization and social discrimination in Institutions of Higher Learning?

## **1.5 Significance of the study**

The study is important because it can be used to inform and improve the national policy on gender equality. It will also assist institutional policies, especially within Higher Learning Institutions so that TVET Colleges in particular will develop or review their policies in respect of LGBTI's. Additionally, this study will increase the body of knowledge with regard to LGBTI issues in rural-based Colleges, in Limpopo Province.

## **1.6 Limitation of the study**

The study focussed on the challenge of being a homosexual in a higher learning institutions, in particular, a TVET College in Limpopo Province. The major limitation of this study was the sample size. The study had a small number (n=8) of respondents and as a result the findings cannot be generalised it affected the generalised. Furthermore, the study only had gays and

lesbians as participants. Out of the eight participants, there were five gays and three lesbians; the other sexual minority group (bisexuals, transgender and intersex) were not represented at all due to difficulties in establishing contacts.

### 1.7 Definition of concepts

**Homosexuality:** Refers to feelings of sexual, emotional, spiritual attraction towards members of the same sex (Ngcobo, 2007: 06).

**Lesbian:** A woman who is emotionally, romantically, mentally and physically interested in other women (Ilyayambwa, 2012).

**Gay:** A man who is emotionally, romantically, mentally and physically interested in and desires other men (Ilyayambwa, 2012).

**Homophobia:** Is commonly used to refer to negative attitudes and emotions towards homosexuality and those who engage in it (Knox and Schacht, 2008:167).

**Homonegativity:** a construct that refers to anti-gay responses such as negative feelings (fear, disgust, anger), thoughts and behaviour (Knox and Schacht, 2008: 574).

**Sexual orientation:** is a person's underlying sexual preference. It is a consistent pattern of sexual arousal towards a person of the same sex/opposite gender, which encompasses fantasy, conscious attractions, emotional and romantic feelings as well as sexual behaviour (Ngcobo, 2007:06).

**Feminist standpoint theory:** it is a theory that rest on two assumptions, that knowledge is located and situated, and that one location, that of the standpoint of the marginalized (women), is privileged because it provides a vantage point that reveals the truth of social reality ( Hesse-Biber, 2014).

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter was to review and analyse the literature on the theories about homosexuality. The chapter further outlined the African cultural and religious perspective on homosexuality. The legal developments in South Africa that address issues of minority groups, including LGBTI, will also be outlined.

As noted already by Kretz (2013), homosexuality is considered 'un-African' and that it is a degenerate by-product of westernization. Homosexuality is a foreign concept in Africa because their culture, tradition and increasing Christian outlook do not permit them to legalize homosexuality. The International Journal on Minority and Group Rights (Nfobin 2014) gives a clear statement by President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe lashing out against homosexuality. He lashed out at them during the annual celebrations marking his country's accession to independence by saying that *"it degrades human dignity. It is unnatural and there is no question of ever allowing these people to behave worse than dogs and pigs. If dogs and pigs do not do it, why must human beings. We have our own culture and we must re-dedicate ourselves to our traditional values that make us human beings...what we are being persuaded to accept is sub-animal behaviour and we will never allow it here. If you see people parading themselves as gays and lesbians, arrest them and hand them over to the police"*. This takes us to the heart of the matter that LGBTI people still continue to be victims of discrimination and stigmatization because of their sexual orientation or gender identity which is perpetuated by heteronormativity.

## 2.2 Theoretical background

What follows in this section are the theories employed to explain homosexuality which range from essentialism to social constructivism. .

### 2.2.1 Biological determinism theory

Many of the theories negate the existence of homosexuality and the LGBTIs. Such theories range from biological determinism to social constructivism. The biological determinism theory suggests that gender is something we are, something we are born with, something that is fixed. This is consistent with O'Higgins-Norman (2009) in his research in Ireland that the majority of teachers and students perceive homosexuality as a deviation from the norm and something that is fixed within an individual. Lisa & Belinda (2001) note that the recognition of sexual orientation is a long process, which often begins during middle school years. However, gay men and lesbians often report that they sensed something different about themselves as early as age of four or five. As with heterosexual youth, gays and lesbians often wonder if the changes their body are experiencing and the feelings they have are normal compared to those of other youth their age. This explains gender in a binary of 'male' and 'female' and nothing in-between and outside the binary. biological determinism further argues that the characteristics of being "male" or "female" are genetically wired and biologically predisposed, therefore there are "natural" personality aspects of masculinity and femininity that we develop in the same way we develop testosterone and oestrogen (Butcher 2014: 223). This theory emphasizes that one should either be a male or a female, as it is biologically inclined, therefore it cannot be changed. This theory takes us to the heart of the matter that homosexuality is natural and fixed and it cannot be changed.

### 2.2.2 Social constructivism

In contrast to biological determinism, social construction and socialization theory argues that gender may be something we are, but definitely it is something learnt. Gender is not fixated as stated by biological determinism theory, but it is instilled in human psyche through socialization. This theory further argues that society creates the definitions and boundaries of gender and the norms of social interactions, and social institutions, provide the social control that fits us into these definitions and boundaries. As with all norms, we, as members of society, must learn what is expected of us; we must be socialized to the gender norms. The socialization theory focuses on explaining gender through the effects of learning about gender, learning how to "be a man" or "act like a lady". As can be seen men and women are in binaries of being either 'men'

or 'women' as opposed to biological determinism of 'male' and 'female'. The social construction and socialization theory leads to a concept called *doing gender*, which describes the process of learning and performing gender expectations; again suggesting that gender is not something fixed or pre-determined, but something that is socially constructed and socialized into (Butcher, 2014: 223). This theory goes with the idea that homosexuality is a 'foreign' concept in Africa and it is a degenerate by-product of westernization, as already mentioned in chapter one. This suggests that Africans learned and adopted homosexuality from western countries

In addition, the social domain theory (SDT) gives a foundation for understanding the differences in people's beliefs about homosexuality and the manner in which they behave towards LGBTI individuals. It also helps give an understanding of issues that are related to the differences in people's judgments and thinking about homosexuality. The central idea of SDT is that, social judgments are multi-layered and draw from several conceptual frameworks or domains of social reasoning (Turiel, Hildebrand & Wainryb, 1991).

SDT suggests that when judgments are made in everyday situations, individuals combine personal, conventional and moral issues in order to arrive at a judgment of the situation. Turiel, *et al.* (1999) further argues that differences in social judgments pertaining to LGBTI people are related to an individual's factual assumptions regarding homosexuality as a form of sexual expression. This means that, some individuals regard homosexuality as psychologically deviant and unnatural, while others view it as a natural form of sexual expression.

### **2.2.3 Masculinities: Hegemonic heterosexuality**

This section outlines how masculinities operate and how they are entrenched in homosexual relations. Masculinities are defined in terms of being tough, brave, hard, able to fight, strong, courageous, and in control over one's emotions (Butcher 2014). However, anything different from the above-mentioned qualities is under-valued. Masculinities are socially constructed, hence they operate within the power zones. Hegemonic masculinities are often associated with heterosexuality which is driven by heteronormativity, therefore, for the non-normative which in this case happens to be homosexuals will find themselves outside hegemonic masculinity's operational circle. This behaviour will make them invisible, unacknowledged, undermined and silenced. When the hetero-masculinity aspect is invaded, men retaliate because it serves as a requirement of hegemonic masculinities. To this effect, homosexual voices are silenced, both by the heterosexual majority, by the LGBTI group itself, where feelings of self-loathing or, if not

these, of the possibility of humiliation or violence, often lead them not to admit they are homosexuals, or if they do, to keep it to themselves (Tebble 2011). One of the components of hegemonic masculinity is heterosexuality, perhaps best articulated by Kivel (cited in Bucher 2014) with his statement, “Act like a Man Box”. According to this “box”, to be a man is to desire women, to objectify women, and certainly to have sex with women. Therefore to be a gay man places one clearly and directly outside of the standards of masculinity. Moreover, heterosexuality is not only used as a definition of masculinity, but as a tool to enforce it. Butcher (2014) states that boys acquire these attitudes at an early age through socialization (learning the norms of society) during the process of socialization which is carried out by agents of socialization (family, school, and peers). Within the family, girls are provided with dolls to play and boys are subjected to tough games to enforce their masculinity (Bucher, 2014).

The school at some point joins in and reinforces the acquisition of masculinities and femininities. This is embedded within the curriculum of the teaching practices, modelling and many other ways. South African literature reveals that heterosexuality remains hegemonic, supported by religion, politics, sport, family and other social institutions. Heterosexuality established its hegemony by explaining itself as intrinsic to all human existence (Brown 2011). According to Trujillo (1991), in a culture that distributes gender and sexuality unequally, boys and men are compelled to associate with hegemonic ‘male’ dominance by partaking in all endeavours that construct their identities to align with dominant perspectives of heteromale embodiment and expression. Trujillo (1991), further argues that masculinity is linked to rough sports such as rugby. In South Africa, like in the UK, rugby is positioned alongside soccer as a leading definer of masculinity. Men’s rugby esteems and encourages bravado, risk taking and violence. Violence in rugby is believed to be an essential part of the game, a way of provoking masculinity and courage. Apart from esteeming violence and aggression, rugby has been theorized to privilege heterosexuality and helps reproduce patriarchy.

According to a study conducted by Onoufriou (2010), men are in an effort to secure their masculine in contrast to a feminine image. In other words, they experience a constant fear of being characterised as feminine, soft and not manly enough, in a cultural environment where ‘feminine practices and attributes’ are polarised in opposition to ‘masculine ones’. Any mixing or blurring of the two discursively different and differential worlds would be identified as ‘abnormality and pathology’. Additionally, a rejection on behalf of male students of what is considered a feminine attribute or behaviour achieves the erasure of any homosexual

suspicions, thus policing ascendant forms of masculinity. In the cultural space, the discourse on 'the real men' according to which masculinities are entrenched and valorised (Onoufriou, 2010). These positions suggest that masculine-subject positions are the most powerful ones and supported the view that 'it is better to be a man rather than a woman'. Men need to be strong and enact their masculinities in opposition to femininities by not being sensitive or insecure regarding their relationships with girls, thus differentiating themselves. Young men are encouraged to prove their masculinities in a hyperbolic way and they are not encouraged to be over-concerned with their own bodies, looks and appearances (this is something for women to worry about). Young men, however, can be obsessed about masculine things such as football, beer or sex; these are legitimate obsessions and are practices not to be regulated or policed. On the contrary, behaving like a girl or exposing feelings and needs can be interpreted as an effeminate behaviour amongst young men, therefore a man 'should' discipline such kinds of practices in order to avoid the threat of being characterised as sensitive, weak or gay (Onoufriou,2010). Martino cited in Onoufriou (2010) states that sexuality is operationalised through a set of discursive practices involving the process of learning to be a heterosexual male who avoids feminine behaviours and homosexuality. Heterosexual masculinities and heterosexual femininities, therefore operate through the exclusion of the other, the non-straight, the non-normal, the lesbian and the gay subject which can hardly merit being named 'subject'.

### **2.2.5 Heteronormative management and LGBTI**

Challenging heteronormative managerial spaces within HEIs has been identified as one of the key difficult space of institutional transformation for many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and any other non-conforming students (Kiguwa & Langa, 2015:02).

Broadly, the privileging of heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity in most societies plays a huge role in the oppression of LGBTI students in institutions of higher learning. It also draws attention to inequality, and the unequal distribution of power and as long as our world is hierarchically organized along enduring relations of domination, people occupying influential positions will tend to experience the world in systematically different ways (Lesch, Brits & Naidoo, 2015:05). Feminism, as a concept, therefore aims to problematize taken-for-granted assumptions such as heteronormativity, in order to promote the empowerment of marginalized groups and to foster equality (Lesch *et al.*, 2015:05). The concept further wishes to recognise and voice the overlapping experiences of the subordinate and marginalized, unacknowledged and silenced group (homosexuals) while aspiring to recognise and voice the misrepresented

experiences of subordinate and oppressed group in a predominantly heteronormative society (Maqubela, 2013). The utilization of power and masculinity within the institutions of higher learning in policy development is seen to be perpetuated by heteronormativity, whereby LGBTI individuals are seen as a marginalized and oppressed group in a predominantly heteronormative environment (Lesch *et al.*, 2015:05).

Top management from higher institutions are less likely to make LGBTI students and staff members aware about policy developments within educational structures that these parties can both engage with or form part of the writing team and secondly to “sell” the idea of engaging in a policy that deals with LGBTI issues (Molema, Mabogoane & White 2015:12). Molema *et al.* (2015:12) point out that higher education is meant to be the crucible of accurate and guided information and knowledge, however, when it comes to education on LGBTI issues, there is a level of oppression which is indirectly embedded by top management which has been influenced by hetero-patriarchal society thus further entrenching the oppression against LGBTI group. Additionally, top management can dishearten those interested in education and policy with regard to LGBTI issues which is based on three notions. The first notion being that it can easily be spread like a virus or a disease. Secondly, that it is in reference to our country and positioning in the continent, that being a non-heteronormative person is unAfrican and an import from the West and thirdly, which is more profound and a more vocal instrument, that it goes against the grain of religion and what God says. This leaves room for those who are in control or privileged over processes and other, to maintain such status, minimalizing any progression or involvement with regard to LGBTI issues. When applying these notions with the knowledge systems that are encountered, it enforces an overarching force of silence that allows for hegemony to be achieved in social settings (Molema *et al.*, 2015:13).

Throughout the duration of being involved in policy development, one common aspect that unfolds is the concept of power relations at institutions of higher learning, which is loosely defined as control or privilege over processes or others thus creating distinctions of people according to the type of authority they have or may not have (Molema *et al.*, 2015:11). It was also during the involvement in policy development that it became shockingly visible that staff and students were not aware of the many policies that were used to govern higher institution structures, nor were they aware of the engagements made about writing and/or editing policies (Molema *et al.* 2015:11). Msibi (2013:68) points out that higher education is meant to be crucible of guided information and knowledge. With issues of power, comes the issue of resistance. It is

often due to the tight grip that power has, that those who are marginalized (homosexuals) often have to fight extensively for their voices to be heard in a predominantly heteronormative environment (Molema *et al.* 2015: 13).

### **2.2.6 Hegemonic masculinity and sports fraternity**

Hegemonic masculinity is a culturally idealized form of masculine character which emphasises the connecting of masculinity to toughness, competitiveness as well as marginalization of gay men (Trujillo 1991). Trujillo continues that such an idealization form of masculinity becomes hegemonic when it is widely accepted in a culture and when that acceptance reinforces the dominant gender ideology of culture. Masculinity is hegemonic when power is defined in terms of physical force and control. Force and competence are translations into the language of the body of the social relations which define men as holders of power, and homosexuals as subordinate. In this way, the male body comes to represent power, and power itself is masculinized as physical strength, force, speed, control, toughness and domination (Trujillo 1991). Homosexuals, therefore, are regarded as weak, have low speed and as people who cannot control their emotions, hence, they cannot in any way fit or be classified under hegemonic masculinity in the sports fraternity.

In a heteronormative society, sports such as rugby, baseball and soccer, clearly define “what it means to be a man”. More recently, these sporting types have reinforced a form of masculinity which emphasises sanctioned aggression, the technology of violence and other patriarchal values. The corporatization of sports has provided far more opportunities for heterosexual persons than for non-conforming group. Sports is also believed as building character, developing fitness, realizing order, and promoting justice (Trujillo 1991). The non-heteronormative persons, however, are less likely to benefit from all the activities mentioned. If sports promotes justice, why should LGBTI individuals be discriminated, oppressed and marginalized in a sporting community due to their sexual orientation? Where would the people who define themselves as “non-straight” realize their full individual characters, because they are not granted enough chance to build their character or even show their talent?

### **2.2.7 Societal values**

Observers of how things are progressing, in many African countries, concerning homosexuality will raise the inevitable question: *What is wrong with being gay or lesbian? On what is this hostility against gays and lesbians founded?* The reality is that homosexuality clashes with,

especially, African societal values and its declared illegality will be an additional reason why many African countries like Uganda and Zimbabwe detest it (Nfobin, 2014).

As Nfobin (2014) states, every society has a system of values, customs and beliefs that amount to the obligatory behaviour that holds the society stable. It is a question of mores and folkways, the basic and important patterns of behaviour that members of that society are obliged to follow. These customs, conceptions, usages, passed down from previous generations, tested and proven by time, constitute the psychological make-up of that society. These impose a way of behaving and acting instinctively when a problem arises within the group. Therefore it seems clear that African culture in general does not accept homosexuality and the very idea that a man should share his intimacy with anyone other than the opposite gender, does not sit well with Africans. The following instance may be taken as typical evidence of this point: The bishops of the Roman Catholic Church in their 36<sup>th</sup> Annual Seminar, held in Sengmelima from 5 to 12 January 2013, were not of a different opinion in their declaration: “ In African culture, it is not part of the family and social values. It is a flagrant violation of the legacy which ancestors, faithfulness to heterosexuality and the family have handed down to us. But it is African writers, French and English-speaking alike that fuel such opinions” (Nfobin, 2014:77). To give yet another illustration: The Most Reverend Peter Akinola, Archbishop and Primate of the Church of Nigeria Anglican Communion, said “.... I hate homosexuality and same-sex unions”.

### **2.2.8 Religion and homosexuality**

Traditionally, Christianity as a religion promotes heterosexuality and does not advocate for acceptance of homosexuality. The debate around homosexuality as a sinful act in the eyes of the Lord has been ongoing for centuries. The combination of these two aspects has often led to conflict for homosexuals who practise Christianity (Nkosi & Masson, 2015: 01). While some may view the combination of these two to be contradictory, many believe that homosexual Christians should neither abandon their Christian beliefs nor their sexual orientation. The decision taken by these Christians, to continue practicing both homosexuality and Christianity, has been accompanied by varied responses from the church and other Christians. These responses varied from hostile to sympathetic, discriminating to accepting, rejecting to welcoming (Nkosi & Masson, 2015:02).

The scriptural criticism approach can definitely cause one to view the Bible as contradicting itself. Most Christians would only quote Bible scriptures that promote traditional

heteronormativity. According to the new Living Translation version of the Bible, Leviticus 18:22 states, “Do not practice homosexuality, having sex with another man as with a woman; it is a detestable sin”. Furthermore, the New King James Bible in Leviticus 20:13 states, “if a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them”.

In the book of Genesis chapter 19 verse 5, the men of Sodom wanted to sodomize the two male visitors who had entered the city of Sodom. It reads “they called to Lot: where are the men that came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them”. The scriptures quoted above depict that Christians only quote scriptures that speak against homosexuality. However, Gnuse (cited in Nkosi & Masson, 2015:03) argues that what was detestable to God was not the homosexual act itself but that the people of Sodom were violating the customs of hospitality, which were highly valued in that time in the middle East. Furthermore, the people of Sodom wanted to use sexual violence to show power and dominance over strangers, displaying a lack of social justice and thereby incurring the wrath of God.

The Bible can sometimes be found to be oppressive and unreliable as is interpreted by Christians who do not focus on Bible Scriptures which reaffirm God’s love and acceptance of the marginalized (homosexuals). According to the New International Version, Isaiah 1:18 , “Come now, let us settle the matter; Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool”. This section of the Bible clearly reveals to us that God loves and accepts us all as we are. The Bible further says that God created us in his own image. In the study conducted by Nkosi & Masson (2015:13) some participants had the following to say: “the Bible says God knew me even before I was born, he knows what is happening to me, and he knows that I have no power to change it”. To take yet another clear illustration “I know that my Father loves me. In the Bible it says Jesus died for all our sins. If being gay is a sin then my Jesus has died for it”. The examples given above show the acceptance by the bible hence the frustrations that homosexuals have in their daily lives as Christians.

### 2.2.9 Legal developments in higher education

In this section, I review the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa as well as policies in higher education concerning homosexuality.

In terms of section 9 (3) of the Constitution of South Africa (1996), gays and lesbians do not have a special section devoted to their rights in the Bill of Rights. Rather, the relevant part of section 9 of the constitution entitled “equality”, states that: “the state may not unfairly discriminate directly and indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, colour, marital status, ethnic or social origin, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth”. Gays and lesbians are protected by the inclusion of the right to sexual orientation as one of the grounds upon which unfair discrimination may not ensue. In relation to education, section 17 of the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (4 of 2000) provides that ‘no person may unfairly or unreasonably discriminate against any person in the provision of education in any manner’.

In relation to legislation and policy in higher education, in 2013, the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr. Blade Nzimande, presented a draft report (Draft Social Inclusion Policy Framework for Public Post-school Education and Training Institutions) that seeks to address social discrimination and social exclusion of the marginalized group. These include the marginalization of black women, LGBTI people, persons living with disabilities and persons from disadvantaged backgrounds within institutions of higher learning (White Paper for Post-School Education and Training, 2013). The fundamental aim is for institutions to transform and effectively address institutional social inequalities by eradicating such discriminatory and exclusionary policies and practices (Mattyse, 2015:07). It is encouraging that the Draft Policy expressly acknowledges the outpouring of homophobic violence that plagues South African society and should the Draft Policy be adopted, it will progressively task institutions of higher learning with the responsibility of ensuring that people with non-normative sexual orientations and gender identities are able to express themselves without fear of intimidation or harassment (Mattyse, 2015:07).

#### **2.2.10 The Human Rights Paradox of LGBTI students in South African Education: The “Hidden Curriculum”**

Children, as minors have additional rights in terms of section 28 of the Constitution. Physical and psychological abuse against LGBTI students in schools would violate their rights to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse and degradation (Vollenhoven 2013).

Vellenhoven (2013) further articulates that as stated in section 28(2), a child's best interests are of paramount importance, which includes the right not to be discriminated against due to sexual orientation. In terms of the preamble of the South African schools Act 67, the school system needs to redress past injustices in educational provision and need to combat racism, and sexism and all other forms of unfair discrimination and intolerance, and uphold the rights of all learners. In terms of section 9(3) of the Constitution, LGBTI students must not be found guilty on any charge merely because of their sexual orientation and if any decision regarding them is made due to their sexual orientation, it boils down to discrimination.

LGBTI students are often harassed and assaulted by peers and educators at school. More than one fifth of sexual assaults on young people occur while they are at school. *The South African Human Rights Commission's Report on School-Based Violence* found that "corrective rape", where a male student or students sexually harass and rape a female lesbian student "to make her heterosexual", is a growing phenomenon.

Therefore, these "corrective rapes" are not only an inhuman violation of the right to be safe and to be treated with dignity, but it also violation of the right not to be discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation.

### 2.2.11 Language

Among the key mechanisms used to discriminate against gay and lesbian people is language (Msibi, 2012:523). Msibi (2012) has reported on the extent to which language can be used to discriminate against homosexual individuals. It is found in his study that verbal abuse appears to be a prevailing issue. What is particularly problematic is that this abuse comes from both students and teachers. His study further notes that lecturers are not only complicit in their silence when homosexual students receive abuse, but also equally active participants contributing to the stigmatization, ostracization and discrimination of learners. Male homosexual learners reported that words like '*Isitabane*', '*moffie*' and '*Ongqingil*', which are all derogatory Isizulu and Afrikaans words with a meaning similar to '*faggot*', were being used in schools to refer to them. They are also considered effeminate and wanting to be like girls; they are also, often, referred to as '*Osis-bhuti*'. This is an Isizulu word which literally means 'sister-brothers', depicting a mixture of a male and female. Girls also experience similar abuse although not the same extent as boys. Girls are often told by teachers to 'stop being tom-boys'. Such statements are not only meant to stop learners from claiming gay identification, but also feed into the

regime of heterosexism by rendering homosexuality as abnormal. Being a 'tom-boy' is not only about what is considered appropriate feminine behaviour, but also how such behaviour is linked with homosexuality. Being a 'tom-boy' is also seen as one of the steps in the process of becoming a homosexual. Language is a powerful tool in which homophobia and heterosexism are entrenched. Such entrenchment is often coercive and maintained through hegemony and conclusion (Morrow & Torres, 1995). This is often referred to as 'internalization' (Msibi, 2012). Msibi (2012) citing Bell writes that hegemony [and internalization] describe how a dominant group can project its particular way of seeing social reality so successfully that its view is accepted as common sense, as natural order, especially those empowered by it. Most gays accept the label of being '*Usis-bhuti*'. They hear this homophobic talk so often that they begin to claim it as it defines them. Anderson (1994) notes that this part is due to the fact that '*faggot*' is so much part of student culture and language that often it goes unnoticed or at least unchallenged.

#### 2.2.12 "Corrective" rape

"Corrective" rape refers to an instance when a woman is raped in order to "cure" her of her lesbianism (Koraa and Geduld, 2015:02). Lesbians are murdered and raped week in and week out to "correct" their sexual preferences. Heterosexual men in South Africa regard lesbianism as an insult to their masculinity and a diminution of their power. Corrective rape, which is also known as 'curative rape', is a brutal act of violence in which women and teenagers who are, or at least are assumed to be, lesbians are raped to "cure" them of their homosexuality. It is believed by the perpetrators that having sex with a man will "correct" a homosexual woman's sexual orientation (Koraa and Geduld, 2015:08). In South Africa lesbians from the African community are more likely to be the victims of this crime, because of their cultural environment. Morrissey as cited in (Koraa and Geduld, 2015:08) point out that a black skin of a lesbians is of particular concern because of much of the popular discourse in South Africa which implies that lesbianism is a taboo and that same-sex desire is non-native to South African Culture. Lesbians are raped and murdered because they are believed to challenge traditional gender norms. Koraa and Geduld (2015) have highlighted the following unusual cruel execution of corrective rape. One of the more brutal cases, which received extensive media coverage, is that of 24 year-old Noxolo Nogwaza, whose lifeless body was found in an ally in Kwa Thema, outside of Johannesburg on 24 April 2011. She had been stoned, stabbed with broken glass and gang-raped: "She had been raped and her head and face were crushed". To date the perpetrator or perpetrators have not been found. On 28 March 2011, Nokuthula Radebe's body was found by

children playing in an abandoned building in Thokoza Township, east of Johannesburg. The 20-year-old was found strangled with her shoelaces, her face covered with a plastic bag and her pants pulled down. To date her killer or killers have also not been apprehended. A crucial element of "corrective" rape is the intention with which these crimes were committed; that is, the intention is to cure the victim. To correct someone implies that there is something wrong with the person which has the effect of pathologising a person. The second element that is often present in "corrective" rape is the brutality with which it is executed. This intention, coupled with the violent behaviour of the rapist, may qualify the action as a hate crime (Koraa and Geduld, 2015:09)

### 2.2.13 Intersections (gender, roles, violence, culture and religion)

Homophobia is a weapon for sexism (Pharr, 1997). Epstain (1997) notes that 'sexism in schools needs to be understood through the lens of heterosexism'. This is because it is through gender roles that assumptions about what men and women should and should not do are made. (Msibi, 2012) suggests that it is the hierarchical and oppositional organization of sexuality that works to consolidate discourses of homophobia and heterosexism. Pharr (1997) further notes that homophobia and sexism are direct manifestations of patriarchy. In conservative South African contexts, it is still seen as wrong for women to wear pants as these are 'meant for men'. This practice is mostly upheld in conservative churches and cultural celebrations. Moreover, the fact that teachers would demand that girls wear skirts instead of pants may appear at first absurd, given the fact that the school rules permit the wearing of pants by girls, yet this absurdity maintains both sexism and homophobia. Being lesbian is, therefore, interpreted as wanting to be like a boy (Msibi, 2012). Sexuality's complex role in society is connected to various cultural practices, boundaries, and rewards, making it difficult to notice and question such ideologies. It is assumed, hence, that all individuals are born with sexuality, sex and gender, these three categories are aligned and function harmoniously. For example, the social construct, sex, exists as its own act and category, but in conjunction with sexuality is used to define normal and abnormal activities. Sex, commonly defined as intercourse between a man and woman is described as natural and functional to gender. Sex between males and females, heterosexuality, is highly valued and valorised, but also used to demoralize all "unnatural" or "unnatural" sexual acts. Therefore, any individual that deviates from "natural" sexuality, sex, or gender is assumed to be transcending all three categories and does not receive protection or benefits from heterosexuals (Brown, 2011). Another way that homophobia is used to maintain sexism in place is violence (Pharr 1997). Msibi (2012) argues that violence is used to enforce and regulate

sexualities and in turn works to maintain patriarchy and heteronormativity in place. Msibi (2012) states that the pattern of abuse of homosexual students are in the hands of those who are meant to protect them (lecturers or teachers). Violence ranges from shouting at (language) to physical harm, with boys being the most affected. The boys are often shouted, shoved, beaten and even threatened to be expelled from school. Another point of anxiety when it comes to this violence is that it happens in front of other teachers and them all 'just laugh and do nothing about it'. Silence in situations such as these means consent, particularly as teachers are tasked with the responsibility of looking after children and not abusing them. It is collusion with the discrimination of homosexual individuals. An important point to stress here is that it is gender-transgressive boys who experience this violence as they invert 'normal' gender roles. Violence is a powerful tool of maintaining patriarchy and a vicious sexist and homophobic mechanism. This violence is not surprising considering the fact that corporal punishment is still used to punish learners in schools even though it is prohibited (Msibi, 2012:527). Another important point is the tension that exists between homosexuality and religion/or culture. Butler and Astbury (2005) also note this point in their study on homosexuality in South Africa. They note that anti-gay sentiment is compounded in South Africa by a strong patriarchal and Christian ethic that views same-sex sexual encounters as sinful and wrong. African culture similarly views homosexuality as un-African and it affects the way in which many people respond to lesbians in particular. The threat of violence is something that is constantly present in the lives of young lesbians. This violence is driven by the need to correct their homosexuality. The correction is seen as a form of teaching, or putting on track, from the deviation that took place because of exposure to western culture (Koraa and Geduld, 2015).

Msibi (2012) also articulates in his study that non-heterosexual students become frustrated with the lack of acceptance of religion with regards to their sexualities. Participants in the study felt that religion simply ignored the issue of homosexuality, and in that sense it neither accepted nor rejected it. This was seen as a positive thing because they also did not wish to be singled out as special cases where everyone was supposed to be equal. Msibi (2012:527) however, found in his study that the reactions against homosexual rights are seen, for many, as upholding religious beliefs and therefore something to be proud of and actively encouraged. Msibi further states that religion and culture are barriers that challenge even the most supportive of teachers. Some teachers support non-heterosexual students because they believe it is their duty to protect all their students. The limitations and restrictions placed by culture and religion are strongly felt by homosexual students as they often perceive themselves as sinful and unworthy.

The ideals around gender roles because they are also often communicated through culture and religion are assumed to be stable and true. Challenging these gender roles in anyway, is almost like challenging the authority of God (in terms of religion) and ancestors (in terms of tradition). The combination of class, race, gender and sexual orientation for homosexual students makes it hard for them to exist and openly claim their sexuality (Msibi, 2012).

#### 2.2.14 Toilet spaces

Higher education spaces are sites of violence against homosexual students who do not feel safe and welcome (Molema, 2015:11). In these institutions, reports of homophobia and transphobia have recently prompted universities to engage with homosexual populations and there has been progress at two South African universities in building gender-neutral toilets (Molema, 2015:11). Molema (2015) quotes Tutu who reports on the experiences of a transgender student who expressed the challenges of living in a residence.

“I live in a male res and it’s really hard. I don’t usually get dressed as a woman while at res because I don’t really want to attract any attention. I don’t want people to get confused and ask why a girl is living at a male res, so I stay away from that as much as possible. I don’t want to confuse or trigger reactions from people. I don’t want them to do something to me next time.”

Morema (2015:12) agrees with Tutu that it is crucial for institutions of higher learning to build gender-neutral toilet spaces and to engage on an ongoing basis with the struggles faced by homosexuals. Generally, university residences are not friendly for gays and lesbians, however experiences of homophobia and heterosexism are seen in nuanced and indirect ways in residences, although people tend to view residence environments as positive if negative acts were minimal and /or not overtly expressed (Lesch, Brits, & Naidoo, 2015:14). Mattyse (2015:11) notes that homosexuals have difficulty in accessing and using toilets. Mattyse further reports on an incident that received much public and media attention whereby male-born individuals decided to dress up in clothing typically associated with female-bodied persons. They went to a recreational spot on campus which they frequented. Upon going to the toilet typically designated for males, they were harassed. One who was guarding the toilet-door for a friend was pushed to the floor and the toilet-door was kicked in. After being publicly humiliated, they rushed to the toilet designated for females. Upon being informed that they were in a female toilet, a male security guard entered the facility to get them out of a space supposedly they did not belong in.

Toilet spaces are also political spaces for various reasons such as women feeling unsafe sharing a toilet with male-bodied persons, gay men using toilets as ‘cruising’ spaces, persons with disabilities experiencing numerous challenges in accessing toilets, a large portion of South African population not having access to basic sanitation, shows the complexity of the matter and is indicative that there can be no quick and easy solutions that will sustainably address the matter. The only way to find a way forward is to have broader public discussions around the matter that will address various intersecting social concerns relating to dignified access to toilets and sanitation which in turn could influence progressive policy developments by drawing on social and politically-innovative strategies (Mattyse, 2015:13).

#### 2.2.15 Incidence and impact of heterosexualist harassment

Herek (1990) defines heterosexism as “an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship or community.” He distinguishes between cultural heterosexism (institutionalized favoritism) and psychological heterosexism (harassment against individuals). Heterosexist acts range from anti-gay epithets, to violence, to murder (Silversnchanz, Lilia, Cortina, Konik & Magley, 2008). Individuals who deviate from traditional masculinity and femininity are particularly vulnerable to heterosexist victimization, which is often interpreted as a punishment for violating gender-normative prescriptions. Heterosexism is one of the ways in which strict adherence to gender-role stereotype is enforced, and gender oppression maintained (Silversnchanz *et al.*, 2008). Heterosexism may be rooted in the enforcement of traditional gender roles, in that negative attitudes toward sexual minorities are often linked to perceptions that gay men and lesbians violate stereotypes of acceptable gender behavior (Herek, 1990). Consequently, heterosexual women and men who transgress gender norms may have their heterosexuality questioned as a means of reinforcing conventional masculinity and femininity. An assumption might be made that they are not heterosexual based solely on their perceived gender-role nonconformity, thus they may be targeted with heterosexist harassment (Silversnchanz *et al.*, 2008). Silversnchanz *et al.*, (2008) further assert that socially-marginalized groups, including sexual minorities, can experience mental and physical health problems resulting from the negative social environment created by stigma, prejudice and discrimination.

### 2.2.16 Perception of campus climate

Despite the evidence that actual harassment/discrimination against LGBTI people was widespread on institutions of higher learning, a study by Ellis (2008) suggests that whilst homophobia on campus is not an overwhelming problem, it is still a significant one. Extreme acts such as physical violence although they are relatively uncommon, verbal harassment and anti-sentiment are prevalent as has already been highlighted in this chapter. Fellow students are, in the main, responsible for incidents of homophobia, both through explicit anti-LGBTI sentiments and also through resistance to these individuals' visibility and inclusiveness. There is some resistance to LGBTI inclusivity creating a climate which inhibits many LGBTI people from being open about their sexual orientation/gender identity and they therefore collude in their own oppression by actively 'passing' as heterosexuals. Far from enhancing the student experience, campus climate ensures that students continue to feel vulnerable and marginalized. In addition, universities and colleges as organizations are in neglect of their duties of ensuring quality of gender non-conforming students. In particular, institutions of higher learning fail to ensure adequate representation of LGBTI perspectives in courses, not making LGBTI students visible in marketing, and not actively enforcing their non-discrimination policies in relation to sexual orientation/gender identity issues (Ellis, 2008). Consistently, moving around on campus environment as someone defying gender norms set by society can also be very daunting. As mentioned earlier derogative name-calling does occur on campus. The silent judgmental stares when walking by a group of students and the subsequent talks and laughs seemingly do not faze some gender non-conforming students. However, it is challenging to comprehend that such experiences do not have a negative impact on the wellbeing of a student, especially aggravated by the fact that this is likely a daily occurrence (Mattyse, 2015: 13). Lesch, Brits & Naidoo (2015:12) also note that campus environment is often perceived as homophobic with male university residences being also perceived as "very masculine res". Hegemonic masculinity is considered to be a normative structure which dictates a specific set of values, and does not allow any exceptions (Lesch, Brits & Naidoo, 2015:13)

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

The study is informed by the feminist standpoint research methodological approach and therefore fieldwork will be guided by feminist principles such as the maintenance of equal power relations between the researcher and the researched, the declaration of the researcher's 'positionality', the acknowledgement of the 'epistemic privilege' of the researched and 'reciprocity' between the interviewer and interviewee during the interview process. These will be elaborated upon as the chapter unfolds. The argument made by this approach is based on the idea that prior to feminism, scientific research had encompassed a perspective which privileges male experiences and interests, reflecting hegemonic or dominant group, while it excluded the marginalized or oppressed groups, among others, women homosexuals and blacks (Gouws, 1996: 67). Feminists considered the exclusion of the disadvantaged groups from the making of knowledge which implies absence of the experiences of these groups in the production of knowledge, as unfair (Maqubela, 2013). Feminists further argue that knowledge should include subjugated, marginalized, silenced or thrown away knowledge (Maqubela, 2013).

This chapter focuses on the research methodology. It starts by discussing the nature of the study and the research design. This will be followed by a discussion of the location, population, the sampling procedure and the data collection technique. Ethical considerations and limitations of the study are also discussed in this chapter.

### 3.2 Nature of the study

The study was qualitative in nature. Feminist research approach was also employed as it is grounded within a qualitative approach which is aimed at pointing out the experiences of the oppressed. This method allowed the researcher to get in-depth information from the respondents. Qualitative approach is concerned with understanding the behaviour of the people involved, therefore it uses language to record aspects of social reality (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2012). Qualitative research is broadly defined, as “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:17). The qualitative research approach allowed the researcher to discover and uncover the experiences of subjugated, marginalized, and silenced groups, such as the homosexual groups, as stated in feminist research approach (Maqubela, 2013).

### 3.3 Location of the study

The location of a study is the actual place where the study is located (Soanes & Stevenson 2004: 286). The study was conducted in a TVET college, in the Limpopo Province, South Africa.

### 3.4 Population of the study

A study population refers to the set of events, people or things to which the research findings are to be applied. (Bless *et al.*, 2006: 184). The target population of this study were LGBTI students of a TVET College in the Limpopo province.

### 3.5 Sampling and procedure

Sampling refers to the technique by which a sample is drawn from the population (Bless, Higson-Smith & Kagee, 2006). Maree (2007: 79) argues that sampling is a process used to select a portion of the study. The study used non-probability sampling method. The researcher combined two types of non-probability sampling techniques, purposive and snowball sampling. The researcher established four contacts through somebody he knows on campus who showed interest in participating in the study. The study had eight participants - five gays and three lesbians and contacts were established through snowball. Because of the sensitivity of the topic,

the researcher was strategic in approaching the field. In his line of work as a social worker, he was in constant contact with people who experience discrimination and oppression from all walks of life, amongst others, battered women, gays and lesbians. The researcher took advantage of his expertise in approaching the field.

### **3.6 Data collection method**

#### **3.6.1 Access to the field**

This study used a qualitative method approach to address the research questions. A self-administered interview guide which contained both open-ended and closed-ended questions was used for data collection.

The researcher initially established a rapport in order to allow the participants to open up and give information that would otherwise not have been easily solicited. Rapport is a state of mutual trust and responsiveness between individuals or groups of people (Shenton, 2004). As guided by the feminist research methodology, 'reciprocity' was established as a way of generating rapport. Reciprocity is a feminist research approach where participants are highly active in the research process and they are allowed to ask questions in return to the researcher (Maqubela, 2013). Once reciprocity was established, the researcher managed to get fresh and rich information that contributed to the knowledge production of the unacknowledged and silenced group. The feminist research method further acknowledges 'epistemic privilege' because participants are put in an important position in knowledge production; they are recognized as knowers and actors.

Positionality in feminist research approach, was also considered. Positionality is a form of feminist research that assumes that the position of the researcher is one of an 'outsider', 'insider' or both 'insider-outsider' in the research process depending on the level of proximity between the researcher and the context (Maqubela 2013). When the researcher assumes the position of that of an 'outsider', it means that the researcher does not possess similar characteristics with that of the researched group. 'Insider' means that the researcher possesses similar characteristics with that of the researched group. The present researcher's position in this study was that of an outsider as I did not share the same characteristics with the participants.

### 3.7 Data analysis

Boeijie (2010:76) defines data analysis as the ‘process of systematically arranging the interview transcripts, field notes and other materials that you accumulate to increase your own understanding of them and to enable you to present what you have discovered to others’. Data analysis involves breaking up the data into manageable themes, patterns, trends and relationships (Mouton, 2001:108). The study made use of Thematic Content Analysis (TCA). Thematic content analysis has been defined “as an analysis technique for subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005:1278). TCA is used to elaborate on themes through interpretation of the in-depth experience of participants. To support valid and reliable inferences, thematic content analysis involves a set of systematic and transparent procedures for processing data.

The following steps adapted from Braun and Clark (2006) were followed when using TCA:

- **Familiarizing yourself with the data**- this phase involves reading the data over and over again while searching for patterns. It is important to read the overall data set at least once before beginning to code, as ideas, identification of possible patterns will be shaped as the data is read. The data is then transcribed into written form (Braun & Clark, 2006).
- **Generating initial codes**—this phase begins after familiarization with the data and a list of ideas has been generated. The next step then, is the production of initial codes from the data. The codes identify a feature of the data that appears interesting to the analyst, and refers to the most basic elements of the raw data. During this phase it is important to ensure that all actual data extracts are coded, and collated together within each code.
- **Searching for themes**- when all data have been coded and collated, the analyst starts to sort the different codes identified into potential themes, and collating all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes. The researcher analyses the codes and considers how different codes may combine to form an all-embracing theme. The themes may be arranged into themes and sub-themes.

- **Reviewing themes-** this involves reviewing and refining themes emerging from the data. The researcher reads all collated extracts for each theme, and considers whether they appear to form a coherent pattern.
- **Defining and naming themes-** the researcher, at this point defines and further refines the themes that will be presented for analysis. Defining and refining refers to identifying the essence of what each theme is about and determining what aspect of the data each theme captures.
- **Producing the report** - involves the final analysis and writing of the report. The analyst provides a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive, and interesting account of the story of the data, within and across the themes.

### 3.8 Bias

To minimize bias during this study, the following were considered as suggested by the standpoint theory:

#### **Positionality**

As I have already stated above in subsection 3.6.1, the position of the researcher was that of an outsider. The researcher did not share same characteristics and sentiments with the participants. Therefore, the researcher established a rapport to allow him to get overlapping experiences of the unacknowledged, marginalized and silenced group (homosexuals).

#### **Reciprocity**

The researcher established rapport and reciprocity as they are the requirements of feminist standpoint theory. These allowed participants to gain trust in the researcher and they were highly active, giving out more and quality information.

#### **Epistemic privilege**

It is a type of feminist research whereby participants are at an important position in the research and knowledge production. Participants are recognized as knowers and actors. My position in this study was that of an outsider as I did not share similar characteristics with the participants. I placed participants in an important and equal position as a researcher because participants possessed critical knowledge of their situation.

### 3.9 Ethical considerations

According to Wysocki (2008: 228), ethics refer to the guidelines for research that enable a researcher to ensure that all respondents participate voluntarily and are not harmed. Ethical considerations or issues are the concerns, dilemmas and conflicts that may arise over the proper way to conduct research (Neuman, 2000).

The researcher was guided by the feminist ethical approach, which ensured that there is a power balance between the researcher and participants. The study also went through ethical clearance from the University of Venda's ethics committee. The following principles were considered during the study:

#### 3.9.1 Informed consent

Informed consent is the process of seeking the explicit and is an agreement for a subject to participate in a research project, based on their full understanding of the procedures involved and their likely effects (Terre Blanche, 1999: 479). Informed consent is a norm in which subjects participate in the study voluntarily, on a full understanding of the possible risks involved. In every research that is to be undertaken, respondents are needed for data collection and as such their informed consent is crucial in research. In this study, participants were informed what the study entailed. The researcher further requested consent from the participants to ensure that participation is voluntarily and they were informed that they were at liberty to withdraw from participating if they no longer feel comfortable. Participants were also given a consent form to sign and the researcher also appended his signature.

#### **Reciprocity**

The researcher established rapport that helped participants gain trust as articulated by feminist research. Reciprocity also helped the participants to bring more and quality information about the silenced, marginalized and subjugated group (homosexuals).

#### **Power relations**

This is feminist research that is concerned with inequalities in knowledge production and seeks to advocate power, social justice, democracy and power balance in the making of knowledge. The researcher ensured that there was power balance between himself and the participants.

This made participants feel that they were all equal in knowledge production and no one was more important than the other.

### 3.9.2 Anonymity

The researcher made use of pseudonyms to ensure that the true identity of the respondents was not linked to their information.

### 3.9.3 Confidentiality

In every study undertaken, protection of confidential information of participants is essential (Babbie & Mouton, 2010). Confidentiality was ensured by making sure that none of the participants' information was discussed with anyone else. The researcher also created a password for the files in the computer to ensure that the information was secure.

### 3.9.4 Privacy

Interviews were conducted in a private place where there was no interference.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The study sought to answer three broad objectives in relation to the challenges of being a lesbian and a gay student in a TVET college: 1) an examination of challenges of homosexual students based on perceived sexual orientation; 2) effects of stigmatization and discrimination on academic performance; and 3) survival strategies. The objectives are discussed below.

#### 4.1 Self-discovery

This subsection takes us through the journey of self-discovery of participants. Data demonstrates that participants, in this study, realized their sexual orientation through play, behaviour and/or feelings. The study revealed that the majority of the respondents first became aware of their sexual orientation at a very young age, especially during play, which might have been below or around the age of 10, as can be seen by the responses below.

*When I was still very young. When we play I would prefer to play with girls and refuse to play with boys.... but in 2009 I fully realised my sexual orientation and came out of closet (Kabelo, 24, male, effeminate gay).*

*I started when I was still very young (Kabelo, 24, male, effeminate gay).*

*To be honest I started realising that I am gay at the age of 9 years (**Guchii, 20, male, effeminate gay**).*

The data demonstrates that homosexuals, in this study, realized their sexual orientation through play, behaviour and feelings. For instance, effeminate gays preferred to play as girls and with girls while lesbians preferred to play with both boys and girls and they are often referred to as, 'tom boys'. Msibi (2012: 523) also reported in his study that girls noted similar abuse, although not to the same extent as boys. Girls noted that teachers often told them 'to stop being tom-boys' and such cautionary statements not only are meant to stop learners/students from claiming queer identification, but also feed into the regime of heterosexism. Same-sex relationships for women is within the 'butch-femme' subculture, thus, women have a choice to be either butch or femme (Ochse, 2009:11). This can be seen in the quotes that will follow. This is often perceived as gender inappropriate by societies in which they live. Also articulated in his study is that binary thinking relies on certain assumptions about gender, for example, it is presumed that men are the more violent, controlling, dominant and assertive of the two sexes, which implies that women are the opposite thereof, and thus, fragile, submissive, and sensitive. Binary thinking complements the idea that heterosexual relationships are natural and necessary, because it appeals to common sense of understanding that opposites balance and complement each other (Osche, 2009:10).

Secondly, homosexuals also realized that they are gay through behaviour, sometimes referred to as 'performativity' (Osche, 2009:10), which means the way they perform or act (see the quotes that follow). Thirdly, participants report that they have come to the realization that they are gay through the way they feel. For instance one of the participants talks about 'falling in love with female things' that as can be seen in the quote below.

*'... To be honest I started realising that I am gay at the age of 9 years and then decided to keep quiet about it due to the fact that I never saw the need to expose something that was already exposed. The thing that made me to realise my sexuality was the way I walk, the way I normally talk and how crazy I became once I saw a cute guy and when I*

*was surrounded by guys. I then suddenly fell in love with female things and "...that's when I knew that my body has been hijacked by a female spirit (Guchii, 20, male, effeminate gay).*

The above excerpts illustrates that most of them explained that they have tried to remain in the closet. Gays and lesbians who decide to "come out" and tell others about their sexual orientation are at risk of rejection, physical abuse and verbal abuse from family members, schoolmates and others in the community (Lisa and Belinda, 2001). However, some share the view that it is difficult to hide because they were driven by feelings and behaviour which gives them away. This is in line with Lisa and Belinda (2001) who note that recognition of sexual orientation is a long process, which often begins during middle school years, however gay men and lesbians often report that they sensed something "different" about themselves as early as at the age of four or five. The quote further elucidates that gender non-conforming students have a challenge of coming out because they are afraid to invade hetero-patriarchy spaces.

#### 4.2 Homophobic experiences on campus

This section sought to determine the experiences of gays and lesbians on campus. Participants clearly underwent various forms of abuse on campus. Many of these attacks seem to be coming from fellow students but also from a few lecturers. These come in more direct, either, non-violent and violent ways such as sexual abuse, derogatory comments and strong language, deliberate exclusion from social events or particular social spaces and also physical acts of aggression. These are elaborated below.

##### i) Language

Among the key mechanisms used to attack or discriminate against homosexual students is language. Language has been found to be one of the key ways through which discrimination and abuse of LGBTI students is perpetrated and maintained in South African colleges. The responses illuminate the usage of jokes, which range from light to extremely serious, accompanied or followed by laughter. These affect the homosexuals in a negative way as can be seen in the responses below:

*"...Lecturers sometimes become dramatic and make my sexuality a joke, I think they should be there as parents and not to make us feel worthless (Steve, 22, male, effeminate gay).*

*“...when I pass they start to laugh at me. They make funny jokes about me. They would be like [...] ‘bona Awutiii ela, ye chaba Baba’ (look at that ‘boy’ he is afraid of man) (Ado, 23, female, lesbian).*

Some of the comments are extremely serious, bashing and condemning. The lecturer, as can be seen below basically seems to imply that homosexuality is evil.

*“...A lecturer once said that my sexuality is satanic and just imagine, we were in class. All attention was brought to me as if I am the celebrity, I felt embarrassed and kept quiet. He concluded by saying ‘let’s leave it, I was just making it a joke’ (Steve, 22, male, effeminate gay).*

This point resonates with Msibi (2012) who in his study also found that language has been found to be a major tool to evoke emotional abuse. For example, the use of the terms “confusion” and “influence” implies the idea that homosexuality is something that only happens to weak-minded people.

Most responses show derogatory behaviour that are attached to homosexuals such as pointing and laughing at, jeering, staring, mimicking, judging, making sick jokes as can be seen in the quotes below.

*Fellow students and more especially males would call me names such as ‘Isitabane’, ‘Wa te tlaetsa’ and ‘Lea silika’ (Delon, male, 20, effeminate gay)*

*You will see them pointing at me and labelling names such as ‘faggots’ (Hlami, male, 22, effeminate gay).*

*“...Well, there are a lot of things they normally do. They point at me while talking, to show that I am the topic of whatever they are discussing. They laugh loud when I pass so that everyone can notice that they are laughing at me. They also make comments like [...] ‘she is a He’ ‘Sesi Buti’ ‘Setabane’ and also that I will never be like a girl, as if I said I want to be a girl. They would be like [...] “I will never date a gay even if they are the last in world”. Others will imitate the way I walk and talk. I was often judged about my size, always judged about my sexuality which back then made me angry and bitter. They don’t say many words but they sometimes give me that “you are a disgrace to mankind” look and funny enough, I just don’t care because to me all of that is not new, I am used to it, so they must just try something new (Mummy, 23, male, effeminate gay).*

Students also insult and make intrusive jokes based on sexuality and sexual orientation that leave homosexual students feeling so invaded and violated.

*...students would be like this “gay”. ‘How do you actually have sex’? And they would be asking me this question in front of others and I feel embarrassed. They also make comments like [...] we must lock you inside one room with a girl and see if your penis won’t erect. I am even told to make children (Steve, 22, male, effeminate gay).*

Homosexual students also suffer isolation, especially soon after revealing their sexuality to friends.

*“... yoooo!! My friends were the first people to keep distance from me after they found out about my sexual orientation. When I go to the toilet they would say [...] allow him to go in first, actually he is supposed to go to the ladies toilet (Kabelo, 24, male, effeminate gay).*

The above demonstrates that the campus environment is unreceptive and unwelcoming to LGBTIs. This is in line with Mudzusi and Sandy (2015) and Matthyse (2015) whose studies were conducted at rural universities; one study was conducted in the same province as this study. Both studies found campus environment intolerant towards the LGBTIs. Paradoxically, a study that was conducted at the University of Stellenbosch and another conducted at Wits University revealed that the two campus environments as “open-minded”, “gay-friendly” and “accepting”. These differences may be attributed to the level of development (urban/rural) of the research context.

#### *ii) Sexual abuse*

Over and above verbal abuse a few of the homosexual students have also experienced sexual abuse in the hands of educators. One such student takes us through the journey of his self-discovery. He shares his traumatic experience of how he was taken advantage of by his teacher in high school. He suffered sexual abuse, rape in the hands of his former teacher, whom he respected and trusted. This left him with deep emotional scars, feelings of self-hate, depression and suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts, feelings of revenge and vengeance. He had the following to say:

*“...I realised it when I was doing grade 10, when I was 16 years old, my high school male teacher asked me to come to his place after school to clean his room and I went*

*there. When I was busy cleaning he begin to ask me if I had ever slept with a guy before, I was so shocked and replied that I never did. He then called me to come closer to me and he started touching my ass and undressed me. He applied lubricants and fu---d... me, I felt like I was raped, it was painful but he couldn't stop or show any remorse because it was my first time. I cried and he asked me not to tell anyone and I never did. You are the first person to know about this. In 2015 when I was doing my matric I started developing feelings for boys. I started having fantasies, seeing myself being f...Ed by a good looking guy. That's when I realised I lack testosterone and I acknowledged it. [...] But as for my former teacher ... I wish he could die now and if he doesn't I will do it myself after completing my studies. I will make sure he experience exactly what I felt. I suffered from self-hate, depression, stress, failed my grade 10 and above all, I attempted to commit suicide four times. I am presently happy with myself but I am not happy on how I lost my virginity and pride. It's fine though, one day I will make a revenge (Delon, male, 20, effeminate gay).*

This is in line with Butler and Astbury (2005) who found that South African LGBTI youth and teachers are homophobic. The fact of the matter is that nobody would suspect a teacher of committing such acts of atrocities towards homosexuals or anybody else for that matter. The teacher has violated the boy's human dignity and privacy as enshrined in Chapter Two: Bill of Rights in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996).

These uncommon types of rapes often go unreported because non-normative sexualities are considered to be against the culture of the community and others do not feel safe enough to report their experiences to law enforcement officials as they also enforce heteronormative practices.

#### **4.3 The effects of abuse on homosexuals**

This section sought to determine the extent to which the abuse of homosexuals may have an effect on their wellbeing. Participants expressed a great deal of distress resulting from homophobic attacks directed towards them. Half of the LGBTI students in this study are 'out of the closet' and the pressure inflicted, makes them feel angry/bitter and worthless, as a result their self-esteem has diminished. And this has affected their focus education as can be seen in the response below:

*“... I feel bad about this, what can I do to change this? I sometimes feel like quitting school, I feel the environment is not good for me. Sometimes I take a bath, get dressed with a plan to go to school but I stay because I know I will be called ‘names’. It is painful ... sometimes miss writing tests. (Steve, 22, male, effeminate gay).*

Steve expressed feelings of despondence emanating from the kind of homophobic treatment he gets mostly from his fellow students. He feels that students perpetrate behaviour that makes the campus environment unwelcoming and unbearable. These have adverse effects on the academic life and future of the LGBTIs. Matthyse (2015:21) argues that institutions of higher learning have the responsibility of creating safe, inclusive and transformed environments to avoid emotional abuse of LGBTI students.

#### 4.4 Major sites for homophobic attacks within campus

The study exposed readers to the challenges that LGBTI students go through as they navigate heterosexual spaces on campus. Data demonstrates that verbal abuse of LGBTI students occurs in both public and private spaces of the campus and that it is mostly gay students who suffer such abuse in the hands of the conforming male counterparts. The data also reveals that the bathrooms, classrooms, and the cafeteria as main sites of homophobic attacks for homosexual students (see quotes below).

*I experience exclusion in the toilet... other students will be like ... let all men go out and leave this woman alone to finish her business (Delon, male, 20, effeminate gay)*

*‘Eish’...I remember one day when I entered the toilet... I found 3 boys... they know that I am gay and don’t hide it... although I still maintain the dress code that makes me to be identified as a man. You won’t believe that I was told to use the female toilet and they even went as far as hiding their private part as if I will do anything about it. I sometimes feel like the thing of saying this toilets are for males and that these are for females should come to an end (Hlami, male, 22, effeminate gay).*

Another site where homophobia is pervasively experienced is the classroom. Again it should be noted that it is mainly male students and lecturers who humiliate gay students in class.

*In class people will be making jokes about me, I hate it because I did not choose to be a laughing stock. Male students will be like [...] don’t get close to me, you will seduce me (Lucxin, male, 22, Effeminate gay).*

*A lecturer once said that my sexuality is satanic ... (Steve, 22, effeminate gay)*

The third site for homophobic attacks is the cafeteria (see the quote below).

*"In a cafeteria I had an argument with some guys one, while queuing to buy food. One of them blurted at me and say... 'Go and have sex with a girl, try to make children (Steve, male, 22, effeminate gay).*

As can be seen from the quotes above, male gender-conforming students look down upon gay students. The results further show that hetero-normative society has shaped the mentality of male gender-conforming students to believe that heterosexuality is the only form of sexuality that is socially accepted and celebrated. The LGBTI students, as a minority have not the power to challenge the status quo. They never seem to fight back when faced with homophobic attacks.

#### 4.5 Academic performance

This section seeks to determine how homophobic attitude and abuse contribute to homosexuals' academic performance. To determine this, the following questions were asked: **Do homophobic attitude and attack affect your academic work? And How?** Most of the respondents (5) expressed the opinion that discrimination on campus does not have any negative impact on their academic performance, however 3 were adversely affected by discrimination, as can be seen in the responses below:

*"...you know it is only pure and honest thought that makes a person what they ought to be and for me to keep improving in my academics. Truthfully, I must walk with confidence, so I am performing quite well because I don't take discriminators into consideration. Their aim is to make me bunk school, do bad in class, obtain low marks but hey... I don't let them instead I believe that the best revenge is success. It's funny because I am performing much better than the very same people who discriminate against me. Let fools be fools. So try to seek attention but hey... pity enough my attention is too expensive to be wasted on immature people (Guchii, 20, male, effeminate gay).*

*"...As for my education, it doesn't affect me because as the gay society we want to prove to them that we can do better than them (Delon, male, 20, effeminate gay).*

*“... It doesn't affect me academically, I am not interested in what people say, what they say about me it's their story (**Sandii AKA, female, 23, lesbian**).*

Responses above show that non-gender conforming students experience discrimination and abuse on many occasions. However, this does not have any effect on the academic performance of the majority of the participants. The responses above display the determination and the desire for success on the part of the participants, despite the challenges they are faced with. This is in line with Msibi (2012:529) who notes that “LGBTI students have created a better self-image and the view of seeing themselves as clever people in a highly repressive environment”. LGBTI students endeavour to perform better than their heterosexual counterpart's students. This demonstrates resilience on the part of the participants.

However, there are some LGBTI students who reported that discrimination affects their academic performance. They articulated the following responses:

*“... I am bullied in class and I sometimes lose concentration. When we are asked to form groups, girls will be the only people to accommodate us. (**Kabelo, 24, male, effeminate gay**).*

*“... It affects my academic performance because sometimes I stay at home and not go to the college. I miss writing tests [...] I am afraid people will be looking at me like a celebrity (**Steve, 22, male, effeminate gay**).*

The above quotes illuminate the magnitude of LGBTI students' discrimination which is based on their sexual orientation. The excerpts further show the influence of hetero-patriarchy on how heterosexual male students perceive homosexuality. They fear that associating themselves with non-heterosexual people will be a challenge to their masculinity which they feel needs to be protected at all costs.

#### 4.6 Coping strategies

This Section sought to determine the survival strategies used by gender non-conforming students to deal with homophobic violence and to challenge heteronormativity spaces. The following two questions were asked to determine their survival strategy: **‘How do you deal with the reaction of people towards your sexual orientation?’** and **‘what do you think can be done to ensure that homosexuals cope effectively with discrimination?’** With regard to

the first question the responses below show that the LGBTI students used the following survival strategies to challenge heterosexuality:

i) *Avoidance*

Participants seem to use a combination of coping strategies depending on the situation at hand. However, the most favoured is avoidance. They simply ignore homophobic perpetrators.

*‘...I usually don’t pay attention to those nasty or negative comments I hear from people. The support I get from my family makes me to be brave enough to smile at people who think calling me ‘gay’ will break me. I am stronger and needless to say I am confident to let people bring me down (Guchii, 20, male, effeminate gay).*

*...believe me you, people hate me and I don’t care as long as they don’t attack me physically. If they talk, I just ignore and continue living my gay life (Nhlami, male, 22, effeminate gay).*

Strategies of avoidance are used in social spaces where sexuality is considered problematic as it enables LGBTI individuals to maintain a sense of well-being, both psychologically and physically. The family support systems also play a crucial role in the lives of gender non-conforming individuals when the society perceive them to be deviant. In this case the family becomes useful as a coping strategy. There are However concerns whether avoidance strategies are effective to destabilise heteronormative practices Kiguwa & Langa, 2015). For most homosexual students this is one of the survival strategies available for them as there are no other mechanisms and structures within the college campus to deal with their complaints.

ii) *Establishment of LGBTI Society*

This organisation plays a significant role in the gender non-conforming students’ lives as it offers a series of programmes which assist these students to cope with their challenges. First they offer supportive “coming out” programmes and social events and provide opportunities for LGBTI students to meet and interact with other LGBTI students (Lesch, Brits and Naidoo, 2015). However, this organisation is not officially part of the campus, hence, according to the participants, non-existence of this organisation on campus exposes them to homophobia. LGBTI societies are considered beneficial as they help to promote a support structure for LGBTI students in environments where they may feel alienated or even marginalised (Lesch, Brits and

Naidoo, 2015:17). The concern about the lack of LGBTI Society was echoed by all the participants (see responses below):

*“...I think we must have a support group on campus because we are many and some are still in a closet (**Catty, female, 23, lesbian**).*

*“... maybe we should have LGBTI pride because it only happens in big **cities (Ado, female, 23 lesbian)**.*

*“... I think we should stand up together as homosexuals and stop this thing of fighting amongst ourselves; it gives those who call themselves straight an opportunity to discriminate us (**Nhlami, male, 22, effeminate gay**).*

*“... I can't think much of one thing, I believe as homosexuals we are not united enough to present a stable community. If we can be united, fight for one another and not against each other. We should stop this thing of being jealous with each other. If we can do so, we can overcome all obstacles (**Guchii, male, 20, effeminate gay**).*

The above demonstrate the dire need for the establishment of a LGBTI society, which is seen as a survival strategy not only to cope with prejudice, abuse, stigmatization and discrimination and other homophobic attack in college spaces but also to assist these student to come out of the closet. Furthermore LGBTI society in colleges are seen to promote unity and another useful way of combatting homophobia is establishing a LGBTI pride which is seen as useful way to assist in raising awareness; it will also minimise the multiple facets of cultural and religious beliefs on heterosexuality as normal and non-conforming gender practice as abnormal. Lesch, Brits and Naidoo (2015:17) suggest that in an exclusive LGBTI society's attempts to challenge oppression and create a liberating group for LGBTI individuals free from homophobia, these societies should create partnerships and work with other student groups on campus to create an inclusive environment.

### *iii) Self-acceptance*

Another important coping strategy which emerged from the responses is the gender non-conforming student's acknowledgement of their sexual orientation as a strategy for dealing with homophobia on college campus. Gay and lesbian students reported that the strategy of self-acceptance is considered crucial and necessary for their survival as homosexual students and could potentially reduce vulnerability to hostility and aggression. Participants explained:

*“Are you gay?” I’ve had this question too many times ever since I started my schooling career and to be honest yes! I am gay and yes! I am proud to be gay. At first it was hard because I couldn’t understand and accept the reality that I am gay. I had to understand the concept of me being gay and also accept myself before I can start seeking acceptance from other people and trust me once I understood the homosexual life that’s where I reached a decision that you know what its time I let the world know that I am gay and that I am not ashamed of it instead I choose to embrace it **(Guchii, 20, male, effeminate gay)***

*“... I wish all my clothes were written “I am gay, so what?” At the back and in front written “I am a proud gay”, so that they would know I am not ashamed. I started standing alone in life because of the shame and hurt caused by other people and every time I feel that pain I always remind myself that life has nothing to offer me but a ticket to pain. I felt like a mess, actually I was emotionally a mess and I didn’t really feel like I have got anywhere else to go at the same point because there was living a day-to-day life in a river of dread and sadness while others are living it all up. Well none of that really mattered because believing that I am capable of doing much than what I think was the first step to a positive and a happy life, so I don’t feel a bit down or sad or angry anymore. I have learnt to accept and love myself from a very young age **(Guchii, male, 20, effeminate gay)**.*

For Guchii, as a non-heterosexual he is not embarrassed of his sexuality as can be seen in the response above. All the derogatory comments he used to receive from fellow students and friends only made him grow stronger. For him, acceptance was the best therapy from all the different kinds of humiliation he used to receive. Although Guchii had found space to acknowledge his sexuality, “the general struggle for LGBTI students continues to be a daily routine that they need to negotiate and manage” (Kiguwa and Langa, 2015:08). On the other hand, Steve is struggling to cope with the inherent homophobic attitudes that are directed to him by his fellow students. What is clear is that isolation and discrimination that many LGBTI students experience within institutions of higher learning contribute negatively to their emotional wellbeing and it must be addressed as part of the transformation agenda in higher education (Kiguwa and Langa, 2015:25).

*“... I take it simple, I am now used to the fact that people out there will say something bad about gays. When you pass they will be laughing and saying ‘gay..gay...gay’, and I*

would confidently respond to say I am gay so what? **(Nhlami, male, 22, effeminate gay)**.

*“...the reason that helped towards me being able to face what comes my way is the fact that I realised my sexuality at a very young age and also accepted myself at a very tender age. It made me to feel too excited, too confident to such an extent that there is no space for negativity. They can criticise me all they want and above all I always keep my head high, walk with confidence and always allow the world to see my unbreakable smile **(Cyndy, female, 23, lesbian)**.*

*“...I wouldn't say there are specific places that exposes me to homophobia because I am this type of a lesbian that is just living life the way it works for me. I live a carefree life, so meaning I am a lesbian everywhere. I don't become a lesbian at one place and a straight lady at another place, 'nope!' that's just not who I am. I expect and want everyone to know that 'Sandii AKA' is a tough and brave lesbian to bring down. So if you wanna bring me down, surely you must know your story **(Sandii AKA, female, 23, lesbian)**.*

The study shows that lesbian and gay students realise the significance of self-acceptance and boldness in the presence of gender-conforming students to avoid victimization. Thus the sooner the acceptance of one's own sexuality, the sooner one begins to express his or her identity without fear of discrimination within the college. Acceptance is one essential survival strategy that homosexual students do not need to negotiate to live freely. There are some individual students, however, who have adopted a lackadaisical attitude about what heterosexuals say about them, as long they are not physically attacked. This is evident in the following excerpts:

*“... I don't give a 'd\*\*..., if a person gives me s\*\*t... then I will give him or her s\*\*t..., I hate a person who undermines me and my sexuality even though the person is not my relative. **(Lucxin, male, 22, Effeminate gay)**.*

*“... As long as you don't attack me, I don't care what you say about my sexuality **(Kabelo, 24, male, effeminate gay)**.*

Although there are some LGBTI students who decide to use avoidance and acceptance strategies to cope with daily homophobic attitudes and victimization within the campus, there are some homosexual students who suffer emotional and psychological distress and develop

negative feelings towards heterosexuals. The utilization of strong language by Lucxin clearly demonstrates the anger that is building up resulting from the homophobic attacks directed towards him. It is clear from the citations above that higher education institution spaces are characterized by many incidents of harassment and violence which are often overlooked and/or hidden under the carpet by victims due to the reluctance by colleges in addressing all these abuses. Consequently, LGBTI students end up having suppressed feelings resulting in poor academic performance by gender non-conforming students. It is crucial for non-heterosexual students to accept their sexual orientation earlier than later because resistance and denial will only expose them to homophobia.

#### 4.7 The violation of human rights of homosexuals

The study revealed that the rights of non-gender conforming individuals have been violated at various levels, amongst others, their right to equality, dignity, privacy, freedom and security of person. This implies that gender non-conforming individuals are intersectionally oppressed.

##### *i. Equality*

The study shows that lesbian and gay students are violated in terms of their equal right. This is attributed to the fact that they are unfairly discriminated against on the basis of their sexual orientation as will be seen as the section unfolds. The following passage demonstrates how non-heterosexual students were discriminated:

*“... I face challenges of discrimination inside and outside class and I go to the SRC president to report, and I’m told the matter will create problems for him in future because it is complicated (Kabelo, 24, male, effeminate gay).”*

The above quote demonstrates that challenges faced by homosexuals are side lined based on the fact that the people who are meant to handle these lack capacity to deal with homosexual issues. Thus they tend to dismiss or trivialise them. This shows how heteronormativity is institutionalised in colleges. The results show the fear to challenge hetero-patriarchy by those in authority. They fear that they would be seen as promoters of non-normative behaviour. This is in violation of Chapter 2: Bill of Rights as enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa which amongst others states that the state may not discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds including sexual orientation, culture, belief, gender and sex.

ii. *Human dignity and life*

The results also elucidates that homosexuals rights to human dignity are also violated. The data shows inherent dignity for gender non-conforming students were violated by fellow students and lecturers. The findings reveal that homosexuals in this study are subjected to ridicule and humiliation as derogatory comments are made by, amongst others, fellow students and lecturers towards them, as can be seen in quotes below.

*“... I am not happy how I lost my virginity and pride. It’s fine though, one day I will make a revenge to my teacher (Delon, male, 20, effeminate gay).*

*“...I also suffered from self-hate, depression, stress, and above all, I attempted to commit suicide four times (Delon, male, 20, effeminate gay).*

The quotes further demonstrates the abuse of power and social status by those who are expected to promote and protect the lives and dignity of gender non-conforming individuals. Chapter 2: Bill of Rights as also enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa states that everyone has inherent dignity and their right to have their dignity respected and protected. It further states that everyone has the right to life. South Africa, however, is still a country where homosexuals continue to be confronted with challenges of emotional abuse, sexual abuse and harassment because of their non-normative behaviours (Ngcobo, 2007).

iii. *Freedom and security of the person*

Thirdly, the study findings show that the right to freedom and security for lesbian and gay students were violated based on their non-conformity to gender norms. The study indicates that lesbian and gay students occupy spaces that privilege heterosexuality as well as heteronormativity, hence, they are prejudiced, discriminated against and harassed. This leaves them with less opportunity to express their sexual orientation. Lucxin’s response below attests to this.

*“... I was actually beaten up by boys that I know for being gay, but it happened at my village and not here at the college (Lucxin, male, 22, Effeminate gay).*

The above statement shows the degree to which non-heterosexual students, especially gays and lesbians, face extreme exclusion from the society and other institutional settings for invading hetero-patriarchy and by employing the threat of violence so as to attach fear and

stigma to gender non-conforming individuals. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Chapter 2: Bill of Rights (12) (1e). However, states that everyone has the right not to be treated or punished in a cruel, inhuman or degrading way. This is in line with Arndt and Dubruin (2006) who state that lesbian and gay students undergo a process that involves shifting their identity from a socially-accepted heterosexual self, to an often socially undervalued, non-heterosexual lesbian and gay self. When these students reveal their sexual identities they often become victims of homophobic attacks.

#### *iv. Privacy*

Lastly, the results showed that the right to privacy for lesbian and gay students were violated by fellow students and sometimes lecturers. It also showed that non-heterosexual students are subjected to humiliation because the college might not have put in place protective measures especially with regard to homosexuality. The study further showed that the right to privacy for homosexual students are compromised because the life orientation curriculum is not effective in addressing and sensitizing students about issues of lesbians and gays. To this effect the privacy for lesbians and gays were violated in different ways as can be seen in the subsequent responses:

*“... I am often humiliated and judged about my size and my sexuality. ‘My question is which size are they referring to?’ (Guchii, male, 20, effeminate gay).*

Another shocking incident that clearly depicts the violation of the right to privacy is that of Delon who was sexually abused by his former high school teacher in 2015;

*“... He asked me if I had slept with a guy before, I was shocked and replied I never did. He came closer to me and started touching my ass and undressed me. He applied lubricants and f...ED me (Delon, mal, 20, effeminate gay)*

The above quotes indicate that non-heterosexual students are ridiculed for invading heteronormative spaces. This can be linked to the usage of language which has been used to infringe on the privacy of homosexual individuals. This resonates also with Msibi (2012:520) as already indicated in section 4.2 above where he states in his study that language is used to invade privacy and perpetuate violence against gender non-conforming students. Moreover, the quotes further illustrates that homosexuals sometimes becomes victims of sexual harassment and rape perpetrated by people who have power privileges. Although the Constitution of the

Republic of South Africa is celebrated for its progressive move, gender non-conforming students are still exposed to homophobic attacks and these could be perpetuated by the fact that there is no regulation specifically devoted to addressing their issues.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS

This section encompasses the conclusions of the study. This study employed a feminist methodological approach to investigate experiences of gays and lesbians in a TVET College. Five gays and three lesbians were recruited to participate in the study. The study made use of

thematic analysis method in analysing data. The study sought to address the following objectives:

1. To explore the challenge of being a homosexual in a TVET College.
2. To determine the effects of stigmatization and discrimination on academic performance.
3. To investigate the strategies used by homosexuals to cope with stigmatization and discrimination in a TVET College.

This chapter starts with a discussion on how the findings answered the research questions. This will be followed by recommendations, future research and lastly the study's contribution to existing literature.

### **5.1 The challenge of being a homosexual in a TVET College**

The first objective addressed by this study was the challenge of being a homosexual in a peri-urban TVET College. Findings have demonstrated that the TVETs, like other rural based and/or those which have been previously labelled as 'historically disadvantaged institutions', are unreceptive of the LGBTIs (Msibi, 2011; Mudzusi and Sandy, 2015; Mattyse, 2015). This is contrary to what has been found in some urban Universities (also previously labelled 'historically white/advantaged Institutions'), which are portrayed as 'open-minded', 'gay-friendly' and 'accepting'. This may imply 'difference' in perceptions and attitudes towards the LGBTIs based on the level of development of the context in which the Institution is embedded. Themes that emerged under this objective have affirmed the existing literature that gender non-conforming students face multi-faceted challenges in these institutions. This study has demonstrated that non-heterosexual students experience homophobia and discrimination based on their sexual orientation. The various forms of abuse these students undergo come from fellow students and lecturers. Moreover, the study has also clearly shown that the perpetration of homophobic attacks is gendered. It is mostly male students and lecturers who are perpetrators of homophobic attacks. As demonstrated in Chapter Four when men feel their hetero-masculinity is invaded, they retaliate because they feel the need to protect their 'male privilege'. Thus homosexuality is a source of tension arising from the desire to maintain male dominance. The major form of abuse experienced by participants is emotional abuse. The study has affirmed that language is the key mechanism with which homophobic attacks are inflicted on gays and lesbians. Homophobia on campus is demonstrated through, amongst others, the use of derogatory labels, derogatory comments, jokes and insults. Secondly, gender non-conforming

students are also sexually abused. This is a rare case considering that the rape occurred between a young gay and an adult male teacher. To establish the cause and a reason behind this uncommon brutal act by a teacher could give us something to think about. “Was this a ‘corrective rape?’” or could the teacher probably had developed feelings for the young gay?” This question remains to be answered, however it does not cancel the brutality that is being exercised against non-heterosexuals. This intention, coupled with the violent behaviour of the rapist, may qualify the action as a hate crime (Koraa and Geduld, 2015:09)

Apart from suffering from being sexual abused, gays and lesbians in this TVET College, are being laughed, starred at, pointed at, bullied, imitated and deliberately excluded from social events.

This study has demonstrated that challenges that LGBTI students go through occur as they navigate public spaces, on campus claimed by heterosexuals. The study has identified the bathroom, classroom, and the cafeteria as main sites of homophobic attacks. The ‘male’ bathroom appears to be the major site where emotional homophobic attacks occur towards the effeminate gays. Here we see tensions between hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities. Effeminate gays here may be identified as those with non-hegemonic masculinities who are on the receiving side of homophobic attacks, as they seek to use bathrooms. On the other hand male students may be classified as those with hegemonic masculinities since they are perpetrators of violence against gays. Male students see themselves as superior than gays and feel they have a right and power to taunt them. It has, however, also been argued that male students have been driven by the fear of loss of ‘male privilege’, as seen earlier in this section, hence, the fear of exposing themselves in the presence of effeminate gays, who seem to threaten their privilege. Secondly, the classroom has been identified as another site where homophobic attacks occur from both the male educators and fellow students. The study has shown that gay students experience verbal abuse by lecturers, marginalization and isolation by fellow male students, who seem to fear being associated with homosexuality. The cafeteria had also been identified as the third site where a homophobic attack takes place and perpetrated again by fellow male students. Fellow male students undermine the masculinity of the non-masculine male students.

The last challenge determined by the study concerns the effects of homophobia towards gay and lesbian students’ academic life. The study has demonstrated that homophobia does affect LGBTI students in negative ways. Participants, show feelings of distress and despondent. At

times, they stay away from school, and miss out on classes and tests, especially once they suffer such attacks.

As the Minister of Higher Education, Dr Blade Nzimande (2013) states, HEIs including TVET colleges have not put in place measures that will protect gender non-conforming students from discrimination and homophobic attacks. The Minister thus presented a draft policy report that tries to address social exclusion of the disadvantaged groups which amongst others included sexual minorities. There is, however, no clear outline from the policy that specifically addresses issues of sexual minorities. To this effect the policy still has an open gap that make non-heterosexuals vulnerable to homophobia and hate crimes (White paper for post-school education and training, 2013).

## 5.2 The effects of homophobia on the LGBTIs academic performance

The findings have shown that, although gay and lesbian students suffer discrimination and stigmatization resulting from homophobia, it does not necessarily have a negative effect on the majority of the participants' academic performance, especially, considering that institutions of higher learning are identified as one of the most difficult heteronormative spaces for them to occupy. The study revealed the resilience of the gays and lesbians against difficult and unwelcoming environment in which they find themselves. This confirms what Msibi (2012) says that colleges do not seem to want to challenge the status quo, in the sense that they are not willing to be perceived as going against the societal and cultural belief systems in which they are embedded. However, this defeats the HEI's mandate to transform themselves and the societies in which they are embedded, through community outreach programmes. As Kiguwa & Langa purport, challenging heteronormativity within institutions of higher learning has been identified as one of the key difficult space in institutional transformation for many LGBTI students (2015:02) In addition, Blade Nzimande believes that, "if prejudice, discrimination and stigmatization of non-heterosexual students remain in HEIs we might have a high number of non-heterosexual students performing poorly academically because of an ultimate decline in their self-esteem" (White paper for post-school education and training, 2013).

However, against all odds, the majority of gender non-conforming students in this study endeavour to outperform other students. They never allow circumstances deter them from their academic success although some do seem to succumb to abuse. It is likely that if homophobic acts such as prejudice, discrimination and stigmatization of non-heterosexual students continue

unabated in HEIs, the number of drop-outs among non-heterosexual students might continue to be on the increase.

### **5.3 The strategies used by homosexuals to cope with stigmatization and discrimination in a TVET college**

The objective above sought to determine coping strategies employed by participants in the hostile environment they find themselves in. To this effect, the study has demonstrated that despite the difficult position gender non-conforming students are in at the TVET, they remain resilient. The study, however, has shown us a dichotomous situation for although the majority strive to resist the hostility directed towards them and succeed in outperforming other students, a significant number of the gender non-conforming students at times succumb to abuse and this in turn affects their academic performance. Given the environment that is not welcoming, non-heterosexual students had found ways of bargaining with the hostile environment. By employing different types of survival strategies which range from avoidance, self-acceptance and becoming members of a support group, an LGBTI society groups established by USAID, outside campus environment.

Firstly, avoidance is the ways that the majority of non-heterosexual students use to deal with social spaces that are heteronormative in nature. Gender non-conforming students employ avoidance strategy with the intention of avoiding prejudice, discrimination and stigmatization that would otherwise harm them emotionally and psychologically. This was their way of circumventing homophobic attacks which would affect their academic performance.

The second strategy that homosexual students use to cope effectively with homophobia is self-acceptance. They believe that acceptance of oneself would potentially reduce vulnerability to hostility and violent behaviour which is directed towards them by people who conform to gender sexualities. Finding space to acknowledge one's sexual orientation also helps because one do not have to negotiate and manage heteronormative spaces.

Lastly, the establishment of LGBTI society on college campus is one which was considered to be a fundamental, in the sense that it will assist non-heterosexual students to cope more effectively with discrimination, abuse, prejudice and stigmatization. This type of organization is yet to be established in the college but it was seen and emphasised by the participants as one of the major strategies that will offer support to those who are still in the closet. Moreover, findings shows that 'coming out' programmes provides an opportunity for homosexual students

to meet and interact with each other. The development of support structures was also considered important in raising awareness about homosexuality and helping to reduce the multiple features of cultural and religious beliefs. Coming out to one's family and friends is often very difficult to do and involves a lot of fretting on the part of the homosexual over whether they will be rejected, scorned or be viewed as a disappointment to their loved ones (Osche, 2009).

#### 5. 4. Recommendations

Based on these conclusions, these are the recommendations for future research, policy makers and TVET colleges in particular.

##### *Recommendation for policy*

Unlike other minority groups the LGBTI group do not have a special section in the Bill of rights, in the South African constitution, devoted to their rights, rather the relevant part of section 9 (3) entitled "equality" states that the state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds including, sex, gender, race or sexual orientation. The results, however, show that the majority of non-heterosexual students continue to face extreme discrimination within the TVEPs There is not policy in place that directs these institutions to put in place protective measures that should specifically address the harassment LGBTI. It is thus considered important for the South African government to develop a policy framework that will guide TVET colleges to develop their own policies.

##### *Recommendations for the institution*

Given the seriousness of homophobia, it is advisable for institutions to devise a strategy to mainstream LGBTI issues in the HEIs system. First, it is important to establish a support mechanisms and relevant structures in place to specifically address the LGBTI issues. As the results have shown TVET colleges, particularly, lack LGBTI structure which would lead and advice on the institutionalization of LGBTI issues. .

Institutions need to hire professionally-trained counsellors, social workers or psychologists within HEI, lack of which is detrimental to the lives of LGBTI students since gender non-conforming students suffer emotional and psychological due to homophobic violence. They face, among others, verbal harassment, name calling, ridicule and rejection which are significant stressors that can increase risk of depression, anxiety, substance abuse and even suicide. Threats, violence and trauma have emotional and physical effects than can be persistent,

including self-blame, self-loathing, depression and post-traumatic stress symptoms. This may necessitate professional help for the LGBTI students.

Seeking individual counselling from a professional counsellor who understands homosexual issues, can help these students negotiate the challenges, cope with discrimination, establish relationships, and develop the skills necessary to succeed in college and in life. Counselling groups and peer groups also offer unique opportunities to increase self-awareness, receive support from peers, and build a community in which acceptance and validation are provided. Such counselling groups can provide a safe environment to discuss issues related to family conflict, relationships, religion, sexuality, and identity development, as well as place to reframe negative myths and misconceptions. Students will be able to share with each other not only an awareness of the challenges they are facing, but also the ways they have found to cope, to promote positive change, and to find success and happiness.

Institutions also need to develop a structure that will handle advocacy and activism, awareness-raising, education and training of students and all staff members on campus. Issues of LGBTIs should be incorporated into the general curriculum. This structure would also facilitate access to accurate information in order to reduce the influence of stereotypes.

### 5.5 Future research

To develop this study further could be done, first, by expanding the research to a national study. The study would be more beneficial by looking at a wider range of TVET colleges in South Africa than just one rural-based college of the Limpopo Province. The generalization of this study is therefore limited because of the sample size. The majority of similar research has been conducted in universities rather than in TVET colleges. An in-depth research needs to be further conducted in various colleges in South Africa with a large sample size to give more credibility to generalization of results (Ngcobo, 2007; Lesch, Brits & Naidoo, 2015; Nzimande, 2015; Molema, A., Mabogoane .F. & White T., 2015; and Kiguwa, N., & Langa, M. 2015).

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## APPENDIXES

### Appendix A: Consent form

I hereby give my consent to participate in the project entitled “: An exploration of experiences and sexual orientation of homosexuals (LGBTIs) students of a TVET college in Limpopo province, South Africa”. I understand that the person responsible for the research project is Mahasha Kelly, student no: 11584837. The researcher has explained the procedure to be followed, thus, I will voluntarily participate in the study. I will also have the opportunity to receive further information about the findings of the investigation. I understand that i may discontinue participation in this project at any time i choose without penalty and that i may refuse to allow the use of information I have given as data and none of my identity will be of public knowledge.

Participant’s Signature: .....Date.....

Researcher’s signature: .....Date.....

## Appendix B: Self-Administered Interview Guide.

### Biographical Details

Age	
Pseudonym	
Sexual orientation	
Level of Study	

### Examination of challenges faced by homosexuals

1. When did you start realizing your sexual orientation? Please explain

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3. Are you open about your sexual orientation? Please explain

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4. How does it feel to be a homosexual at a TVET college?

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5. What stigma surrounds being a homosexual student in a TVET college?

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6. Which areas within the college facility exposes you to homophobia?

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**Effects of stigmatization and discrimination on academic performance**

7. Who discriminates against you on campus?

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8. What exactly do they do to you?

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9. How do you feel about it?

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10. How does it affects you academically?

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**The strategies used by homosexuals to cope with stigmatization and discrimination**

11. Do you think the college have put measures to protect you as homosexuals?

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12. Do you think people hate you?

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13. How do you deal with the reaction of people towards your sexual orientation?

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14. What do you think the college lacks that exposes you to homophobia?

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15. Where do you think the college can improve to ensure that you are protected as a homosexual?

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16. What do you think homosexuals should do to cope effectively with segregation experienced in the college facility?

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