

**BLACK MOTHERS' JOURNEYS:
COMING OUT ABOUT THEIR OFFSPRING'S
SEXUAL ORIENTATION**

by

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DECLARATION

I, Khulukazi T. Soldati-Kahimbaara, Student number 43755747, declare that *Black Mothers' Journeys: Coming Out about their Offspring's Sexual Orientation* is my own work and all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete referencing, and that this work has not been submitted before for any other degree at any other institution.

K.T. Soldati-Kahimbaara

Date

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ABSTRACT

Research to date in South Africa has explored the coming out narratives of lesbian and gay people. Most of this research suggests these people experience their parents' reactions as largely negative. This negativity is attributed to the patriarchal culture and religious beliefs which insist on compulsory heterosexuality that dominate African discourse in South Africa. However, thus far, little work has been done focusing specifically on the perceptions of the parents of lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring, and on the parents' own coming out about their children's alternative sexual orientation. In this qualitative study, I explored the lived experiences of black mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual children from diverse backgrounds with the aim of capturing their own voices and gaining an understanding of their journeys, from the moment that each discovered that her child belongs to a sexual minority to her acceptance of the child's alternative sexuality. I conducted semi-structured interviews with six black South African mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring in order to learn about these mothers' experiences. I analysed the interview transcripts using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis. I identified three main themes, namely the mothers' journeys; responses to the study's research questions, and other concerns the black mothers still have regarding their lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring. Each main theme was comprised of several sub-themes. In a nutshell, the study shows that in contrast to the assumption that South African black urban communities are hostile spaces with no visible familial support for lesbian, gay or bisexual youth, in reality, there are examples in urban African communities of parental support for members of sexual minorities. Although all the mothers in this study held Christian beliefs, none subscribed to a 'same-sex attraction is a sin' discourse. Instead, most of these mothers regarded their children as special gifts from God, and some saw their children's alternative sexuality as God's way of teaching them as mothers about unconditional love.

KEY TERMS:

black; coming out; mother; journey; offspring; sexual orientation

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CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION

1.1 Introduction

In this study, I consider when, how and to whom South African black mothers come out about their children's alternative sexual orientation as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) individuals, in light of the heterosexism and homonegativity prevalent in black communities in this country.

In this chapter, I provide a general orientation of the study and its context. I also discuss both the historical and the contemporary usage of the term 'coming out'. I state the research questions, discuss the rationale for the study and provide definitions of terms as used in the study. Lastly, I provide a chapter outline of the dissertation as a whole.

Since my topic addresses sexual orientation, and not gender identity and biological variance, I limit my discussion to the lesbian, gay and bisexual population, even though sometimes the issues I raise also affect transgender and intersex individuals. Furthermore, due to the negative connotations associated with the term 'homosexuality' in the lesbian, gay and bisexual literature, in this dissertation (except where the term is used in a direct quotation), I substitute the term with the following terms: 'same-sex sexual orientation', 'alternative sexual orientation/sexuality', 'same-sex sexuality', 'same-sex attraction', 'same-sex desire', 'same-sex practice' or 'same-gender loving'.

Discovering that their son or daughter is lesbian, gay or bisexual comes as a shock to most parents. There are a variety of reasons for this, but I mention only three here. One reason is that we live in a world in which heteronormativity remains pervasive. According to Mann (2012), the term 'heteronormativity' refers to "the assumption that heterosexuality is natural, normal and socially appropriate. [Therefore, i]t becomes the standard by which other sexual practices are deemed deviant" (p. 416). A second reason why the disclosure of alternative sexual orientation comes as a shock to parents stems from the fact that many parents who discover that their offspring is not heterosexual are themselves heterosexuals, and they have often had no direct interaction with anyone who is not heterosexual prior to their discovery of their offspring's alternative sexual orientation. A third reason emanates from the fact that alternative sexual orientation is stigmatised in South African society, both from the perspectives of African

culture and of organised religion. Therefore, when parents discover that one of their own offspring is either same-sex attracted or bisexual, their values are called into question. Hence, it is not surprising that some parents are shocked or feel conflicted. Some react by taking extreme actions, such as rejecting their son or daughter, or coercing the young person to live as a heterosexual person. However, despite the difficulty they experience, some parents accept their same-sex attracted or bisexual son or daughter, regardless of the shock and devastation they may feel.

The expression ‘coming out’ is associated with the disclosure of alternative sexual orientation to family, friends and others who previously assumed that the person concerned was heterosexual. The term can be traced to earlier scholars such as Dank (1971), Plummer (1996) and Troiden (1979). For example, Dank (1971) uses the term to refer to the process of identifying oneself as same-sex attracted. Plummer (1996) describes coming out as the process by which same-sex attracted individuals are ‘reborn’ into the organised aspects of the same-sex attracted community and identify themselves as same-sex attracted. Troiden (1979) regards coming out as a process that consists of four stages: sensitisation, dissociation and signification, coming out and commitment. More recent literature (Caldwell, 2004; Goldfried & Goldfried, 2001; Phillips, 2007; Stewart, 2002) agrees with earlier scholarship on these definitions of the term, but the term is currently also used to refer to the process by which parents of lesbian, gay or bisexual people endorse their new identities as parents of members of a sexual minority. This literature has also revealed that parents of lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring, like their son or daughter, experience closet time – a time when they hide from others the fact that their offspring are lesbian, gay or bisexual, before making the decision to disclose this information to others.

Caldwell (2004) notes that the “contemporary usage of this term, has since been extended to include other issues that people find difficult to disclose to others” (p. 2). These include disclosing all sorts of secrets, such as adoption, divorce or family illness (Imber-Black, 1998). Finally, Goldfried and Goldfried (2001) argue that parental disclosure of the fact that a parent’s son or daughter belongs to a sexual minority group is one of the most crucial steps parents must undergo in order to be fully supportive and accepting of their gay, lesbian or bisexual offspring. Having provided a brief introduction, and historical and more current definitions of the term coming out, I now proceed to contextualise the study.

1.2 Contextualising the Problem

In South Africa and in the United Kingdom, many young lesbian, gay or bisexual youths are coming out of the closet to their parents and families earlier, before leaving home, than was previously the case. In the United Kingdom, this shift to disclosure prior to leaving home can be ascribed to the high youth unemployment rate (Jones & Wallace, 1992), which has resulted in a delayed transition of young people from childhood to independent adulthood. One of the ways in which this delayed transition manifests is in these youths' inability to support themselves, which in turn forces them to remain financially semi-dependent on their parents (Coles, 1995; Jones, 1995). Like the United Kingdom, South Africa is currently experiencing a high matriculant and graduate unemployment rate (Merten, 2016). According to Merten (2016), the percentage of black African professional, managerial and technical workers aged 25 to 34 has dropped by 2% over the last 20 years, leaving this generation less skilled than the previous one. According to Merten's (2016) study, the 25 to 34 age group continues to constitute the bulk of the unemployed in South Africa. Like their United Kingdom counterparts, young South Africans who are members of a sexual minority are often forced to come out while still living at home.

Based on their testimonies, it seems that parental reactions to such sexual orientation disclosures are mostly negative (Muholi, 2004; Nkabinde, 2006). As mentioned previously, the strongest reason for parents' difficulty in accepting their offspring's same-sex sexuality or bisexuality emanates from the fact that the majority of parents are heterosexual, and their assumption that their children will also be heterosexual. When a son or daughter comes out, parents may experience many emotions – ranging from shock to disbelief, denial, isolation and anger – at the beginning. However, later on, these emotions are likely to be replaced by either acknowledgement or acceptance, or even affirmation of their son or daughter's alternative sexual orientation. In South Africa, two negative discourses dominate debates on same-sex sexuality. They are the myths that 'same-sex sexuality/practice is unAfrican' and therefore a Western import, and that 'same-sex sexuality/practice is a sin'. These negative discourses or myths seem to have (perhaps unintentionally) contributed to intolerance against sexual minorities and a rise in various forms of violence against people who belong to a sexual minority in rural, semi-urban and urban areas of South Africa.

Examples of victims of these acts of violence in Gauteng, to mention a few, include the brutal murder of the 24-year-old Noxolo Magwaza, a lesbian member of Ekurhuleni Pride Organising

Committee (EPOC) on 28 April 2011, at Ekurhuleni near Johannesburg (Mtetwa, 2011). Another victim was Eudy Simelane, the lesbian Banyana Banyana soccer player who was gang-raped in what is believed to have been ‘corrective/curative’ rape, brutally beaten and stabbed 24 times on the face, chest and legs in KwaThema, a township near Johannesburg, on 28 April 2008 (Mambaonline, 2008). Other victims of violence were two lesbian women, Salome Massoa and Sizakele Sigaza, who were the victims of a double rape and murder in July 2007, after they had been verbally abused at a bar. Their bodies were found bound with their underwear. They were gang-raped, tortured and shot in a field in Meadowlands, a suburb in Johannesburg (Ndaba, 2007).

Muthien (2007) defines ‘corrective’ rape (also called ‘curative’ rape) as the “rape of women perceived of as lesbian by men and as an ostensible ‘cure’ for their (aberrant) sexualities” (p. 323). Muholi (2004), on the other hand, views ‘corrective’ rape as synonymous with hate crimes. Craig (2002, p. 86) defines a hate crime as an “illegal act involving intentional selection of a victim based on a perpetrator’s bias or prejudice against the actual or perceived status of the victim. Craig (2002) adds that unlike other crimes, hate crimes have a “unique form of aggression that includes the intent to harm” (p. 87).

In the Western Cape, similar incidents have been reported. For example, De Waal (2006) in the *Daily Maverick* of 12 September 2006 reported the brutal murder of Zoliswa Nkonyana, a 19-year-old lesbian woman who was gang-raped and subsequently killed by a group of about 19 men on 4 February 2006. Conflict arose from an argument with a female patron about Zoliswa’s wanting to use women’s toilets, while she and her friends were ‘pretending to be tom boys’ (De Waal, 2006). Following this confrontation, the woman informed her male friends, who were at the tavern. When Zoliswa and a friend left, the men followed them, and when Zoliswa separated from her friend, the group of about 19 men caught up with her, beat her up and fatally stabbed her. Another 19-year-old teenager, Sihle Sikoji of the Luleki Sizwe Womyn’s Project, a Cape Town-based Non-Profit Organisation (NPO), which fights against hate-based crimes like ‘corrective’ rape and sexual assault, was speared to death on 9 November 2012 because of her openness about her sexuality (Mposo, 2012).

The ‘corrective’ rape and murder of gay men is also a common phenomenon in South Africa, although it is often not reported, possibly due to fear of stigma. As in the case of the rape of lesbian women, it is also believed that the rape of gay men is perpetrated in order to ‘cure’ them of their gayness. Examples of male victims of violence include the case of Thapelo

Makutle, a 23-year-old man from Seoding in Kuruman, North West, who was killed and mutilated. His throat was slit to the point of virtual beheading and part of his testicles and penis were cut off and stuffed into his mouth on 8 June 2012. According to Shaine Griqua, the director of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Organisation (LEGBO) Northern Cape, Thapelo was followed home after an argument about whether he was transgender or gay (Conway-Smith, 2012). LEGBO Northern Cape is an NPO which provides services such as safer supportive spaces to vulnerable, rejected and marginalised members of society, especially those exposed to prejudice, hate crimes and hostility. Another gay man, Galip Asvat from Hillbrow, Johannesburg, was ambushed by a gang of three men in the foyer of his apartment building in 2007. They thought he was a woman. On finding that he was a man, they became even more violent and called him *isitabane* [a sexual minority person] and seemed to think that this justified the physical violation that they perpetrated on him (Louw, 2014). One of the worst examples of such violence occurred in Vosloorus in Gauteng to a young man called Tebogo Mokhoto, who was killed on 1 April 2016 in a bloody attack on the East Rand during which he was anally raped with a wooden object (Mambaonline, 2016). According to Matshidiso Mofokeng from Vosloorus Activators (quoted in Mambaonline, 2016), a community-based lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) group, Mokhoto returned home after a night out to find his home being burgled by a group of men. The four men, two of whom it is believed he knew, then killed the young man, cutting his throat and stabbing him multiple times. Mofokeng also reported that a stick or wooden pole was shoved into his rectum (Mambaonline, 2016).

The explicit examples above reveal that, without any doubt, some rural areas, semi-urban and urban areas of South Africa are hostile spaces for ‘out’ lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons. Nel and Judge (2008) conclude that sexual violence is used as a means to punish lesbian women and gay men for not conforming to patriarchal and heteronormative constructs. It is particularly shocking that in the South African context these atrocities directed at people belonging to a sexual minority continue, despite the progressive nature of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996* (RSA 1996), which prohibits discrimination and/or violence against members of all sexual minorities.

Bearing in mind the difficulties confronting lesbian, gay and bisexual persons in communities in South Africa, one can only guess that it may be equally difficult for parents of young people who belong to a sexual minority group to come out about the alternative sexuality of their offspring. This study therefore attempts to explore this topic.

1.3 Aims of the Research

The purpose or aim of this study was to explore the experiences of ‘out’ mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring from the moment of discovering that their children belong to these sexual minorities until the period of coming out of the closet, by using the journey metaphor. In doing so, my aim is to give a voice to these mothers’ experiences in order to enhance understanding of their feelings, thoughts and actions in the course of their journeys.

In order to realise the aim of the research, I investigated the research questions set out below.

1.4 Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

- How were the journeys of the black mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring after discovering that their children are lesbian, gay or bisexual?
- What motivated the black mothers in this study to acknowledge and/or accept and subsequently come out themselves about the sexual minority status of their offspring?
- What was the impact (if any) of the black mothers’ coming out on their relationships with their offspring and with the lesbian, gay or bisexual community in general?
- What meanings did these black mothers ascribe to having lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring?

1.5 Background and Motivation

Most of what is known about black parental reactions to the discovery that a son or daughter is lesbian, gay or bisexual in the South African context comes from anecdotal accounts by lesbian, gay or bisexual people, not by their parents. One exception is a study by Livingston (2014), which explored the experiences and meanings that shape white heterosexual fathers’ relationships with their gay sons. Livingston’s (2014) study is undoubtedly important, in that it provides some information on experiences and meanings that shape white heterosexual fathers’ relationships with their gay sons, but it is limited in its focus on white middle-class Afrikaner fathers of gay sons, excluding black, Indian and coloured fathers and their gay sons. It also excludes the experiences of black, white, Indian and coloured mothers and the meanings that they attach to those experiences and that shape their relationships with their lesbian or bisexual offspring. This means the voices of black parents of members of these sexual minorities have not yet been heard on this issue.

The literature on the disclosure of sexual orientation to the family of origin by lesbian, gay or bisexual young people shows that mothers are usually the first to be told (Valentine, 1997), because they do most of the emotional work within families. Further research by Valentine, Skelton and Butler (2003) shows that “not only do lesbians and gay men commonly break the news of their sexuality to their mothers first, they often ask her to come out on their behalf to other members of the family” (p. 487). This, together with the fact that I myself am a mother of a gay son, prompted me to do research in this neglected area of study to fill the gap in the existing literature. I also wanted to compare my journey with the journeys of similar mothers in order to see whether any general patterns could be observed.

1.6 Rationale for the Study

The issue of same-sex attraction/practice is a contentious one in Africa in general, and in black communities in South Africa in particular. Two myths, namely that same-sex sexuality is unAfrican and by implication is a Western import, and that same-sex sexuality is a sin, are used to silence and render same-sex sexuality invisible in society. At the same time, since 1996, new reforms have been put in place in the Equality Clause in section 9 of the progressive South African *Constitution*, which states:

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

Despite these positive reforms in South African legislation, the reality for black lesbian, gay and bisexual people in some communities is different, as they are denied their right to live openly as lesbian, gay or bisexual, as enshrined in the *Constitution*. When these marginalised members of society insist on living openly as lesbian, gay or bisexual, they may be confronted with verbal or physical violence, and in extreme cases, rape and murder, as the examples provided in the introduction suggested.

It is common knowledge that in a family, the lives of lesbian, gay or bisexual children (like those of their siblings), as well as those of their parents are linked. Therefore when lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring come out of the closet about their alternative sexuality, this has a large impact on the family as a whole, especially on their parents. Following a young person’s coming out, parents have two choices. They can either stand together with their lesbian, gay or bisexual son or daughter by coming out about their new identities as the mother (or father) of

a person who belongs to a sexual minority, or support the rejecting attitudes of society. Neither is an easy decision for a parent to make.

In light of the arguments raised above, this study therefore attempts to explore retrospectively the feelings and thoughts of mothers who were confronted with their offspring's coming out, and the actions that these mothers took.

Finally, I hope that parents who discover for the first time that a son or daughter belongs to a sexual minority group may benefit from reading about what these 'out' black mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring have encountered during their journeys, how they dealt with the challenges they faced, and how their own actual process of coming out occurred. Put simply, I hope the findings of this study will serve as a resource for families struggling to accept the sexual minority individuals in their families and communities.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

The following key terms are used in the study and are defined below:

- black
- mothers
- coming out
- journeys
- offspring
- sexual orientation

1.7.1 Black

I use the term 'black' to refer to a racial grouping nowadays commonly referred to as African. However, in my use of the term I do not include Coloureds and Asians, who were also classified as black in the post-1994 racial classification system. The exclusion of these groups in this study is informed by the fact there are marked differences between the cultural beliefs regarding same-sex sexuality of these groups and those of the group referred to as African. I opted for the term black because the term 'African' is problematic – some whites, Asians and Coloureds in South Africa also identify themselves as 'African'.

1.7.2 Coming out

According to the APA (2007), the term ‘coming out’ refers to “revealing that one is gay lesbian, bisexual or transgender. Such a declaration can sometimes lead to problems within the individual’s family, employers, or friends and can be a difficult step, even for those who and are comfortable with their sexual orientation” (p. 198). In this study, however, I use this term to refer to disclosure by heterosexual parents to others who did not know that their offspring are members of a sexual minority group.

1.7.3 Mother

The term ‘mother’, according to the *Oxford Dictionary* (1995), refers to a woman in relation to a child or children to whom she has given birth. I have used the term to mean a mother figure – a term which refers to a “person who occupies the mothering role in relation to a child” (APA, 2007, p. 595). In this study, this term therefore refers to biological mothers, as well as other caregivers, such as an aunt, grandmother, or elder sister, an adoptive or foster parent, etc.

1.7.4 Journey

The term ‘journey’ refers to a metaphorical mapping of experiences that traces participants’ feelings, thoughts, actions, and the spiritual understanding these mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring have gone through from the moment of discovering that their children are lesbian, gay or bisexual to the time of accepting this fact.

1.7.5 Offspring

According to the APA (2007), the term ‘offspring’ refers to “any of the immediate descendants of a human, animal or plant” (p. 642). However, in this study, the term offspring refers to young adults raised by the participants in this study. As mentioned previously, the term is not confined to biological and legal relationships. It is inclusive of adopted or fostered children, whether this relationship is legally ratified or not.

1.7.6 Sexual orientation

The APA (2007) uses the term ‘sexual orientation’ to describe “one’s enduring sexual attraction to male partners, female partners, or both. Sexual orientation may be heterosexual, same-sex (gay or lesbian) or bisexual” (p. 846). People who are heterosexual experience these feelings

primarily for people of the opposite sex, while people who are gay or lesbian experience these feelings primarily for people of the same sex. People who are bisexual experience these feelings for people of both sexes.

1.8 Outline of the Remainder of the Study

Chapter 2 examines the literature on parental reactions to the disclosure of alternative sexual orientation by offspring. Four models of identity development as a parent of a gay, lesbian or bisexual son or daughter are presented. The chapter ends with a discussion of the three theories that inform this study: family stress, family resilience and Queer Theory.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodology employed in the study. This includes the paradigmatic considerations and the central role that I as the researcher have played in this study.

Chapter 4 begins by providing brief summaries of the participants' journeys, followed by the presentation and analysis of the findings. The chapter ends with a discussion of these findings in view of the available literature.

Chapter 5 provides a summary and the conclusions of this study. It also reflects on the study's limitations and suggests recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I review existing literature on parents' reactions to the coming out of their offspring as lesbian, gay or bisexual, and I highlight challenges facing people who belong to a sexual minority and their families following their coming out. Given the scarcity of the literature on the subject in Africa, and in South Africa, in particular, most of the literature reviewed is from the West. Context is important in a study like this one, so reviewing the literature from the West is useful – as it enables us to reflect on the role that parents from the West have played in the lives of their lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring, compared to the role that parents of lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring in South Africa could play in future. Thus even though contexts differ, there are always lessons to be learned from the West.

I begin with a discussion of what is known about parental reactions and other persons such as teachers, other students and community members to same-sex attraction in South Africa and proceed to the available literature from the West.

2.2 Local Literature on Same-Sex Attraction/Practices

As already indicated in the introduction to this study, there is a paradoxical situation in South Africa – on the one hand, members of sexual minorities experience discrimination, and even persecution and violence in their communities; on the other hand, the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (RSA, 1996) grants them full rights as citizens and forbids discrimination against them. This discrepancy has elicited attempts to increase the visibility of all sexual minorities in the public sphere in South Africa, as evidenced by the many PRIDE events celebrated in various provinces and cities in South Africa yearly. Various NPOs also cater for the specific needs of members of sexual minorities. Yet the harassment of members of sexual minorities continues unabated, as the examples given in the introduction of this dissertation suggest.

Furthermore, other than the study by Livingston (2014) mentioned previously, in the South African context, there are no other studies available that document parental reactions to the coming out of their offspring as gay, lesbian or bisexual (or as members of other sexual

minorities). This means that the little which is known about black parents' reactions to the coming out of their offspring is derived from reports by young people who have come out, rather than from these parents themselves.

In general, same-sex sexuality has been silenced in African discourses on sexuality. Oral accounts by African elders and first-hand accounts of people with same-sex desire or people who have engaged in same-sex practices have largely been submerged in general denial. However, same-sex attraction has existed in Africa in the past, and continues to exist at present. Scholars such as Dlamini (2006), Epprecht (2008), Msibi (2011) and Shoko (2010) have confirmed the existence of people who, in some way, do not fit the heterosexual ideal.

According to Shoko (2010), in Zimbabwe, there are two opposing views on same-sex practices. One view denies the existence of same-sex practices, known as *chingochani* in Shona, prior to the coming of colonialists in Africa, suggesting that same-sex attraction is a foreign phenomenon and/or a borrowed tradition. This view supports the notion of same-sex sexuality as unAfrican which is widely accepted in many African countries, including South Africa. The opposing view attests to the existence of same-sex attraction prior to the coming of white people in Zimbabwe. Elders who were interviewed maintained that same-sex attracted individuals were known to exist in Shona culture long before the colonisation of Africa and continue to exist today. For example, one chief (quoted in Shoko, 2010, p. 636), stated that it is common knowledge in Zimbabwe that "homosexuality is practiced by some boys at puberty ... however, the intention is that of relieving sexual urges without any shadow being cast on future plans for heterosexual sex in marriage". Another elder, a woman, said that "both men and women do homosexual acts in the absence of the opposite sex. All that people need in these relationships is love" (Shoko, 2010, p. 636). The arguments of these elders seem to suggest that same-sexuality is solely situational. This implies that it either happens because of cultural restrictions placed, for example, on boys at puberty, or it happens when people of the opposite sex are not available. This argument is therefore problematic, as it rejects the genetic and other explanations of same-sex sexuality.

As mentioned previously, in the whole of Africa, the dominant discourses about same-sex sexuality are that same-sex attraction is 'unAfrican' and same-sex attraction is 'sinful'. These discourses, according to Msibi (2011), are used to rationalise crusades against various sexual minorities. The irony regarding the 'unAfrican' myth is that those who oppose same-sex practices using this myth as their reason ignore the accounts of early anthropologists which

date as far back as the sixteenth century. A historical overview by Epprecht (2008) identifies scholars such as Richard Burton (1885, quoted in Epprecht, 2008, p. 37), who used disapproving terms such as “unnatural damnation” to refer to male-male sex among the BaKongo. Andrew Battel (1590, quoted in Purchas, [1613] 1905, p. 376) also used the word “beastly” to describe “men in women’s apparel” who were kept among wives among the Imbangala of Angola. Jean Baptiste Labat (1732/1998, p. 163), an Italian explorer, also reported on the leader of a caste of cross-dressing male diviners known as the *chibados* or *quimbandas* in Angola among the Imbangala, whom he described as a “lewd man ... without honor”.

Ngubane (1977 (quoted in Epprecht, 2008) and Bozongwana (1983, quoted in Epprecht, 2008), claimed that there is a link between same-sex sexuality, bisexuality and spirit possession. In particular, these two anthropologists identified some traditional healers among the Zulu and Ndebele who engaged in same-sex practices. Links between same-sex practices and medicine or magic have been made in various parts of Africa. For example, Tessman (1998) suggests that sexual acts between two married adult males were seen not as an act of pleasure, but as ‘wealth medicine’, and claims that sexual intercourse between two men was used to fortify the authority of chiefs against political rivals, or warriors preparing for battle, or boxers preparing for a boxing match, or mine workers seeking protection against rock falls, or desiring a promotion and a pay rise. The argument linking same-sex practices and traditional healing is also supported by Nkabinde (2008), who identified a number of female *sangomas* [traditional healers], including herself, who marry same-sex partners at the behest of their ancestors.

Antonio (1997) attempts to provide a plausible explanation for the confusion resulting from the unAfrican debate, and attributes this confusion to the secrecy surrounding same-sex sexuality, and to the silencing and absence of written records on the cultures, histories and sexualities of many parts of Africa. This ties in with the fact that, in the past, African cultures were oral cultures; therefore knowledge or their histories were transferred from the elders to the young by word of mouth. Unless the young absorbed the information passed on to them, when these elders died, the knowledge was lost. According to Antonio (1997), the fact that sexuality is treated as a taboo subject in many African cultures has further added to the silencing and invisibility of African sexualities in general, and same-sex sexuality (which is especially stigmatised) in particular. Although the claim that same-sex sexuality is unAfrican is evidently fallacious, it is nevertheless the dominant view in many black communities. One of the

objections of those who support this view is the claim that same-sex sexuality allegedly has the potential to destroy patriarchal African traditions and heterosexual family values (Msibi, 2011). Chigweshe (1996) argues that same-sex attraction between men of marriageable age is stigmatised “because it challenges the idea of male supremacy and patriarchal hierarchy” (p. 12).

At present, the ‘unAfrican’ and ‘anti-African culture’ arguments are also used by traditional leaders in South Africa, as well as by former and current African heads of state, including Arap Moi in Kenya, Sam Nujoma in Namibia, Olusegun Obasanjo in Nigeria, Yoweri Museveni in Uganda, Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe and Jacob Zuma in South Africa. Msibi (2011), refers to the information transmitted about same-sex sexuality as lies, and argues that these African heads of state and others who are opposed to same-sex attraction merely use this discourse to persecute and harass those who engage in same-sex relations. Since traditional leaders and the various countries’ heads of state mentioned above are figures of authority, it is likely that their public opposition to same-sex practices and negative views on same-sex sexuality and same-sex individuals has indirectly fuelled hatred of same-sex attracted people. It has probably fuelled and provided a false justification for the persecution and harassment of lesbian, gay or bisexual persons in intolerant communities all over Africa.

Some research which has also shed light on the plight of same-sex attracted persons and their experiences comes from South African schools, for example, by scholars such as Bhana (2012), Boonzaier and Zway (2015), Butler, Alpaslan, Strumpher and Astbury (2003), Butler and Astbury (2008), Msibi (2012) and Stephens (2011). Regarding sexual minorities in schools, Butler et al. (2003) found that school-going gay and lesbian youths experience discrimination, isolation and non-tolerance in their high school contexts. Furthermore, Butler et al. (2003) reported that self-identified lesbian and gay youths are harassed by both their peers and teachers. Their research reveals silence in the curriculum on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues. These findings are similar to those of Bhana (2012), who suggests that South African schools are homophobic spaces in which members of sexual minorities are ridiculed and harassed, and even worse, physically assaulted, sometimes in full view of teachers who turn a blind eye on the issue. Francis (2012) also argues that teachers either ignore or avoid issues to do with sexual diversity, and when they do talk about same-sex attraction, they tend to endorse the heteronormative idea of compulsory heterosexuality. Butler and Astbury (2008) and Msibi (2012) therefore accuse teachers of investing in heterosexuality, by

repudiating alternate forms of sexuality, thus contributing to the creation of a homophobic environment in schools. Yet, Msibi (2012) points out the potential for teachers to work against discrimination especially because, in the absence of parents, teachers are tasked with playing the parental role at school. De Palma and Francis (2014) suggest practical steps that can be taken to remedy the current oppressive environment operating in schools. These include teacher education that engages directly with sexual diversity, in particular, discussion on various authoritative discourses, which include religious teachings, educational policy, science and the human rights framework of the South African *Constitution*. They suggest the provision of training materials and practical guidelines based on existing policy.

Other studies and narratives that shed light on the experiences of the youth and of young adult same-sex attracted men and women are those of Boonzaier and Zway (2015), Cook, Sandfort, Nel and Rich (2013), Malan and Johardien (2010), Matebeni (2011), Rabie and Lesch (2009), Reid (2005), Smuts (2011) and Swarr (2012), who present insightful findings. I first discuss studies that explore lesbian youth and/or lesbian women's experiences, and then proceed to research that considers gay men and/or bisexual men's experiences.

A study by Boonzaier and Zway (2015) focused on young lesbian and bisexual women between the ages of 13 and 17 in the Western Cape. Their study revealed that although these young lesbian women are constantly faced with violence in their daily lives, some young lesbian and bisexual women resist discrimination and negotiate safety, and thus become agents in their lives rather than victims.

The study by Matebeni (2011) explored black lesbian sexualities and identities in Johannesburg. Her findings showed that the formation of lesbian identities "is mutable and evolving" and that therefore "there cannot be a single formulation of the category" (Matebeni, 2011, p. 282). In other words, she argues that lesbian identity is in constant flux, especially in a cosmopolitan setting. Regarding meanings attached to black lesbian identity, Matebeni (2011) suggests that, on the one hand, lesbian identity is expressive and is shaped by aesthetics, style and pleasure. On the other hand, it is also political, and as such makes a claim to power and a politics of inclusion. She also raises the issue of safety or lack of it for lesbian women and their children.

Smuts (2011) considers the intersecting identities and social spaces in which lesbians come out. Her main argument is that "coming out should be understood in terms of a matrix of power and that the extent to which lesbian women can tap into this power, and gain agency, is

dependent on each woman's intersecting identities of class, race and religion" (Smuts, 2011, p. 38). Using the coming out model of Cass (1979) in the analysis of her data, Smuts (2011) argues that stigma (perceived or real) shapes how lesbians come out in different spaces. In particular, Smuts (2011) suggests that very few lesbians reach Cass's last stage, which is identity synthesis, because of their social class and place of residence. Smuts (2011) adds that other factors that prevent lesbians from reaching identity synthesis include homophobic feelings prevalent in society, lesbians' families and certain cultural and religious groupings. These factors also have a negative impact on the construction of lesbian sexual identities, as they may be forced to pass as heterosexual in certain environments out of fear of victimisation.

Both the studies by Matebeni (2011) and Smuts (2011) consider adult lesbian women, and give no indication of the roles played by the parents of lesbian women in these studies and how the issues raised in these studies affect their parents.

A Cape Town-based study by Swarr (2012) sheds some light on how butch lesbian women are perceived in their communities. In lesbian and gay literature (Boonzaaier & Zway, 2015; Eves, 2004; Swarr, 2012), butch and femme are used as interchangeable designators of the top/bottom or insertive/penetrative partner. According to Kheswa and Wieringa (2005), women who identify as butch tend to take a more masculine role in action, dress and mannerisms. By contrast, femme lesbians tend to take on a more feminine role. The study by Swarr (2012) explored the experiences of women who identify as butch. Her study suggested that a perception exists that butch lesbians want to be men; they are alleged to have sex with straight women, and consequently, they are seen as threats to heterosexual men (Swarr, 2012). If this is indeed the perception or view held by some men, it may provide some answers as to why (butch) lesbian women are targeted for hate crimes such as 'corrective' rape.

In addition to this limited number of studies focusing on the experiences of lesbian and bisexual youth and women in Johannesburg and Cape Town, a few South African studies focusing on the experiences of gay and bisexual men have also been conducted. These include studies and narratives by Cook et al. (2013), Malan and Johardien (2010), Murray and Roscoe (2001), Rabie and Lesch (2009) and Reid (2005) to mention a few.

The study by Cook et al. (2013) shows that gender non-conformity is pervasive in the expression of same-sex sexuality in South Africa, unlike the findings in some Western countries, where gender non-conforming gay and bisexual (white) males tend to experience a lot of mental distress as a result of the frequent discrimination they are exposed to. In the South

African context, however, Cook et al. (2013) found the opposite to be true. For example, they found that black gender non-conforming gay and bisexual men did not experience more depression than black gender conforming gay and bisexual men in South Africa, despite the fact that the gender non-conforming men experience more discrimination than their counterparts. In fact, it appeared as if outness acted as a protective factor against discrimination. This led Cook et al. (2013) to speculate that it may be that, because of their 'outness', these black gender non-conforming gay men and bisexual men may have either developed effective coping mechanisms at an early age, or they are protected by social networks of friends and family. The view that family acceptance and support may have protective effects for a lesbian or gay young adult is also raised by Elizur and Ziv (2001). Amongst other things, the study by Cook et al. (2013) reveals that the relationship between gender non-conformity and mental health in black gay and bisexual men may be less universal than was previously understood. It also suggests that cultural perceptions around gender, masculinity and femininity play significant roles in how gender non-conforming gay and bisexual black men integrate into South African society.

Two more South African studies confirm the relationship between gender non-conformity and black gay and bisexual males. For example, a study by Reid (2005) shows that in South Africa, among black gay and bisexual men, there are 'wives' and 'husbands' with clearly defined boundaries who live openly as such. Rabie and Lesch (2009) also reveal that it is regarded as normal for some black gay males to engage in feminine activities, such as fetching water from the tap in a township and visiting relatives with women. All the studies mentioned above confirm the findings of a study by Murray and Roscoe (2001), which suggests that the expression of same-sex sexuality in South Africa tends to reproduce a binary of masculinity and femininity among black gay men, more than in developed countries.

To sum up, the studies mentioned above have shed some light on how sexual minorities are perceived and treated in some communities in South Africa. Issues of lack of safety are prominent, particularly with regard to lesbian women. By contrast, some non-conforming gay and bisexual men live openly in same-sex unions in some communities. In view of the paucity of literature on parental reactions in South Africa, I now examine literature from abroad: Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States on parental reactions to learning that their offspring is lesbian, gay or bisexual.

2.3 International Literature on Parental Reactions to the Discovery That a Child Is Same-sex Desiring or Same-sex Attracted

In the United States, the Stonewall riots of 28 June 1969 set the scene for gay liberation and the modern fight for lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender rights. Internationally, particularly in the United States, there are many studies that explore parental reactions following their child's coming out as lesbian or gay, for example, research by Ben-Ari (1995b), Caldwell (2004), Crosbie-Burnett (1996), Pearlman (2005), Phillips (2007), Saltzburg (2004), Savin-Williams and Dubé (1998), Stewart (2002) and Strommen (1989). One Australian study by Gorman-Murray (2008) explores narratives from gay, lesbian and bisexual youth coming out in supportive family homes in Australia.

The first study discussed here is by Strommen (1989). It focuses on reactions by parents of sons after the parents discovered that their sons are same-sex attracted. Strommen (1989) draws attention to the fact that “parental reaction to disclosure of homosexuality by a child has been studied primarily from a counselling perspective [possibly because] parental reaction is invariably negative, with the disclosure being perceived as a crisis by the family” (p. 39). Strommen (1989) also points out that parental response to disclosure relates to three factors. The first is the values concerning same-sex desire currently held by the family members to whom the person comes out. The second is the effect these values are perceived to have on the relationship between the disclosing family member and other family members. The third is the conflict resolution mechanisms available to the family members. Strommen (1989) concludes that the most important factor is the first factor – the values the family members hold concerning same-sex orientation. This is because, if the family values on sexuality are influenced by the popular societal negative response to same-sex behaviour and identity, then the negative traits which the family believes apply to all same-sex desiring individuals will generally be attributed to the lesbian or gay member of the family (Strommen, 1989). This often results in the alienation and estrangement of the disclosing family member from the rest of the family. Strommen (1989) refers to this rejecting state in which the relatives of a same-sex desiring person attribute negative traits to their own family member as “familylessness” (p. 51). This happens if, for example, family members perceive the same-sex-attracted individuals as child molesters, or perverts. Then their own child may suddenly become a stranger and, because of this new identity, the person is cut off from the rest of the family. For parents of lesbian and gay youths, the isolation and/or alienation of their own child is often accompanied

by discomfort and guilt, which emanates from a tendency by parents to blame themselves for the alternative sexual orientation of their offspring. Valentine et al. (2003) notes that mothers experience emotions of guilt and self-blame more than fathers, possibly because of a widespread belief that a child's turning out to be lesbian, gay or bisexual is an indicator of the mother's failure in her role as caregiver.

Ben-Ari (1995b) explored experiences of both parents and their adult lesbian and gay offspring after disclosure, and identified three stages in the process of coming out. These are "pre-discovery experiences, thoughts and feelings, the actual act of discovery; and the third stage concerns post-discovery stage experiences, thoughts, and feelings" (p. 95). During the pre-discovery stage, fears of coming out and motives for coming out are the most important themes in the experiences of gay and lesbian adult children prior to the disclosure. Her findings also highlight that for both parents and their lesbian or gay adult children, "being honest, not to hide, not to live a lie" is the main motive for "coming out" (Ben-Ari, 1995b, p. 104). However, parents and their children differ regarding the most common fears associated with coming out. Parents in that study felt their children's greatest fear was the fear of confronting their same-sex attraction. For the lesbian or gay persons, by contrast, it was the fear of being rejected by their parents that was uppermost in their minds. During the discovery stage, one important factor that facilitates parental acceptance of the disclosure of alternative sexual orientation by their child, according to Ben-Ari (1995b), is the actual words a son or daughter uses when coming out. If the words are positive, for instance, "I'm gay and I'm happy" or "I am in a relationship (with a man or a woman) and I'm happy", the parents are more likely to adjust smoothly to the disclosure (Ben-Ari, 1995b, p. 98). Conversely, if the disclosing child uses negative information, for example, "I have a problem, I'm gay", parental adjustment to the news is likely to be equally difficult. Regarding post-discovery experiences, one issue that emerged is that parents in the study who had a difficult post-discovery stage were those who had not previously met same-sex oriented people, or those who had had no access to information on same-sex attraction prior to their offspring's coming out.

A study by Stewart (2002) considered the fact that same-sex attraction is often stigmatised in society. Stewart (2002) asserts that when a child comes out as lesbian or gay, parents develop what he calls 'courtesy stigma'. Courtesy stigma, according to Phillips (2010, p. iii), refers to "the public disapproval evoked as a consequence of associating with a stigmatised individual or group". However, Fields (2001) has shown that despite the stigma which parents develop

because they are parents of lesbian and gay children, they soon gain a new identity as 'exemplary' parents or what he calls 'superparents'.

Saltzburg (2004) also looked at parents' experience after learning that an adolescent is gay or lesbian, focusing on two issues. The first was an exploration of the meanings parents ascribe to disclosure by their adolescent children. The second was how these parents' stories of parenting following disclosure were constructed from this meaning. Three themes emerged from the research. They are 'Disclosure as a defining moment', 'The parenting disconnect' and 'Reorganising the parenting structure after disclosure'. Regarding disclosure as a defining moment, the majority of the parents in Saltzburg's (2004) study confirmed that the moment of disclosure was a highly significant moment in the parents' lives. For many, it was characterised by deep sadness, emptiness and disappointment that their son or daughter would not live out the life that they had imagined for him or her, or for themselves for that matter. Saltzburg (2004) also found that there were marked differences between parents who had had prior suspicions throughout their offspring's sexual orientation and those who had not. For those who suspected, the gradual accumulation of awareness positively supported their adjustment. Consequently, they moved more smoothly into the adjustment process than parents who were oblivious to their child's orientation. Saltzburg (2004) also found that the easy adjustment of parents was facilitated by a variety of strategies, which included looking for gay mentors who helped them to understand their adolescent's experience and manage their emotions. A positive spinoff of these parents' efforts was that their sense of connection to their adolescents remained intact throughout the crisis. However, Herdt and Koff (2000) reported contradictory findings. They note that parents who had had long-standing suspicions before disclosure had a more difficult time adjusting, and they attributed this to the realisation that the disclosure marked a permanent end to long-standing hopes that their suspicions would be untrue.

According to Saltzburg (2004), parenting disconnect in the parents of gay or lesbian children manifested in grief-like stages such as deep sadness and loss. This is also described in other literature on family responses to loss through death (see, for example, Kubler-Ross, 1969) and/or literature on disclosure (Caldwell, 2004; Devine, 1983-1984; Phillips, 2007). One factor which may prevent adjustment is the persistent state of emotional turmoil parents feel. Boxer, Cook and Herdt (1991) refer to this state of emotional turmoil as cognitive and emotional dissonance, and view it as a product of parents' assimilation of the deluge of negative images about same-sex sexuality, which conflicts with their deeply ingrained, loving thoughts about their child. The pain caused by these conflicting emotions is one of the causes of parental

withdrawal socially and their disengagement from parenting functions. This often results in a state of dysphoria. The term ‘dysphoria’ refers to a “mood characterised by sadness, discontent, and sometimes restlessness” (APA 2006, p. 308).

Although initially, most parents react badly to disclosure, many scholars (Boxer et al., 1991; Caldwell, 2004; Goldfried and Goldfried, 2001; Phillips, 2007) argue that an adolescent’s coming out is later followed by parents’ coming out as well, a fact which they attribute to the close link which exists between the lives of parents and those of their adolescent children. This parent-child connection or bond forces parents of same-sex attracted youths to configure a new lens through which to view their world, not just as parents, but as parents of a lesbian, gay or bisexual child. Stewart (2002) calls this process “a transformation of the self” (p.2).

The gradual adjustment to the fact that one’s child is same-sex attracted usually gives rise to the third theme identified by Saltzburg (2004), namely reorganising the parenting structure. This can be facilitated by the lesbian and gay children themselves, as they are often more knowledgeable about same-sex attraction than their parents, especially at this stage. Hence, the job of educating their parents becomes theirs. According to Saltzburg (2004), reorganising parenting structure at adolescence occurs at one of three levels. The first level entails adapting to a son or daughter as gay or lesbian. The second level entails adapting to one’s own identity as the parent of a gay or lesbian adolescent. The third level entails adapting the social context of adolescence to include gay and lesbian adolescents. As mentioned in prior self-disclosure literature (Ben-Ari, 1995b; Herdt and Koff, 2000), the parents who adjust faster than others are those who proceed to find gay or lesbian individuals as mentors and teachers. These gay mentors help parents to achieve parental adjustment by acting as role models and showing the parents of lesbian and gay offspring that being gay is not synonymous with deviance or immorality. As Saltzburg (2004, p. 116) puts it, what is “embodied in the mentoring relationship is the unconscious process of deconstructing previously held negative images about gay men and lesbians and reconstructing new meaning”. The new knowledge spurs parents on to continue to participate in their child’s life and to reconnect rather than disengage and to reassume their parental role.

The main argument of the study by Caldwell (2004) is that there is a link between parental disclosure of a child’s alternative sexuality to others and true acceptance of their child’s same-sex identity after disclosure. She argues that when parents keep their children’s same-sex attraction a secret, their act of secrecy has detrimental effects on their child’s identity and self-

esteem. Caldwell's (2004) model of parental acceptance consists of three phases: 'Going into the closet' followed by 'Feeling good about issues' and lastly, 'Coming out'. These phases will be discussed in a detailed manner under 'Western Models of Identity Development as a Parent of a Lesbian or Gay Child' (see Section 2.5).

Pearlman's (2005) study focused only on mothers of lesbian women. Among other things, the mothers who showed acceptance of their lesbian daughters publicly reported feeling rewarded in the lesbian, gay and bisexual community for coming out about their new identities as mothers of sexual minorities. They were perceived as 'superparents' or 'exemplary' parents (Fields, 2001; Stewart, 2002). Pearlman (2005) adds that their new role as 'superparents' "provided them with new values, and expanded their identity and sense of self" (p. 135). Furthermore, the majority of the mothers reported a closer relationship with their daughters following disclosure.

While Pearlman (2005) focuses on mothers of lesbian women only, Willoughby, Malik and Lindahl (2006) focus on parental reactions to their sons' sexual orientation disclosure. According to Willoughby et al. (2006), the key issue that influences how parents react to disclosure is the family resources already in place prior to a stressor's onset. Because of the stigma attached to same-sex sexuality, Willoughby et al. (2006) classify the disclosure of same-sex sexuality as a stressor event. This is appropriate, because disclosure often disrupts the family equilibrium, forcing members of the family of origin to renegotiate family values. Family resources refer to internal resources, such as family communication patterns, the family's ability to solve problems, the goals of the family, money and services available in the community. Families with these resources, according to Willoughby et al. (2006), would have high cohesion, adaptability and warmth, and these may create a bond stronger than society's forces after the disclosure of alternative sexual orientation. According to Olson and Gorall (2003), cohesion refers to the connectedness within the family system and the emotional bonding that family members have toward one another, while adaptability refers to the extent to which a family is able to change when confronted with novel situations. According to Olson (1996), families with high levels of cohesion and adaptability can be described as balanced, while those with low levels of cohesion and adaptability are described as unbalanced.

Willoughby et al. (2006) further hypothesised that gay men from families perceived to have balanced cohesion and adaptability prior to coming out would perceive their parents to react less negatively to their sexual orientation disclosures than gay men from families with

unbalanced cohesion and adaptability. In their study, Willoughby et al. (2006) drew on family stress theory, which suggests that the family resources in place determine how a family may react to the disclosure of sexual orientation by a family member. Thus, depending on the resources that are in place in the family, parental reactions can be in line with the general public views on same-sex attraction, and parents may reject the child, or parents may embrace the child's sexual difference. To sum up, Willoughby et al. (2006) argue that the family resources in place within a family may create a buffer against the perturbations caused by the disclosure of sexual orientation. This explains why some families remain supportive of their child, regardless of shock and/or disapproval of their child's same-sex sexual orientation, while other families do not.

In a study by Phillips (2007) that explored identity development of a parent as the parent of a lesbian or gay male, it was found that when the participating parents first learned that their child was same-sex attracted, they experienced three broad phases of adjustment: emotional responses followed by behavioural and/or cognitive strategies, and then moral and spiritual responses. These are further discussed at three periods of adjustment: earlier, middle and later adjustment. Shortly after discovery, emotional responses dominated. This is also discussed in detail under 'Western Models of Identity Development as a Parent of a Lesbian or Gay Child' (see Section 2.5).

Admittedly, most of the literature on the disclosure of an alternative sexual orientation suggests that many parents and relatives react negatively to a disclosure of alternative sexuality, at least at the beginning. However, an Australian study by Gorman-Murray (2008) on gay lesbian and bisexual youths shows that not all families of lesbian, gay or bisexual youths react negatively when they learn of their offspring or a sibling's alternative sexual orientation. The study by Gorman-Murray (2008) rejects the common portrayal of "the family home in both academic literature and popular discourse as a homophobic space" (p. 34). Instead, his Australian research shows that there are family homes that are, from the outset, supportive of lesbian, gay or bisexual children. Because these homes provide support to lesbian, gay or bisexual children, Gorman-Murray (2008) argues that they serve as sites of resistance to wider social structures and practices of heterosexism and heteronormativity. Herek (2004) defines heterosexism as a cultural ideology that perpetuates homo-negativism by denying and denigrating non-heterosexual forms of behaviour, identity, or relationship. Heteronormativity is similar to heterosexism (see Section 1.1). The research by Gorman-Murray (2008) shows that "just as young people can choose to come out against the 'heteronorm', parents too possess this

agency” (p. 38). When this happens, Gorman-Murray (2008) asserts, supportive family homes are transformed into “spaces which promote difference and non-heterosexual identity development” (p. 40). This results in the “queering of the ostensibly heterosexual nuclear family home” (Murray-Gorman, 2008, p. 39).

In this respect, Gorman-Murray (2008) differs from Peplau and Beals (2004), who excuse the negative reactions of heterosexual parents of lesbian and gay children on the grounds that it is because they are usually heterosexuals who also expect their children to be heterosexual. Instead, Gorman-Murray (2008) shows through the Australian narratives of the lesbian, gay or bisexual youths in his study that “some parental and sibling responses [can and do] explicitly nourish and encourage the ongoing development of GLB [gay, lesbian or bisexual] identities within the family home” (p. 40). In the study by Gorman-Murray (2008), the parents and siblings did this in a variety of ways. For example, one mother of a gay son proactively prepared the rest of the family and the son’s close friends for the child’s inevitable coming out long before it happened. Therefore, her “prescient actions [...] paved the way for the ongoing exploration and development of [her son’s] ongoing exploration and development of his emerging gay identity at home” (Gorman-Murray, 2008, p. 40).

Another mother demonstrated publicly her acceptance of her son’s alternative sexuality by displaying photographs of him and his boyfriend in the family home. In doing this, this mother not only began disrupting the status quo in the family home, but she also queered her home by “displacing the heteronormative imagery typical of family photographs” (Gorman-Murray, 2008, p. 40). One sibling showed unconditional support for her lesbian sister to explore her emerging lesbian identity by organising her a fake identity document to facilitate entry into gay venues, as she was still under age, while her father encouraged her to explore her ‘butch’ part of her lesbian identity by showing her how to make a tie knot (Gorman-Murray, 2008). These narratives of Australian families, show that heterosexual parents can be supportive of their lesbian and gay children. Thus, heterosexuality is not necessarily an impediment to supporting ongoing development of same-sex attraction.

To summarise, seven out of the nine studies examined above show that parents’ initial reactions to the discovery of same-sex orientation tend to be negative (Ben-Ari, 1995; Caldwell, 2004; Pearlman, 2005; Saltzburg, 2004; Strommen, 1989; Willoughby, 2006). These negative reactions change over time. The literature also suggests that a child’s difference from peers in childhood and parental suspicions about the child’s alternative sexuality prior to disclosure

may lead to easier adjustment to a child's disclosure of same-sex attraction or bisexuality (Saltzberg, 2004). Caldwell (2004) points out that when children come out of the closet, their parents tend to go into the closet. Although this reaction may have a negative impact on the parent-child relationship (Goldfried & Goldfried, 2001), Caldwell (2004) argues that this response is important, because it buys parents time to adjust to the shocking news. Younger and more educated mothers were found to be more receptive to their lesbian daughters than mothers with little education (Pearlman, 2005). Family resources in place before the onset of a stressor were found to be an important determiner of parental reactions (McKenry & Price, 2000; Willoughby et al. 2006). The journey towards acceptance of a child's same-sex sexuality, according to Phillips (2007), is divided into phases consisting emotional responses in the initial phase, followed by cognitive and behavioural responses in the middle phase, and moral and spiritual issues dominating the final phase. Lastly, the study by Gorman-Murray (2008) has shown that there are families that react positively to disclosure of alternative sexual orientation by their children from the outset. Gorman-Murray (2008) asserts that through their positive action of accepting their children unconditionally these families begin to 'queer' the family home, making it a transgressive space that not only resists, but also subverts heterosexual norms by openly supporting the ongoing development of their child's alternative sexual orientation.

Having looked at the existing literature on the perspectives of parents of lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring, I now turn my attention to factors that predict parental reactions to their child's coming out.

2.4 Factors Predicting Parental Reactions to Their Offspring's Coming Out

The varying reactions of parents to their offspring's coming out of the closet have interested researchers for some time. The discussion below focuses on some of the contextual factors that are deemed to affect parental reactions to a child's coming out. They are family cohesion, adaptability and coming out; parenting style and coming out; gender and age; religiosity; the availability of accurate information; as well as the availability of support. These factors are discussed in this order.

2.4.1 *Family cohesion, adaptability and coming out*

The discussion above has already highlighted the central role of the family, in particular the role that parents play in making the decision to disclose a family member's same-sex

orientation to others, including outsiders. Linked to the centrality of the family in coping with stress emanating from the disclosure of same-sex orientation by a son or daughter are the factors of family cohesion, adaptability and coming out. Family cohesion and adaptability have been found to influence parental reactions to the coming out of a child. As has already been suggested in the above discussion, family resources in place prior to the discovery of a family member's same-sex sexuality create a bond stronger than the forces of society, which may result in a family's rejection of society's condemnation of same-sex attraction. For example, Olson (2000) suggests that if, when parents learn about their offspring's same-sex orientation, the parents concerned make a joint effort to learn about lesbian, gay or bisexual issues, then the likelihood that they will adapt to the news is better than for those parents who work at cross-purposes with their son or daughter.

Some scholars, such as Ben-Ari (1995b), Savin-Williams and Dubé (1998) and Willoughby et al. (2006), argue that the best predictor of parental reactions to a child's same-sex disclosure is the relationship that parents have with the child prior to his or her disclosure. Thus, they conclude that the closer the pre-disclosure relationship is, the more likely it is that family members will remain close after disclosure. Conversely, the more distant the pre-disclosure relationship is, the more unlikely it is that the family members will become closer after disclosure. I now consider parenting style and coming out.

2.4.2 Parenting style and coming out

Besides family cohesion and adaptability, parenting styles have been found to have a direct influence on parental reactions to the disclosure of a child's same-sex sexual orientation. The term 'parental style' refers to the manner in which parents express warmth and support towards their children and the degree to which they supervise them.

Maccoby and Martin (1983) have identified four parenting styles on the basis of two dimensions, namely responsiveness and parenting control. These styles are authoritarian, authoritative, indulgent and neglectful. Of the four styles, the authoritative parenting style is often favoured because it is child-centred. Children and their parents interact closely; at the same time parents maintain high expectations regarding behaviour and performance, as well as firm adherence to schedules and discipline. Willoughby et al. (2006) found that parents perceived to have authoritative parenting styles responded less negatively to the disclosure of their child's same-sex sexuality than parents perceived to have authoritarian parenting styles.

Pearlman's (2005) findings are similar to those of Willoughby et al. (2006). For example, she found that mothers who demonstrated most receptivity to a daughter's being lesbian are those with a child-oriented style of parenting that mirrors current motherhood ideologies, which emphasise autonomy, psychological attunement and child gratification. These parents also tend to include the child in decisions on discipline and are responsive to reasonable demands made by their children (Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

Still on the issue of parental styles, Valentine, Skelton and Butler (2003) also distinguish between positional and personalising families. According to them, positional families maintain a traditionally gendered and intergenerational division of household power. Parents who adopt this style often react negatively to disclosure. By contrast, in personalising families, power is evenly distributed between members, and parents in this type of family have the potential to react more positively to disclosure. Valentine et al. (2003) argue that this is possibly because parents in such families recognise their children as individuals and equals. It also appears that personalising heterosexual parents (and siblings) are not threatened by the declaration of sexual difference. Instead, they acknowledge their lesbian or gay children's emotional maturity, independence and right to take responsibility for their own lives apart from the family unit.

In summary, the discussion above has shown that a family's parenting style has a direct influence on parental reactions to disclosure of a child's same-sex sexuality. Having discussed how parenting styles can predict parental reactions to coming out of offspring as sexual minorities, I now turn to gender and age.

2.4.3 Gender and age

Like parental styles, the gender and age of parents of sons or daughters belonging to a sexual minority were found to be positively correlated to parental responses to a child's coming out. A United States study by Savin-Williams (2001), for example, found that both mothers and fathers had more difficulty accepting that a daughter was lesbian than that a son was gay. Furthermore, Savin-Williams (2001) found that fathers had more problems accepting the coming out of a child of either gender than did mothers.

Saltzburg (2004) found that same-sex dyads such as mothers and lesbian daughters, or fathers and their gay sons, appear to experience more difficulties in their adjustment processes. In a United States study by Maguen, Floyd, Bakeman and Armistead (2002), lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring were found to be less likely to disclose to their parents first, and if they did,

fathers were likely to react negatively. Furthermore, in a United States study by D'Augelli, Hershberger and Pilkington (1998), gay men reported that their fathers and brothers were more likely to be verbally abusive than their mothers and sisters.

Lastly, research by Valentine (1997) in the United Kingdom, as mentioned earlier, has shown that mothers are very often the first in the family to be told, as much of the emotional work in families is usually done by mothers. Valentine et al. (2003) also noted that besides the fact that lesbians and gay men commonly confide in their mothers first, “they also often ask her to come out on their behalf to other members of the family” (p. 487)

Regarding the relationship between age and acceptance, not many studies have been done. According to the limited research available on this issue, some scholars suggest that parents at the mid-life stage find it difficult to manage the stressors associated with this set of events (Allen, 1999; Saltzburg, 2004). Allen (1999), for example, explored how older parents of adult gay children manage the stigmatisation they might experience compared to their middle-aged counterparts. She found that other influences could include the quality of the relationship between the parent and child and their wish to have grandchildren, as well as the prior relationship between the parent and the person to whom a stigma is attached. Heatherington and Lavner (2008) also found that the parent gender and lesbian, gay or bisexual youth gender in combination matter, although in less consistent ways. For example, they found that “father-lesbian daughter pairs seem to experience the most difficulty” (p. 332). Finally, Pearlman (2005) found educated, younger mothers to be more receptive to their lesbian daughters than less educated, older mothers were. The next factor for discussion is religiosity.

2.4.4 Religiosity

According to Cramer and Roach (1988), religiosity has been proposed as an indicator of whether parents are likely to accept or reject their same-sex oriented child after coming out. In this study, I use this term to refer to dogmatic and rigid religious beliefs that guide a family's sense of right and wrong (morality). In the West, the dominant view of most churches is that same-sex sexuality is a 'sin'. Subhi and Geelan (2012) argue that this explains why “reconciling [alternative] sexual orientation with religious and spiritual beliefs can be challenging for Christian homosexuals” (p. 1382). In the West, the difficult relationship that exists between same-sex sexuality and religiosity has been researched extensively (cf. Brooke, 2005; Haldeman, 2004; Henrickson, 2007; Rodriguez, 2010; Schuck & Liddle, 2001; Subhi &

Geelan, 2012; Yarhouse, Tan, & Pawlowski, 2005) and their research reported insightful findings. For example, lesbian, gay and bisexual participants in a study by Henrickson (2007) on same-sex attracted individuals who had been raised as Christians reported that their religion was a source of difficulty rather than a supportive force while they were growing up.

Similarly, in Schuck and Liddle's (2001) study, lesbian, gay and bisexual participants reported experiencing conflict between their religious beliefs and same-sex attraction. The main sources for their beliefs originated from denominational teachings, scriptural passages and congregational prejudices that caused them to suffer from shame, depression and suicidal ideation. Schuck and Liddle (2001) list a number of strategies used by same-sex attracted individuals to achieve reconciliation between the conflict they experience between their religious beliefs and same-sex attraction. One strategy used by individuals from strict families with conservative religious beliefs may involve attempting to alter their sexual orientation by undergoing conversion therapy, rather than risking losing their family, and/or community. Some who fail in their attempts in conversion therapy might decide to abandon the church in order to meet their inner-self needs and their same-sex attraction. Sadly, others may contemplate or even attempt suicide.

Rodriguez (2010) explains that there are same-sex attracted individuals who find that their religious faith and their sexuality are equally important facets of their lives. In such cases, renouncing their religious faith would not resolve the problem for them. These individuals typically experience significant intrapersonal conflict (Rodriguez, 2010). Intrapersonal conflict refers to the anxiety that arises in gay or lesbian persons who experience conflict between their religious faith and their homosexuality (Rodriguez, 2010). Subhi and Geelan (2012) hold a similar view to Rodriguez's (2010) on the conflictual relationship between religion and same-sex sexuality. They also found that same-sex attracted individuals who find themselves stuck between rejecting Christianity and embracing same-sex attraction are usually people who want to maintain their religious beliefs. Their data show that same-sex attracted individuals from homes where religion is practised strictly reported that their parents harboured resentment and anger after their offspring's coming out, and that this led to hostility between the parents and their children. In some cases, this resulted in the same-sex attracted individuals' limiting their contact with their parents or severing it temporarily.

Internationally, the winds of change have taken effect. Support for sexual minorities has been expressed by the Episcopal Church Conventions of 1976, 2006, 2009 and 2012 in the United

States. The 1976 Convention declared that same-sex attracted persons are “children of God” and are therefore “entitled to full civil rights” (Episcopal Church United States, 1976, n. p.). In 2006, the Convention affirmed support for gay and lesbian persons as children of God and consequently called on legislatures to provide protection such as bereavement and family leave policies, and opposed any states that prohibit same-sex civil marriages or civil unions (Episcopal Church United States, 2011, n. p.). In 2009, the Convention affirmed that “gays and lesbians in lifelong committed relationships” should be ordained (Episcopal Church United States, 2011, n. p.). The Convention also voted to allow bishops to decide whether or not to bless same-sex marriages. In 2012, the Convention approved the use of an official liturgy to bless same-sex marriages (Episcopal Church United States, 2011, n. p.).

Support for gay men and lesbian women has also come from the United States Catholic Bishops in a pastoral statement urging parents to love and support their gay children (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1997). The election in 2003 of Bishop Gene Robinson, an openly gay Anglican bishop of New Hampshire, also indicated the changing religious views towards same-sex sexuality in the Anglican Church (BBC News, 2008). Responding to the furore that was raised by the debate regarding whether Gene Robinson, a same-sex oriented priest, should be appointed to the position of the Bishop of New Hampshire, Archbishop Tutu said that the Anglican Church had seemed “extraordinarily homophobic” in its handling of the issue and added that he felt “saddened” and “ashamed” of his church at the time (BBC, 2007). Despite the progress made to date on the church front, on 23 May 2016, Reverend Canon Mpho Tutu-Van Firth, the daughter of Bishop Tutu, married a woman and lost her church licence. She was reported as having said: “Because the church does not recognise our marriage, I can no longer exercise my priestly ministry in South Africa” (Huisman, 2016). The debate continues to rage in the Christian church and, for that matter, among adherents of other faiths, such as Judaism and Islam. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to explore all the details of this widespread debate. The next factor that I discuss is availability of information.

2.4.5 Availability of accurate information

The availability of accurate information has been shown to play an important role in assisting families to come to terms with the disclosure of alternative sexual orientation of their offspring. Ben-Ari (1995b) emphasises the importance of the manner in which the disclosure of a child’s lesbian or gay identity is approached by the person making the disclosure. For example, in her study exploring the family dynamics associated with the coming-out process, she recommends

that sexual minority youths themselves make an effort to educate their parents about same-sex sexuality prior to disclosure.

In the same study, Ben-Ari (1995b), suggests that if sexual minority youths frame coming out as an effort to increase intimacy and closeness with the family, the parents' experience of dealing with that information is likely to be more positive. A particularly helpful approach that has moved parents towards acceptance of their lesbian or gay offspring involves parents' seeking information on same-sex sexuality from gay-positive sources. Parents can learn more about same-sex sexuality in a variety of ways. These include parents' involvement in support groups such as Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbian and Gays (PFLAG) chapters, consulting the internet, buying books on the subject, seeing psychologists, social workers, counsellors, etc., and directly asking questions from lesbian or gay members of the family (Goldfried & Goldfried, 2001; Griffin, Wirth, & Wirth, 1986; Philips & Ancis, 2008; Savin-Williams & Dubé, 1998).

PFLAG is an international family-based organisation committed to the civil rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons (Goldfried and Goldfried, 2001; PFLAG 1999-2014). It was founded in 1972 in the United States with a simple act of a mother supporting her sexual minority son. It has grown to be international, with offices in many big cities worldwide. Its vision is to enable parents, families, and friends of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons to celebrate diversity, and to envision a society that embraces everyone, including those of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. Its mission is to promote the health and well-being of lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons, their families and friends through support to cope with an adverse society, education to enlighten an ill-informed public, and advocacy to end discrimination and to secure equal civil rights. PFLAG provides opportunity for dialogue about sexual orientation and gender identity, and aims to create a society that is healthy and respectful of human diversity.

In summary, the availability of information has been shown to be particularly helpful for the well-being of both lesbian, bisexual and their families of origin. As the above discussion has shown, various sources portray lesbian and gay people as able and entitled to lead normal lives. Such exposure is very important, because it enables the parents of lesbian and gay youths to revise their expectations of a gay lifestyle so as to include a broader range of options (Griffin et al., 1986).

2.4.6 Availability of support

Besides the availability of accurate information, the availability of support from family, friends or support groups has been found to be helpful in enabling parents to develop an understanding of their lesbian or gay children (Kircher, 2011; Phillips & Ancis, 2008; Savin-Williams, 2001). In particular, support groups such as PFLAG provide parents with three things: accurate information, an outlet to express their feelings, and the realisation that they are neither alone nor the first parents to have a lesbian, gay or bisexual child.

A study by Robinson, Walters, and Skeen (1989) in the United States showed that two thirds of parents active in support groups had reached acceptance of their children's same-sex sexual orientation. Thus, seeking support from organisations such as PFLAG was found to be very beneficial for parents who have recently learnt about their children's same-sex sexuality. What is most useful about PFLAG support is the shared knowledge that other parents have felt the multitude of emotions that a parent who has just discovered that his or her child is lesbian or gay is feeling right now. It also provides parents with the knowledge that the feeling gets better with time and knowledge.

Another important strategy that parents can employ to facilitate adjustment to their child's same-sex sexual orientation is to include same-sex oriented individuals besides their children in their lives. Through having direct on-going interactions with lesbian, gay or bisexual people, parents may change their views on same-sex sexuality and this could signify the beginning of managing heterosexist societal structures (Beeler & DiProva, 1999). As mentioned previously, another effective way to facilitate understanding of sexual minority offspring involves parents' finding mentors in the lesbian, gay, and bisexual community who can assist parents in understanding their son's or daughter's experiences more fully.

Phillips (2007) suggests that while initially many parents feel ashamed of their offspring's same-sex attraction, later they come to realise that it is society and not their children who are to blame for that feeling. Most importantly, Kircher and Ahlijah (2011) found that having a lesbian or gay child can prove to be a source of strength for some parents. A participant in the study by Kircher and Ahlijah (2011) said: "I'm a better person because of him.... I'm a lot less judgemental; I'm more accepting" (n. p.). In other words, the experience of having a lesbian or a gay child can become both transformative and empowering, as it pushes some parents to engage in activism and/or advocacy work (Phillips, 2007; Stewart, 2002).

To summarise, this discussion has shown that certain factors can be predictors of parental reactions to offspring's coming out of the closet. This discussion has also highlighted various actions that are beneficial, as well as some that are not. Having explored the factors related to parental reaction to offspring's coming out, I now turn to Western models of identity development as a parent of lesbian or gay child.

2.5 Western Models of Identity Development as a Parent of a Lesbian or Gay Child

Most of the literature from the United States and the United Kingdom on parents' discovery that their offspring is attracted to others of the same sex has revealed that a child's coming out creates a crisis within a family for the same-sex oriented youth, his or her parents and the family unit as a whole. As already mentioned above, this study relies heavily on coming out literature from the West, in particular, on research from the United States, because there is a dearth of in-depth studies on black African parents' coming out experiences about their children's same-sex sexual orientation or bisexuality. Examining literature from the West is useful, as it may allow us in future to compare the reactions of parents from the West with those of parents from South Africa regarding their disclosure of the same-sex attraction of their children to the rest of the family and to outsiders. There are no local parental coming out models regarding offspring's bisexuality, and generally bisexuality is erased even in current Western models. Hence, all the models that are discussed in this section are from the West and consider parents of lesbian women and gay men, and no bisexual youths are included. Given the erasure of bisexuality in literature on alternative sexuality, in this study I discuss bisexuality in a separate section of its own (see Section 2.6) in order to examine its challenges more fully.

I discuss four models of adjustment or identity development as a parent of a lesbian and gay child. The two older ones are Devine's (1983-1984) and Crosbie-Burnett, Foster, Murray and Bowen's (1996) Social-Cognitive-Behavioural (SCB) model of families. I then consider two more recent models, namely Caldwell's (2004) and Phillips's (2007) models. The earlier models are discussed together first, followed by the two later ones.

2.5.1 Devine's (1983) and Crosbie-Burnett et al.'s (1996) Social-Cognitive-Behavioural (SCB) Models of Adjustment

The two older models mentioned above share some similarities, but there are also some differences. Both models trace the process of adjustment to being a family member of a gay or lesbian individual over time, revealing that this process occurs in loosely ordered stages. The

model developed by Devine (1983-1984) consists of five stages: Subliminal awareness, Impact, Adjustment, Resolution and Integration. The SCB model posited by Crosbie-Burnett et al. (1996) derives from a behavioural paradigm, drawing on Bandura's (1986) social-cognitive theory. It is divided into two sub-systems, namely the family system and subsystems within the family system. According to Bandura's theory, every individual's motivation, thoughts and behaviour are explained by a model of causation in which that individual's behaviour, environmental factors and intrapersonal factors all operate as interacting determinants of each other. Bandura (1986) refers to this as reciprocal determinism. The SCB model is the application of this theory. Crosbie-Burnett et al. (1996) argue that the application of the SCB model of families to gay and lesbian people's families of origin is important, because it "illustrates how family members relate to each other cognitively and behaviourally within their shared social and physical environment and within the family's social environments such as work setting, friendship groups, extended family and neighbourhood community contexts" (p. 397).

Devine's (1983-1984) first stage, aptly called 'subliminal awareness' "generates a variety of homeostatic interactions with the focal member (lesbian, gay or bisexual)" (p. 11). During this stage, members of the family may evade knowing the truth about the focal member, for example, by avoiding asking questions or topics that might bring to light the issue of same-sex attraction. Subliminal awareness highlights the existence of vague suspicions, often based on atypical gender role characteristics, as made manifest in a girl who likes to play rough sports, or a boy who plays with dolls. This contrasts with other stage models where the discovery of alternative sexual orientation comes as a shock. These stage models follow the popular grief model by Kubler-Ross (1969). In Devine's (1983-1984) model, by contrast, the parents have been forewarned, as they have had suspicions all along, based on the child's gender atypical behaviour. One of the weaknesses of this model is assuming that all lesbian and gay children have readily observable traits or behaviours, and that therefore their parents or caregivers get a forewarning of sorts.

The first stage of the SCB model, on the other hand, is 'Incremental disclosure – who knows' (Crosbie-Burnett et al., 1996). This stage assumes that family members have had no prior suspicion before disclosure, and therefore the focus is on the role played by the person in whom the gay or lesbian family member confides first. According to Crosbie-Burnett et al. (1996), this person bears the "burden of knowing" (p. 398) and has to make decisions regarding who

else should know and who should not. This stage is characterised by anxiety (intrapersonal emotion), as this person's job may also include ensuring that some family members do not find out. This creates a problematic situation within a family, as what is known to some is a secret to others, thus dividing the family into in-group and out-group members. This scenario can be difficult to manage, particularly during festivities which involve the whole family, especially for the knower and the in-group. If there are already suspicions about the child's alternative sexuality, there is a possibility for adjustment to begin before the actual disclosure.

The second stage of the model developed by Devine (1983-1984) is the 'Impact' stage and is characterised by "rapid disorganisation and system loss" (p. 13). This is the actual discovery of a son's or daughter's same-sex sexual orientation and it often plunges the family into crisis mode. This stage is often accompanied by reactions similar to those described as typical in Kubler-Ross's (1969) grief model, such as shock, denial, confusion and blame. There is no corresponding stage to this in the SCB model.

Devine's (1983-1984) third stage, the 'Adjustment' stage, and the SCB's second stage, which is called 'Adjusting to the new role of parent or sibling of a gay or lesbian, deal with parents and siblings' attempts to deal with the crisis they are experiencing. In the model by Devine (1983-1984) attempts to restabilise the system are made either by requesting the focal member to change his or her sexual orientation or, if this fails, by asking the focal member to make concessions in lifestyle that will enable the family to maintain its sense of respectability. In the SCB model, in cases where family members had some suspicion that the child is a member of a sexual minority, there is a possibility that the adjustment stage may begin before the actual disclosure. Crosbie-Burnett et al. (1996) assert that adjustment requires that "the family member's schema about his or her own family begins to shift to integrate the new beliefs" (p. 399). In practical terms, this may mean that the parent should get used to having a family consisting, for example, of a son and a son-in-law rather than a son and a daughter-in-law. In other words, according to Crosbie-Burnett et al. (1996), parents of a lesbian daughter or gay son may have to shift the schema from thinking of themselves as being a father or mother in a typical (American) family to being a father or mother of a gay son or lesbian daughter. If parents find themselves unable to make the schema shift, this may result in the gay or lesbian child's being rejected from the family. Devine (1983-1984) does not allude to rejection, but she cautions that denial could occur and may prevent adjustment of parents to the new role.

In the fourth stage in Devine's (1983-1984) model, which is called the 'Resolution stage', the parents of a lesbian or gay child attempt to work through the dissonance between their values and the reality caused by the disclosure of their child's sexual minority sexual orientation. What the family of a lesbian or gay child needs to do, according to Devine (1983-1984) is to "readjust family rules, roles and themes [and] knowledge is critical to the completion of stage" (p. 14). After having begun the process of adjustment to their new role, members of the family of the lesbian or gay individual also wrestle with a choice between passing (in other words, not disclosing their new identity as parents of a lesbian or gay child) or coming out as parents of a same-sex attracted person in a variety of social contexts. At this stage, the family members may develop a need to tell others, although this is complicated by the fact that a parent is never out to everyone at any one time, and therefore needs to make decisions regarding whom to tell and whom not to tell, especially regarding members of the extended family, friends, co-workers, neighbours, etc. In the SCB model, decisions regarding whom to tell or not to tell are made in the first stage, as discussed previously.

Devine's (1983-1984) last stage is the 'integration' stage. This stage manifests in the parental acceptance of one's daughter or son "for who the child is, and as the child is" (Gallor, 2006, p. 29). Strommen (1989) postulates that during this stage, a new role for the child and new behaviours for dealing with the child's same-sex sexual orientation are enacted. Although the child's same-sex orientation is no longer an issue at this point for the parents of a lesbian or gay child, Devine (1983-1984) argues that because of previous teachings and stereotypes imposed by the social norm of heterosexuality, few parents attain the status of a proud, self-professed parent of a gay or lesbian child. In the SCB model by Crosbie-Burnett et al. (1996) "Coming out as a family member", corresponds to Devine's integration stage. Disclosure to others at this stage extends to friends and co-workers. As discussed in the literature review, disclosure takes into consideration those to whom family members feel closest, and the decision to disclose depends on expected consequences.

In the SCB model developed by Crosbie-Burnett et al. (1996), there are four more sub-systems besides the family system considered above. These four subsystems are discussed below. They are the gay child-parent subsystem, the straight child-parent subsystem, the marital subsystem and the sibling subsystem. The term 'straight' refers to a person who is "primarily, emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted too people who are not the same sex/gender" (Comprehensive List of LGBTQ+ Vocabulary Definitions, 2013). All the subsystems listed

above are affected by the discovery that a child is lesbian or gay, as communication patterns, boundaries and hierarchies in the family may change (Crosbie-Burnett et al., 1996).

2.5.1.1 The gay child-parent subsystem

In the context of the gay child-parent subsystem, variability in parents' reaction to learning that a child is gay or lesbian depends on the relationship that the parent already has with the child prior to the disclosure of same-sex sexuality (Crosbie-Burnett et al., 1996; Willoughby et al., 2006). In particular, the degree of emotional support a child expects from his or her parents varies, and depends on whether prior to disclosure the parent-child relationship was close or not. If, for example, the parent-child relationship was not emotionally close, the discovery may not make much difference in the relationship, although it could also widen the distance between the two. Conversely, if the parent-child emotional relationship is strong, this connection may have a positive impact on the adjustment process.

2.5.1.2 The straight child-parent subsystem

In the straight child-parent subsystem, reactions depend on who knows first about the same-sex sexuality of the gay or lesbian child – the parents or his or her siblings. It also depends on the position of the straight child in the family. For example, if the straight child is older, it is possible that he or she may have known before the parents, and may therefore provide a gay brother or lesbian sister with guidance on how to tell the parents. However, if the straight siblings are younger, the parents may feel obliged to provide them with some form of explanation for their same-sex attracted offspring's sexuality with the intention of helping the straight children to adjust. The acceptance of the same-sex child by siblings in turn depends on a variety of factors. The straight family members need to help each other to adjust and/or pull together in support of the gay or lesbian family member.

2.5.1.3 The marital subsystem

Like the straight child-parent subsystem, the marital sub-system can be affected either positively or negatively by the discovery that a child is same-sex attracted. For some couples, learning that a child is lesbian or gay may result in deeper bonding and unity, while for others it could result in feelings of tension and separateness. In extreme cases, especially when one parent accepts the same-sex sexuality of the son or daughter, while the other does not, a split may occur between the spouses. Other factors that may threaten cohesion of the marital dyad

include not agreeing on whether or not to tell members of the extended family or the neighbours.

2.5.1.4 *The sibling subsystem*

The sibling subsystem, like the other systems, can be greatly affected by the discovery that a sibling is gay or lesbian. Murray (1994) argues that siblings are sometimes the first to be told by the gay or lesbian sibling, in order to test how the family will react. If this happens, the sibling(s) take the “burden of knowing” and therefore serve as gatekeepers who are responsible for who knows and who does not. An equally important point that Crosbie-Burnett et al. (1996) raise about sibling adjustment is that, like their parents, siblings may begin to question their own sense of sexual identity (Griffin et al., 1986, p. 119). Thus learning that a sibling is gay or lesbian requires more than a simple adjustment to a marginalised status. It also involves grappling with “issues of vulnerability, guilt and blame” (Crosbie-Burnett et al., p. 401). If there are straight siblings in the family, they may share some of the views and challenges raised in the discussion of the marital subsystem. If they are not all supportive of the lesbian or gay child, tensions may occur.

Crosbie-Burnett et al. (1996) argue that compared to young children, adolescent and young adult siblings may harbour more concerns related to having a gay or lesbian sibling. For example, since coming out as lesbian or gay implies that lesbian and gay people reject traditional sexual boundaries, their straight siblings may worry that their gay or lesbian sibling might break other sexual boundaries, such as by engaging in incestuous relationships (Crosbie-Burnett et al., 1996). Furthermore, siblings of the opposite sex may struggle with finding themselves being attracted to the same boy or girl. Young children may be protected by their lack of knowledge about the significance of having a gay or lesbian sibling, or by parents’ remaining silent about it in their presence, but not telling young children can be detrimental to them, if, for example, they are not told, but accidentally find out about a gay or lesbian relationship on their own. If, for instance, they see two women or two men kissing, this can cause cognitive dissonance and emotional distress for family members (Crosbie-Burnett et al., 1996). According to the APA (2006), cognitive dissonance refers to “an unpleasant psychological state resulting from inconsistency between two or more elements in a cognitive system” (p. 189).

Having discussed the points of convergence and divergence in the two earlier models, I now turn my attention to a discussion of the two more recent models.

2.5.2 Caldwell's (2004) and Phillips's (2007) models of identity development as a parent of a lesbian or a gay child

Of these two models, Caldwell's (2004) model is less comprehensive than Phillips's (2007) model: Phillips's (2007) model traces parents' identity development as the parents of a same-sex oriented child along three levels (early, middle and later adjustment) and in three dimensions (emotional, cognitive and behavioural), as well as at the moral and spiritual levels. Furthermore, it describes milestone events on their journeys, what Savin-Williams and Dubé (1998) describe as turning points at each level.

By contrast, the model by Caldwell (2004) consists of three phases: "Going into the closet", which is characterised by grief for the loss of the 'heterosexual dream' the parents may have had for their child (Caldwell, 2004, p. 53). This is followed by "feeling good about it", which is prompted by the parents' love for their offspring, which in turn spurs the parents on to read about and research same-sex sexuality as a means to educate themselves about it. The third and last stage is called "coming out", and it is characterised by the disclosure of their offspring's same-sex sexuality to outsiders.

In both models, early adjustment (shortly after discovery) is characterised by a mixture of emotions more or less similar to the stages typical of the grief model developed by Kubler-Ross (1969) – shock, denial, anxiety, anger and confusion. In Caldwell's (2004) study, parents reported going into the closet when their child came out of the closet. Caldwell (2004) argues that this is necessitated by the fact that parents need time to cope with the issue(s) personally before they can tell others. Thus, going into the closet allows parents to buy themselves some time to adjust before sharing the news with others. This action can be detrimental to the parent-child relationship (Goldfried & Goldfried, 2001), but Caldwell (2004) considers it the first step in the healing process.

Goldfried and Goldfried (2001) are critical of this strategy used by parents (going into the closet) on the grounds that it may damage the trust between parents and their lesbian and/or gay child(ren). Therefore, Goldfried and Goldfried (2001) are of the view that the only way parents can show their love and support for their lesbian and gay child(ren) is by coming out of the closet about their discovery. Besides, keeping a secret has a negative impact on the

parents themselves (Goldfried & Goldfried, 2001), because the parents then have to cope with the strain of hiding their child's orientation to others.

Three sub-themes were identified by Caldwell (2004) in the quest to understand parents' difficulties in accepting their children's same-sex sexuality. The first is the view that same-sex attraction is an illness. The second is that, for those mothers who suspected their child's orientation prior to disclosure, the confirmation or the reality of their child's same-sex sexuality may be devastating. The third involves reporting a deep sadness and a sense of loss comparable to the one which usually follows the death of a loved one. Many of the participants in the study by Caldwell (2004) reported feeling as if their child had contracted a disease, suffered and then died.

During the initial stage, the overriding emotion felt by the participants in the study by Phillips (2007) was fear or concern around the safety of their children, particularly against prejudice and hate crimes. The concern that their child, especially a son, might contract HIV/AIDS also surfaced strongly in both models. Lastly, the concern that friends and families would discover the family secret proved to be a problem too. The ability to cope successfully during this period, according to Aldwin and Levenson (2004), depends on the person's ability to regulate his or her feelings.

In the cognitive dimension, issues of causality dominated at this stage, as some parents blame themselves or their actions. Furthermore, a number of parents cope with the situation by blaming outsiders, such as a friend or a teacher, for their child's same-sex attraction. Similarly, the second stage of the model by Caldwell (2004) involves negotiating closet dynamics, especially searching for the origin or cause of a son's or daughter's same-sex sexuality. Although Caldwell (2004) views the preoccupation with causality as a futile endeavour, she does consider it useful in the sense that it may mark the beginning of parents' self-education about same-sex sexuality. Such self-education helps to dispel various myths that parents previously believed, and may replace them with accurate and reliable information on same-sex sexuality from credible sources such as PFLAG chapters, lesbian, gay or bisexual-friendly therapists and accurate lesbian, gay or bisexual literature, to mention a few.

The behavioural dimension, in the study by Phillips (2007) was characterised by parents' taking some of the following actions: disengaging from their normal support networks or disengaging from parenting. In some cases, this resulted in a state of dysphoria – a state characterised by

anxiety, depression and unease. Concerning the spiritual and moral dimensions, the participants in the study by Phillips (2007) reported that a preoccupation with existential questions dominated this stage. For example, parents worried that their children might die of AIDS before reaching old age. Consequently, some parents felt anger towards God for making their child that way.

The most difficult challenge for parents at this stage, according to Caldwell (2004), involves managing “the struggle between how they are feeling and how their same-sex oriented child expects them to feel and act” (p. 30). A very important source of emotional support for most parents, during this time, came from their same-sex oriented children themselves. For example, one parent quoted in the study by Phillips (2007) confided that obtaining support from her same-sex oriented child was very important because it proved that the child was still the same person the parent had always known and had not become a stranger due to identity disclosure.

Support groups such as PFLAG also provide parents with a platform through which they could disclose to similar others without the fear of being rejected. Goldfried and Goldfried (2001) cite three reasons why PFLAG chapters are important. Firstly, they enable parents to learn about same-sex sexuality. Secondly, they also enable them to renegotiate personal and religious beliefs. Finally, they enable parents to practise self-disclosure to similar others before actually self-disclosing to outsiders. Searching for support implies disclosure and many parents at this stage feel anxious about disclosing the secret even to their close family members.

In the study by Phillips (2007), the emotional dimension of the middle adjustment stage was dominated by worrying about what other people will say or think. In general, Phillips (2007) found that the attitudes of family members ranged from supportive, quietly disapproving to overtly negative. In the cognitive dimension, many parents coped by seeking information and support from others. Phillips (2007) also found that parents who attributed the same-sex sexuality of their children to inborn causes were more likely to accept their child’s same-sex attraction than those who thought there was an element of choice. This is in line with Weiner’s Attribution Theory which predicts that perceptions of one’s ability to control the causes of an event mediate the affective responses associated with that event (Weiner, 1986). In the behavioural dimension, some parents in Phillips’s (2007) study sought gay mentors, and these helped them to advance their understanding of gay issues. This is something that Saltzburg (2004) also raises. What also emerged as the most important during this phase was parents’ insistence on maintaining strong connections with their same-sex attracted children. The moral

and spiritual dimension of the middle adjustment stage in the study by Phillips (2007) was characterised by a positive transformation, which resulted in parents' redefining and/or revising their commitment to their belief systems, especially when they came into conflict with their growing understanding of lesbian and gay oppression. For some parents, the revision of belief systems resulted in estrangement from their faith communities. An important observation here was that the majority of the parents chose a supportive relationship with their child over their religious/church affiliations.

Phillips (2007) reported that in the later adjustment phase, parents' commitment to their new values was salient in all dimensions. For example, in the emotional dimension, parents had come to accept their same-sex oriented children for who they really are, rather than for whom they wanted them to be. In other words, parents at this stage had become able to separate their child's sexual orientation from the child him- or herself. On the cognitive and behavioural dimensions, parents reported noticing the development of compassion and sensitivity to others, especially people from marginalised groups. They also noticed changes in themselves such as assertiveness, particularly in relation to addressing expressions of intolerance by others, a willingness to educate others about what it is like having a gay family member. Some parents became vocal advocates for gay rights and became politically active on behalf of lesbian and gay causes, or became allies of lesbians and gay people.

In the moral and spiritual dimensions during this stage, an important realisation for these parents was that their love for their children and their desire to remain part of their children's lives was their highest value (Phillips, 2007). Finally, most parents reported an evolution of their values and tangible personal growth. In respect of turning points in the later adjustment phase, most of the parents reported that their emerging identities as parents of lesbian and gay youths had become so central to whom they had become that they could not imagine their lives without this element; they therefore embraced the personal growth they had experienced to achieve this milestone (Phillips, 2007). The final stage in Caldwell's (2004) model is coming out, which entails disclosure to others. Most parents reported disclosing first to friends, then to family members, and then to members of the extended family. According to Caldwell (2004), disclosure to friends first is informed by the fact that friends are chosen and therefore their support can be predicted.

Bisexuality is a category that falls under sexual orientation, but from the literature on parental reactions to the disclosure of alternative sexuality by offspring, it is clear that bisexuality is

under-researched in and largely excluded from the literature on the disclosure of alternative sexual orientation. Neither of the older models and the more recent models of parental coming out about a child's same-sex orientation considers bisexuality. In the discussion below, I focus on issues affecting bisexuals, casting light on possible reasons for its exclusion in the majority of parental coming-out models. I also consider possible reasons why I suspected that it would be difficult for me to find mothers of bisexual youths to participate in this study.

2.6 The Erasure of Bisexuality in Coming-Out Literature

As the discussion above has shown, a number of studies have been done on parental reactions to the coming out of the closet by members of sexual minorities, but none of the studies discussed above include bisexual individuals, despite the fact that alternative sexual orientation comprises lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals. The systematic exclusion of bisexuality from the bulk of studies on alternative sexual orientation has contributed to the silencing of bisexuality in the literature on alternative sexualities – it may be said to have promoted its invisibility or erasure. The lack of information on bisexuality has in turn given rise to misrepresentation of this form of sexuality (McLean, 2007), particularly due to the myriad meanings attached to it. For example, McLean (2007) lists a range of inaccurate stereotypes which contribute to the misrepresentation of bisexuality. These are discussed later.

Because of the erasure of bisexuality in the literature on sexual orientation, Heath (2005) refers to bisexuality as the silent “B” because, as she puts it, “despite the token inclusion of bisexual people in the names of some mixed queer organisations and services, many demonstrate little active inclusion of bisexual people: even when the ‘B’ is there, it is passed over in silence” (n. p.). Consequently, in this study, I have discussed bisexuality as a category of sexual orientation separately from lesbian and gay coming-out literature in order to expose the issues pertinent to it.

Internationally, some research has been done on bisexual identity formation, for example, by Bower, Guverich, and Mathieson (2001), Bradford (2004), Eliason (2000), Israel and Mohr (2004), Li, Dobinson, Ayden, Scheim, and Ross (2013), McLean (2007), Palotta-Chiarolli (2006) and Rust (1995, 2000), to mention a few. However, none of this research was included in research on same-sex orientation, even though being lesbian or gay fall under alternative sexual orientation. As McLean (2007) has pointed out, this exclusion of bisexuality has given rise to several commonly held inaccurate views and stereotypes on bisexuality. Examples of

these stereotypes include the claim that bisexuality indicates indecision (McLean, 2007), and that bisexuality is not a real sexual identity, but is a passing stage or transitional stage *en route* to a gay or lesbian identity (Rust 1995). Another is that bisexuals are promiscuous and therefore are unable to commit to any one person, or that they have more than one partner at a time (Eliason, 2000; Li et al., 2013). Moreover, bisexuals have been accused of being vectors of HIV/AIDS to heterosexual people (Eliason, 2000).

Bisexuality has also been associated with both biphobia and polyamory. Biphobia refers to an aversion to bisexuality and bisexual people as a social group or as individuals; polyamory is broadly understood as a relationship structure in which individuals may have more than one romantic or sexual relationship, conducted openly with the consent of all involved (Ross, Dobinson, & Eady 2010). McLean (2007) warns that the problem with rigid views towards bisexuality is that they are responsible for the absence of a middle ground which allows for the fluidity that is characteristic of sexuality.

In an attempt to explain the position of bisexuality in literature on alternative sexual orientations, Bower et al. (2001) put the blame on the “monosexism implicit in our culture” (p. 26). The term ‘monosexism’, according to Eisner (2013) refers to “the social system according to which everyone is, or should be monosexual, including social rewards for monosexual people and punishments against bisexual and other non-monosexual people” (p.321). McLean (2007, p. 151) is critical of the fact that the process of coming out is “considered one of the key events in the development of an integrated and healthy homosexual and bisexual identity”. According to her, the idealisation of coming out as “good”, and the vilification of non-disclosure as “bad” is misleading, because for bisexuals, coming out involves “revealing not just that one is attracted to the same sex, but that one is also, or still, attracted to the opposite sex” (McLean, 2007, pp. 151-152). Both McLean (2007) and Rasmussen (2004) are critical of the disclosure imperative, in particular, the positive words used to describe “out” lesbian and gay individuals, such as “honest” and “empowered”, as opposed to negative words such as “dishonest” and “lacking” to describe those who are “not out” (p. 145). In fact both scholars are against what they call the disclosure imperative on the grounds that it silences and shames those who choose not to come out. Rasmussen (2004) sees this attitude as unjust, especially since coming out may have adverse effects for some individuals in certain contexts. Hence it is not an option for them.

Orne (2011) also criticises the loose way in which the term ‘coming out’ is used. He argues that the term should be replaced with the term ‘strategic outness’ or ‘identity management’. The former is a term he coined to “emphasise the role of sexual context in sexual identity disclosure” (Orne, 2011, p. 681). Mosher (2001) refers to the state of being both in and out of the closet as ‘identity management’. Identity management refers to the ways in which people control access to the type of information that is out there about their identities (Goffman, 1986). Use of these terms underscores the fact that coming out is not a once-off event, and that it often entails living in and out of the closet at the same time.

In light of the complexity of bisexuality as a category of sexual orientation, it is not surprising that stereotypes abound regarding what bisexuality entails. A recent study by Lynch (2012) has shared important insights on accounts of bisexual women regarding their gendered and sexualised identities in the South African context. Her study confirmed findings by international research on bisexuality. Among other things, Lynch (2012) posits that bisexuality was explicitly made invisible or unintelligible by various people. The term ‘unintelligibility of bisexuality’ was first used by Bower et al. (2001) to refer to the difficulty of comprehending bisexuality as a category of sexual identification. Bower et al. (2001) attribute people’s inability to do so to the dominance of a monosexual binary, where heterosexuality and homosexuality are constructed as the only valid categories of sexual identification. Lynch (2012) found that because people insist on positioning participants along a hetero-homo binary, they are unable to construe sexual desire as “going both ways” (p. 165).

Lynch (2012) finds this assumption of a binary in sexualities surprising, given that scholars such as Diamond (2008) have described sexuality as fluid. The assumption of a binary in sexualities explains the reasoning of a participant in a study by Bradford (2004), who attributed her inability to acknowledge her own bisexuality and the confusion she experienced to derogatory associations with the term bisexuality. This view was reiterated by one of the participants in the study by Lynch (2012). This participant said:

I don’t think a lot of people believe in bisexuality and that it exists. I think people see it as an excuse, kind of. I don’t know, I’ve gotten that feeling a lot, like come ‘come on, you obviously prefer one or the other’, and ‘you’re just fucking around’ if you go the other way or whatever. (p. 166)

Because bisexuality is also associated with indecision, in the study by Lynch (2012, p. 169) participants reported feeling pressure to “choose a side”. They explained that when they labelled themselves bisexual, this was met by disapproval by family friends and family alike.

The lack of acknowledgement of bisexuality as a category meant that these participants had no reference points for identifying as bisexual at that point in their lives. The result was that some participants reported that their first same-sex feelings were characterised by internal conflict – on the one hand, these feelings positioned them as same-sex attracted; on the other hand, they knew fully well that they were also attracted to the opposite sex. Consequently, they reported feelings which ranged from confusion to feeling guilty, as it seemed they were wrong for being attracted to both men and women. This sentiment was confirmed by another participant in a study by Bradford (2004):

I went through a really difficult time mentally because while, intellectually, I could say, ‘maybe I’m attracted to both,’ from a practical point of view it seemed like I should be one or the other. That’s sort of how society divides it, but it seemed very difficult to me at the time to be able to think about just one or the other. (p. 13)

Similarly, some of the participants in a study by McLean (2007) reported that on disclosure of their bisexuality, disapproval was evident in the labels they were identified by, which included “confused”, “immature” and “untrustworthy” (p. 157). In a study by Bradford (2004), participants reported being perceived as either “hiding behind heterosexual privilege”, or as “disturbing”, or “very distressing” and causing others to be “uncomfortable” (p. 15).

A local study by Arndt (2009) explored attitudes of heterosexual university students in South Africa towards bisexual men and women, and also provided important findings. However, although the findings contribute towards what is known on bisexuality in South Africa, the study’s limitation is that it only focused on heterosexual people’s attitudes towards bisexual people, and therefore neither explored bisexual people’s own experiences, nor their parents’ experiences. Instead, it explored how bisexual people are perceived in their society or the communities in which they live. The results of this study revealed that bisexuality as a form of sexuality was largely misunderstood and stigmatised in South African society. For example, it became clear that bisexuality is perceived as synonymous with hermaphroditism (an old term for intersex). This was expressed thus by a participant in the study by Arndt (2009) who confused a bisexual person with a person who is intersex. Another participant in the same study confused the term bisexuality with bestiality.

An international study by Israel and Mohr (2004) also explored attitudes toward bisexual women and men to expose current research and future directions. Their study reported similar findings to those of the study by Arndt (2009). Both Arndt (2009) and Israel and Mohr (2004) propose that, given the prevalence of misinformation and negative attitudes toward bisexual

women and men, attitude change interventions targeting specific populations should be conducted. They propose that such interventions should focus on heterosexual individuals, lesbian women and gay men, but most importantly, on health professionals and bisexual individuals themselves. In particular, Israel and Mohr (2004) explain that interventions for heterosexual men should focus on changing the sexual objectification of bisexual women, while interventions for lesbian women (and gay men) should focus on healing historical, personal and political rifts with bisexual women. Interventions for professionals, which include counsellors, social workers, nurses and doctors, may benefit these professionals, especially given the fact that bisexual people tend to be viewed as vectors of transmission of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) (Eliason, 2000). Thus, the benefits of attitude change interventions addressing health care professionals may improve health care delivery (Israel & Mohr, 2004). Finally, attitude change interventions for bisexual individuals could explore ways to help them overcome internalised binegativity – a term which refers to “negative attitudes about bisexuals” (Eliason, 2000, p. 140).

According to McLean (2007), another reason for the complexity of coming out as bisexual is that multiple meanings are attached to the term ‘bisexuality’. McLean (2007) argues that bisexuality is not experienced the same way even by bisexuals themselves. For example, she asserts that for some people who identify as bisexual, bisexuality involves both emotional and sexual attraction to both men and women. For others, it may involve only sexual experiences with one gender, but emotional plus sexual experiences and relationships with the other. The literature on bisexuality identifies six types of bisexuality (McLean, 2007, p. 155):

- historical bisexuality – living a predominantly hetero- or homosexual life, but with a history in which there are either bisexual experiences and/or fantasies;
- sequential bisexuality – having consecutive/successive relationships with both men and women, but with only one person at a time;
- concurrent bisexuality – having relationships with both men and women, occurring at the same time;
- episodic and temporary bisexuality – having encounters with the same or opposite sex, while living mainly as heterosexual or homosexual;
- experimental bisexuality – experimenting once with bisexuality, but soon returning to former sexual identity; and
- situational bisexuality – a heterosexual person having relationships with people of the same sex as him- or herself because of a specific situation (for example, being in prison).

What complicates the issue of bisexual identities is that some people may fall into the categories mentioned above, but may not view themselves as bisexual. For example, Pallotta-Chiarolli (2006) found that many young people reject what they call the “‘tripartite system of stable identities’ altogether” (p. 82), with some showing preference for the term “queer”. Others completely refuse to be sexually labelled, with one youth in the study by Pallotta-Chiarolli (2006) labelling herself as an “unidentified fucking object” (UFO) (p. 82). The strongest factor that makes it difficult to access bisexual-identifying or bisexual-behaving young people is that “the label itself is stigmatised [and for this reason] many young people feel coerced to identify as either heterosexual or homosexual in research” (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2006, p. 79).

To sum up, this discussion has made it evident that the process of coming out as bisexual may be even more complex for bisexual men and women than it is for gay men or lesbian women. The main reason, it would seem, is society’s inability or unwillingness to view bisexuality as a legitimate form of sexuality, which is in turn informed by society’s view of sexuality in terms of the binaries of heterosexual and homosexual identification. The fact that bisexuality is a stigmatised and misunderstood form of sexuality makes it very difficult for individuals who are bisexual to disclose their sexual orientation. In conclusion, McLean’s criticism of the disclosure imperative in relation to bisexual people holds true because when bisexual people come out, they open themselves to stigmatisation and negative labelling. Given that bisexual individuals themselves find it difficult to come out about their sexual orientation for the various reasons discussed above, it follows that their parents (if told) may also not find it easy to come out about the bisexuality of their offspring, due to ‘courtesy stigma’, which Phillips (2010, p. iii) describes as public disapproval of a person evoked as a consequence of the person’s associating with a stigmatised individual or group.

I believe that the exploration of the literature on bisexuality was useful in this study, in that it provided me with valid explanations which account for the difficulties confronting bisexual individuals in society. It also accounted for the silencing and the invisibility of youths who identify as bisexual in general. By extension this made me aware in advance that I was likely to experience difficulty in finding parents of bisexual offspring in my study. Despite the high probability of not finding ‘out’ mothers of bisexual offspring, I feel very strongly about their inclusion in this study, as bisexuality is a doubly marginalised form of sexual orientation.

Having discussed the erasure of bisexuality in the literature on alternative sexual orientation disclosure, I now move on to three theories that informed this study.

2.7 Theoretical Framework

In this section, I discuss three theories that informed the current investigation. They are Family stress theory, Family resilience theory and Queer Theory. All three theories, although not originally associated with sexual orientation, can be used to illuminate the processes that parents of children belonging to sexual minorities go through after disclosure. They can also provide insights on how parents of lesbian, gay and bisexual children deal with, try to understand and make sense of, cope with and adapt to the stigmatised identity of their offspring, and by extension to the courtesy stigma attached to themselves.

2.7.1 Family stress theory

As shown in the literature review on parental reactions above, the coming out of offspring as lesbian, gay or bisexual is likely to cause stress to both the individual who is lesbian, gay or bisexual, and to the family system. This occurs because disclosure forces family members to adopt new roles, and it requires shifts to subsystems, boundaries, hierarchies and communication patterns (Crosbie et al., 1996). The term ‘family stress’ is defined by Thomason and Havice (2009) as a real or imagined imbalance between the demands on the family and the family’s ability to meet those demands. Another simpler definition comes from Hill (1949), one of the original researchers associated with the term. Hill (1949) defines it as a roller-coaster pattern of adjustment which is characterised by initial disorganisation, followed by recovery and reorganisation. Hill (1949) first used the concept in his classic research on war-induced separation and reunion.

In family stress theory, the demands which affect a family at any given time are called stressor events. There are two types of stressor events or demands that may affect a family. These are life events or transitions that happen in the family. They can be either positive or negative, and they can cause a change in the family’s coping pattern (Thomason & Havice, 2009). Two types of stressors are distinguished: normative (those that are expected, for example, the birth of a child after marriage) and non-normative (those that are not expected, for example, the death of a child). The disclosure of sexual orientation by a family member fits the description of a non-normative stressor event (Willoughby et al., 2006). One reason for this, according to Peplau and Beals (2004) is that “lesbian and gay men are usually raised by heterosexual parents who

assume that their children will be heterosexual” (p. 234), Therefore when a son or daughter comes out as lesbian or gay, the disclosure is perceived by the family as a crisis (Peplau & Beals; 2004; Strommen, 1989).

Another reason that alternative sexual orientation is viewed as a non-normative stressor is that being lesbian, gay or bisexual is stigmatised in the heterosexist world in which we live. For example, culture condemns same-sex attraction/practices on the basis that it is perceived to pose a threat to patriarchal family values (Chigweshe, 1994; Msibi, 2011), and organised religion tends to view it as sinful. Therefore, when a child comes out of the closet, the parents are bound to suffer from what Phillips (2010) refers to as courtesy stigma. This stigma often results in parents’ losing their standing, for example, in the church (if they subscribe to a form of organised religion) and in society. Fields (2001) explains that parents struggle to recover from the double loss they suffer – the loss of their-children-as-normal, as well as the loss of themselves-as-normal. Families who recover from the crisis are those who had family resources in place prior to the onset of the stressor event – in this case, the disclosure of same-sex sexuality (McKenry & Price, 2000).

Examples of resources required for meeting the demands of a stressor include family communication patterns, the family’s ability to solve problems, the goals of the family, money and services in the community. Thus, according to family stress theory, families that cope easily with traumatic events or non-normative stressors, such as the disclosure of alternative sexual orientation by a family member, are those that are able to balance the demands of the situation with their coping resources and behaviour, based on the meanings they give to events. Coping refers to what the family does with the resources it has, in order to remove the stressor, or to be able to live with the hardship, or to develop new resources in response to the crisis. Willoughby et al. (2006) see a link between “the way in which the family reacts and copes with a family member’s sexual orientation disclosure [and] the way the family member will view oneself as gay” (p. 22). Thus, for lesbian, gay or bisexual youths, disclosure functions as a means “to seek validation” and internalise the feedback from significant others, such as family and peers, if the feedback is positive (Willoughby et al., 2006, p. 22). If the disclosure of alternative sexual orientation is met with a lack of acceptance, this may result in the development of a negative sense of self in the youth concerned (Willoughby et al., 2006).

The Family Adjustment and Adaptation Response (FAAR) Model developed by Patterson (1988) shows that there are linkages between family stress theory and family resilience. In the

FAAR model, Patterson (1988) discusses four constructs. They are family demands, family capabilities, family meanings, and family adjustment or adaptation. In order to survive a crisis, the family demands (which consist of normative and non-normative stressors, ongoing family strains, and daily hassles) have to be balanced with family capabilities (the tangible and psychosocial resources that the family has, and coping behaviours, in other words, what the family does). If the family demands exceed the family capabilities, an imbalance results. If the imbalance persists, a crisis or a period characterised by disequilibrium and disorganisation in the family occurs.

However, Patterson (2002) points out that a crisis may not always be bad. She argues that “a crisis is very often a turning point for a family, leading to major change in their structure, interaction, patterns, or both” (p. 351). This implies that a crisis can lead to a discontinuity of the family’s trajectory of functioning, which could either lead to improved functioning, or to poorer functioning. Improved functioning often leads to the restoration of balance. In other words, it results in the reduction of demands and an increase of capabilities – a process called regenerative power in family stress theory. If the stressor is the discovery of same-sex sexuality, at this point, the family can develop a means of successfully coping with it. This could be achieved through the use of resources such as education or visiting counsellors or psychologists as a family. However, if the opposite occurs, then poor adaptation or vulnerability results. The two concepts mentioned above operate in opposition to each other. Family regenerative power refers to factors that help the family recover from crisis, while family vulnerability refers to factors that may impair the resistance capabilities of a family.

To sum up, the discussion of family stress theory highlights three things. Firstly, the family unit may be the most important predictor of parental reactions to a child’s sexual orientation disclosure. Secondly, family stress theory posits that family resources in place prior to a stressor event (in this case, disclosure of alternative sexual orientation) may act as a buffer against the stressor. Thirdly, for a family to maintain its equilibrium, the family concerned needs to balance family demands with capabilities. Family crises, although initially negative, may lead to improved family functioning (family regenerative power).

2.7.2 *Family resilience theory*

The concept of resilience derives from studies of children who function competently despite exposure to adversity when psychopathology is expected (Masten, 1994). Researchers in other

disciplines use other terms for this concept. In medical sociology, Antonovsky (1987) uses the term 'salutogenesis' to describe the high functioning of many survivors of the Holocaust. Cassel (1976), an epidemiologist, uses the term 'host resistance' to describe the factors that protect the host (person) from becoming ill. McCubbin and Patterson (1982) from the family science field use the term 'family resilience' to describe variability in the responses of military families to the crisis of war. They observed that many families move from crisis to successful adaptation.

Walsh (1998) defines the term 'resilience' as "the capacity to rebound from adversity strengthened and more resourceful" (p. 4). Similarly, Patterson (2002) defines the term as "the phenomenon of doing well in the face of adversity" (p. 350). Phillips (2007) postulates that resilience can help individuals to "bounce back to normal functioning when dealing with difficult situations" (pp. 12-13). As already mentioned in the discussion of family stress theory, disclosure of sexual orientation by a child is an example of a non-normative demand that may easily lead to family vulnerability if it is not managed skilfully. According to Patterson (2002), "most researchers view resilience as a process where there are interactions between risks and protective factors relative to a specified outcome" (p. 352). Family adaptation is the outcome that is most relevant to resilience, because it emerges after a crisis or a period of disruption or exposure to significant risk. As its name indicates, the term "adaptation" enables the family to restore the balance between the demands and capabilities at two levels of transaction. The first is that between the family members and the family unit, and the second is that between a family unit and the community. If this is successful, bonadaptation will be the result within the family, and the family will show continued ability to promote the development of the individual family members and willingness to maintain their family unit so that it can accomplish life cycle tasks (Patterson, 2002).

The key to family resilience is striking a balance between closeness and distance and between change and stability (Patterson, 2002), the "identification of protective factors and processes that moderate the relationship between a family's exposure to significant risk and their ability to show competence in accomplishing family functions" (p. 356). Two central aspects of these family relationship patterns are family cohesiveness and flexibility. Taking same-sex sexuality as an example, demands and capabilities can emerge from three different levels of the ecosystem. The first level is from individual family members, the second is from the family unit, and the third is from various community contexts.

Phillips (2007) argues that disclosure of sexual orientation requires a family to negotiate challenges on all three levels in order to adjust successfully. Practically, this can be done in various ways. For example, a young person who decides to disclose his or her same-sex orientation for the first time may first confide in a sibling (individual to individual). Then, with the sibling's support, he or she can proceed to disclose to the parents (family systems unit). Lastly, the family as a whole can decide on how to disclose in various community settings such as work, social organisations and places of worship (family and its external communities), whenever the need arises. So disclosure of alternative sexual orientation would be an example of an individual-level demand, decisions about how to manage the child's coming out or keeping it a secret would be an example of a family-level demand. Finally, community stigma about homosexuality would be a community-level demand. The family capabilities can be strengthened by parent education, family cohesiveness, good health and education services, and these can be used at any of the three levels. However, if the demands significantly exceed the family's capabilities, a state of disequilibrium or crisis arises, and disorganisation or disruption in the family occurs. Disclosure of sexual orientation by a son or daughter is often difficult for the family – the crisis can result in a discontinuity in the family's trajectory of functioning, which in turn can lead to either improved functioning or poorer functioning.

Oswald (2002) explored two resilience processes that enable members of sexual minorities to create and strengthen their family networks. These are intentionality and redefinition. Intentionality refers to the “strategies used by gay and lesbian and their heterosexual loved ones to create and sustain a sense of family within a societal context that stigmatises homosexuality” (Oswald 2002, p. 375). It entails choosing kin, managing disclosure, building community, ritualising and legalising. Redefinition, by contrast, refers to “processes by which lesbian and gay family networks affirm the existence of gay and lesbian people and their relationships” (Oswald 2002, p. 375). These processes are politicising, naming, integrating gayness and envisioning family.

In summary, family resilience is viewed as a process where interactions occur between risks and protective factors within the family, relative to a specified outcome, which in this case is family adaptation. For Patterson (2002), a balance between closeness and distance and between stability and change is the key to resilience. Furthermore, a family facing adversity can strengthen its capabilities and promote resiliency through parent education, family cohesiveness, good health, flexibility and education services. The two concepts of

intentionality and redefinition presented by Oswald (2002) are relevant for this study, because their aim is to strengthen alternative family structures by making them resilient in the face of discrimination.

2.7.3 *Queer Theory*

Queer Theory is an interdisciplinary synthesis of poststructuralism, feminist theory and gay and lesbian studies whose origins can be traced to the early 1990s. Mann (2012) asserts that Queer Theory built on each of these three bodies of thought and origins, “but it also pushed them in new conceptual directions that would place sexuality, and particularly the origins and consequences of *sexual norms*, at the centre of analysis” (p. 233; Mann’s emphasis). From the poststructuralists, Queer Theory borrowed the fluid notions of identity and power. However, Queer Theory is critical of the poststructuralists’ failure to engage with the profound role sexuality plays in the ongoing production of social meaning. From feminism, Queer Theory borrowed the idea that gender (and sexuality) are socially produced and are used as instruments of power. Queer theorists acknowledge the fact that feminist theory has long engaged with sex and sexuality, but it is critical of the manner in which it has dealt with these topics, namely using only the lens of men’s subordination of women. Feminist scholars such as Gloria Anzaldua (1987), Judith Butler (1990), Gayle Rubin (1984) and Eve Sedgwick (1992) have revealed some of the complex connections between feminist theoretical problems and questions of gender transgression and queer sexualities. Queer Theory has therefore highlighted, among other things, weaknesses of the feminist canon such as addressing matters of gender ambiguity, cross-gender identification, gender performativity, the social construction of gendered bodies and the diversity of non-normative sexualities.

Finally, while gay and lesbian studies have also contributed positively in documenting lesbian and gay history, politics and subculture, lesbian and gay studies are criticised for their belief in the existence of the notion of a rigid heterosexual/homosexual binary. Queer Theory challenges this binary and in its place emphasises the fluidity of sexualities as well as the idea that sexualities are historical and social constructions (Mann, 2012). Butler (1990) argues that “although most of us take our gender and sexual identities for granted and presume them to be essential aspects of who we are, it is more accurate to view them as sociohistorical inventions that have long been used to classify, rank and discipline people” (quoted in Mann, 2012, p. 236). Therefore, according to Butler (1990, cited in Mann, 2012, p. 236), rather than accepting

that gender differences are automatic and natural, the hetero/homo binary has forced us to work hard on making sure that our bodies and personalities adhere to prevailing gender norms.

Regarding the use of the term 'queer', it is important to note that it has undergone a number of changes. For example, according to APA (2006) the term was used originally to describe anything that is unusual in an odd or strange way. It was later "extended to refer to gays in the late 19th and throughout much of the 20th century when it acquired a predominantly negative, derogatory connotation" (p. 764). In the late 1980s, the term was reclaimed by lesbian and gay individuals and activists to establish a sense of community and assert a politicised identity, distinct from the gay political identity. Today, various scholars provide different definitions of this term. For example, Halperin (1995) states that this term refers to "whatever is at odds with the normal, and with the legitimate or the dominant" (p. 62). Halperin (1995) argues that the term expresses a positionality rather than an identity in the humanist sense and is not restricted to gay and lesbian individuals. Joubert (1998), on the other hand, uses the term to refer to a sub-group that has values and morality different to those of the general population in relation to sexuality, as well as to a more general approach to life. A key characteristic of this group is that it defies the rejection and stigmatisation of same-sex people in society by creating new norms based on difference emanating from being members of a stigmatised group.

Mann (2012), emphasises the idea that the term is not used synonymously with lesbian, gay bisexual or transgender identities, "instead it is a critique of all things oppressively normal, especially conventional ideas about sex [and] it also embraces sexual and gender difference" (p. 235). Both Halperin (1995) and Mann (2012) have extended the meaning of the term queer to refer to a wide range of individuals such as those who are marginalised as a result of their sexual practices, or because they operate outside the normative (such as married couples without children, or married couples with 'naughty' children, mixed race families, white families who have adopted black children, etc.). In short, according to these scholars, queer then demarcates not a positivity, but a positionality *vis-a-vis* the normative. Therefore, queer describes a horizon of possibility. It identifies itself through its rejection of traditional gender identities, through its adoption of non-conformism and deliberately seeking an alternative to the label LGBT. It is precisely Queer Theory's preoccupation with non-conformism that makes it appealing for this study, because lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals in society are relegated to the margins.

My inclusion of Queer Theory in this study is also informed by the fact that it challenges heteronormativity and shows that there is nothing ‘normal’ about being heterosexual. Slagle (2003) is also critical of the tendency of seeing heterosexuality as ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ on the basis that it casts other sexualities as ‘abnormal’ or ‘unnatural’ or ignored entirely (see also Butler, 1990, cited in Mann, 2012). Rejecting the heterosexual/homosexual binary opens up space for the exploration of gender ambiguity, cross-gender identification, gender performativity, a social construction of gendered bodies and the diversity of non-normative sexualities (Mann, 2012). My use of the term ‘queer’ is also informed by Slagle’s (2003) view that Queer Theory is “a progressive move toward inclusivity and the celebration of differences” (p. 130).

Similarly, Duggan (1992) asserts that in Queer Theory, “the rhetoric of difference replace[s] the more assimilationist liberal emphasis on similarity to other groups” (quoted in Mann, 2012, p. 236). Thus, for Duggan (1992), ‘queerness’ goes beyond taking a stand against heterosexual desire and also rejects living as an average, respectable gay or lesbian citizen who imitates heterosexual lifestyle. Instead, it involves resisting cultural and institutional forces that try to make all people conform to normal or straight ways of life as made manifest in actions regarded as “normal” in society such as “settling down” – getting married, having children and aspiring to be just like everybody else (Duggan, 1992, quoted in Mann, 2012, p.236).

Queer Theory and criticism also reject the idea that suggests that sexuality is a “private” matter that is not appropriate for public display (Warner, 1993). Queer criticism is critical of mainstream discourse which has argued that sexuality is best left in the bedroom on the grounds that when people say that, they are in fact making reference to non-normative sexualities and not normative ones (in other words, heterosexuality as opposed to same-sex sexuality). Queer critics are therefore critical of the double standard which imposes silence only on queer sexualities and not on heterosexuality. For example, scholars such as Slagle (2003) and Warner (1993) point out that heterosexual sexualities are constantly displayed publicly. This is evident in common actions such as heterosexual couples walking holding hands, or sitting on a park bench kissing, or husbands or wives displaying each other’s photographs in their offices. However, Slagle (2003) raises an important issue, namely that “when queers try and celebrate their relationships in similar ways, they are [...] accused of trying to destroy the most fundamental institutions upon which society is built (the nuclear family)” (p. 134).

Regarding sexual practices, Queer Theory accommodates a range of these. For example, while same-sex sexuality refers to sex between people of the same gender, queer sex refers to a variety of sexual practices, in which the central issue is challenging gender and heterosexual norms (Mann, 2012). Examples of queer sex that are all permissible, precisely because they express different human preferences, include kinky sex (which involves fetishes, bondage, sadomasochism, sex toys, etc.), ‘cross-generational’, ‘non-monogamous’, ‘non-love based’, ‘promiscuous’, ‘for pay’, ‘unsafe’ and/or ‘same-sex sex’. A unifying factor of all these sexual practices is the fact that they reject traditional state-sanctioned ideas about the romantic and heterosexual purpose of human sexuality (Rubin, 1984).

To sum up, I have used Queer Theory for this study because it is a fit in two important ways. Firstly, it offers a critique of normativity, and thus rejects “conventional forms of association, belonging and identification” (Halberstam, 2005, p. 4). These pertain to rigid ideas about gender and sexuality, the desirability of entering into a monogamous marriage (with a person of the opposite sex), and keeping sexuality private (if it is not heterosexual).

Secondly, Queer Theory rejects gender and sexual identities, by showing that the binaries of man/woman and heterosexual/homosexual identities are artificial and unstable. Queer theorists acknowledge that people’s sexual desires change over the course of their lives and are influenced by their religious, cultural, political and economic conditions. Queer Theory’s valuing of outsiderhood, strangeness and gender and sexual rule-breaking (Mann, 2012) further makes it an appropriate lens for this study.

Having done an extensive review of the literature on parental reactions to their offspring’s coming out of the closet about their sexual orientation, followed by models of identity development as parents of a lesbian daughter or a gay son, as well three theories applicable to alternative sexual orientation, I now proceed to Chapter 3, where I discuss the methodology used in this study.

CHAPTER 3: THE RESEARCH PROCESS

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I outline the research design that I employed in this study. I begin by reiterating the purpose of the study and proceed to a discussion of the qualitative research paradigm which informs my study, namely the interpretivist paradigm. This is followed by a consideration of the research design, in which I discuss the role of the researcher, the research site, the fieldwork, the participants, the chosen data collection methods, ethical considerations relevant to the data collection, and the data analysis method, which was Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Lastly, I indicate which measures were taken to ensure trustworthiness.

3.2 Purpose of the Research

Most of what is known about parental reactions to the discovery that a son or daughter is lesbian, gay or bisexual in the South African context comes from second-hand accounts by lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring of their own experiences, not from first-hand accounts by the parents involved. This means the voices of black, Coloured and Indian parents of members of sexual minorities have not yet been heard on this issue. In view of the gaps in existing literature, a study such as my own, can only add another piece to the bigger picture.

The present study therefore hopes to add to the limited literature available by focusing on black mothers' coming out journeys from the closet about the alternative sexual orientations of their offspring and their motivations for doing so, given the fact that some contexts are hostile to members of sexual minorities.

3.3 The Qualitative Research Paradigm

According to Terre Blanche, Durrheim, and Painter (2006), "paradigms are all-encompassing systems of interrelated practice and thinking that define for researchers the nature of their enquiry along three dimensions: ontology, epistemology and methodology" (p. 6). The research paradigm or approach that I chose for this study is an interpretivist paradigm, because I was interested in the subjective worlds of my participants (the mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring). Ontology refers to the nature of reality that a researcher seeks to study, while epistemology focuses on what can be known, especially concerning the relationship between

the researcher (who is “knowledgeable”) and what can be known about the topic under review. In terms of the ontology of this study, the reality under study consists of people’s subjective experiences of the external world. Because I was interested in mothers’ lived experiences, except for one mother that I interviewed at her work place, at her request, I interviewed the rest of the mothers at their own homes where they are confronted with their children’s same-sex sexuality or bisexuality. In line with the fact that my research study was people-oriented, the epistemological stance that I adopted was that of empathetic listener/observer.

Methodology refers to how researchers practically conduct their investigation into whatever it is they believe can be known (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). For this study, the methodology I employed was qualitative, interactional and interpretational. I interacted with the participants by means of interviews. I also used participant observation, which helped me to capture body language and other gestures that conveyed the participants’ feelings, in some cases, more accurately than words.

In terms of approach, I adopted a qualitative approach. Creswell (2007) lists the following three contexts as suitable for the choice of a qualitative research method, rather than a quantitative research method. The first context is one in which the problem or issue requires exploration rather than quantification. The second context is one in which a researcher needs a complex, detailed understanding of the issue in question. Such details can be established through face-to-face interviews with participants who have experienced the problem or the phenomenon under investigation. Ideally, the interviews should be conducted in their homes or at their places of work. The third context in which qualitative research is a perfect fit is one in which the researcher’s aim is to empower individuals to share their stories, to hear silenced voices, or to minimise the power relationships that are typical of researchers and participants in a study. Qualitative research is also appropriate when a researcher wants to understand the contexts or settings in which participants in a study address a problem or issue.

Creswell (2007) also identifies a number of common characteristics of qualitative research, some of which are also discussed by Hatch (2002) and Marshall and Rossman (2006). These are briefly discussed below, showing to what extent these characteristics are found in my study:

- **Natural setting:** In qualitative research, the emphasis is on collecting data at the site where the participants experience the issue or problem under study. This is often achieved through face-to-face interviews (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I conducted five of the six interviews at the homes of participants and this enabled me to

visualise the context in which the participants experienced the issue under study, which in this case is the alternative sexuality of their offspring.

- **Researcher as key instrument:** Unlike quantitative researchers, who often rely on instruments such as questionnaires developed by others or themselves, qualitative researchers collect data themselves, mainly through face-to-face interviews and/or observations (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002). Researchers may use an interview protocol for data collection, but it functions merely as a guide. The main tool for information gathering is the researcher him- or herself. For this research, I conducted the interviews myself. Interviews ranged from one and a half hours to two hours.
- **Multiple sources of data:** Data-gathering for qualitative research involves gleaning data from multiple sources. These include interviews, observations and documents. Researchers do not rely only on a single source. The data collection stage is then followed by a review of all the data, making sense of them and organising them in categories and/or themes cutting through all data sources (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). For this study, I interviewed and observed participants. I also recorded the interviews and took notes during each session. During the data analysis, I reviewed all the data and identified themes that emanated from all the data sources.
- **Inductive data analysis:** Qualitative researchers use a bottom-up approach, rather than a top-down one. This approach is flexible and allows researchers to work back and forth between the themes and the data base, until comprehensive themes have been established. Collaboration with participants interactively may be allowed to enable them to shape emerging themes in the study (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In this study, throughout the data analysis stage, I worked back and forth between the emerging themes and the transcripts, until I felt that the themes established were comprehensive.
- **Participants' meanings:** One of the key challenges in qualitative research is keeping the focus on participants' meanings regarding the problem or issue under study, rather than the meanings and views of the researchers or authors in the existing literature. As a mother of a gay son myself, I had to be careful to encourage the participants in this study to tell their own stories and explore their own subjective meanings, rather than to confirm my experiences. A key characteristic of a qualitative researcher, according to Biggerstaff (2012), is that "he or she accepts that s/he is not 'neutral'. Instead s/he puts herself in the position of the participant or 'subject' and attempts to understand how the world is from

that person's perspective" (p. 178). For this reason, I kept a reflexive journal which I used to document my personal reflections, to help me separate my experiences from those of the participants.

- **Emergent design:** The term "emergent design" refers to the fact that, although qualitative researchers need to have an initial plan at the outset of their research, they need not adhere to it rigidly, as various aspects of the research change. These changes may affect the research question, forms of data collection, the research site, and other elements. In qualitative research, it is important to learn about the problem or issue from the participants and to devise means to obtain the information required to address the research question (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 2006).
- **Theoretical lens:** The theoretical framework provides qualitative researchers with a lens through which to view their studies. For this study, I employed three theories: family stress theory, family resilience theory and Queer Theory. I used family stress theory because the discovery of a son or daughter's alternative sexuality by parents often plunges the family into a crisis, causing it to be stressed (Ben-Ari, 1995a; Caldwell, 2004; Oswald, 2002; Patterson, 2002; Phillips, 2007; Saltzburg, 2004; Savin-Williams & Dubé, 1998; Strommen, 1989). I also chose family resilience theory because for a family to remain cohesive after the crisis or perturbation caused by sexual orientation disclosure, the family needs to have resources which promote family resiliency. Lastly, I used Queer Theory, because it acknowledges and promotes diversity in the structure of the family (Butler, 1990, cited in Mann, 2012; Slagle, 2003).
- **Interpretive paradigm/ inquiry:** Because this aspect is discussed in detail in Section 3.3, I provide only a brief summary here. In interpretive research, multiple views of the problem or issue should emerge. This means that the researcher, participants and the readers all make their own interpretations of the issue that is studied, and all these interpretations shape the study's findings (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In this case, my interpretation of the phenomenon and the participants' are provided, and the readers are invited to reach their own interpretation.
- **Holistic account:** In an attempt to develop a complex picture of the problem or issue under investigation, qualitative researchers report from multiple perspectives, identify a variety of factors involved in the situation and sketch the larger picture that emerges (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In this study, I noted some contradictions between what participants were telling me and what they were doing, and these

contradictions are discussed among the research findings in Chapter 4 as they provide a holistic account of the mothers' experiences and reactions.

3.4 The Research Design

Durrheim (1999) regards a research design as a plan that guides how a study will be conducted in an attempt to answer the research question(s). Research designs favoured by qualitative researchers are open, fluid and changeable (Creswell, 2007; Durrheim, 1999; Hatch, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 2006), and these designs are adapted as the research unfolds. The research design that I adopted in this dissertation is explained below, considering the role of the researcher, the research site, the fieldwork, the participants, the data collection and data analysis methods used, ethical considerations, and the criteria of trustworthiness. I discuss these in this order below.

3.4.1 The role of the researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher, as already indicated, is the key instrument for data collection. This is achieved through face-to-face interviews and/or participant observation. Guba and Lincoln (1981, cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985) list seven advantages of using the researcher as the main instrument in qualitative research. I only discuss three which resonate with my role as researcher in this study. The first advantage is responsiveness. This implies that humans can sense and respond to personal and environmental cues that may be found in the environment. For example, in the course of the research process, during interviews, I could capture sighs and breaks in the voice of participants which conveyed a lot of information on their emotions in the context of this study. These cues communicated more vividly what some of the participants were really feeling as opposed to what they were reporting about their feelings. The second advantage is adaptability. This refers to the fact that people can collect information about multiple factors at multiple levels at the same time. The third and final advantage of using the researcher as instrument that resonates with me is that the interpersonal contact of an interview or observation affords the researcher (and the participants) opportunities for clarification and summary. This means that the researcher is able to summarise data on the spot and feed it back to respondents for clarification, correction and amplification.

Despite the obvious advantages of using the researcher-as-instrument discussed above, as Patton (2002) points out, researchers are undoubtedly imperfect. One criticism levelled against

using the researcher as an instrument is the subjective nature of his or her data collection and analysis. Regarding this study, I was cognisant of the fact that my perceptions were shaped not only by the research process under study, but also by my own personal experiences as a mother of a same-sex attracted son. I had to reflect carefully on my biases, beliefs, and values stemming from my culture, as recommended by Kopala and Suzuki (1999). Since the research had a personal dimension for me, it was important that I became conscious of how my own processes might affect the research process. According to Bosman (2009), such an awareness can facilitate a researcher's connectedness to the particular study and to the participants. Another research tool that I used in this study, as pointed out previously, was an interview schedule or protocol which served as a guide during the interview. I also kept a journal in which I recorded my own reflections after each interview and during the data analysis.

Given that in qualitative research the researcher is the main instrument involved in collecting, analysing and interpreting the data, there is no way to avoid subjectivity and bias in the phenomenon being researched. Easton, McComish, and Greenberg (2000), as well as Patton, (2002), are critical of the human-as-instrument, arguing that this "instrument" is potentially flawed, due to the subjective nature of the researcher's data collection and analysis capabilities. In view of this subjectivity, Willig (2008) asserts that "reflexivity is important in qualitative research because it encourages us to foreground, and reflect upon, the ways in which the person of the researcher is implicated in the research and its findings" (p. 18). Creswell (2007) makes a similar statement when he says:

How we write is a reflection of our interpretation based on the cultural, social, gender, class, and personal politics that we bring to research. All writing is 'positioned' and within a stance. All researchers shape the writing that emerges, and qualitative researchers need to accept this interpretation and be open about it in their writings. (p. 178)

This is particularly pertinent in my case, as I, like the black mothers in this study, have a son who is gay, and therefore my writing is positioned by my situatedness and my own "stance" (Creswell, 2008, p.18). According to Willig (2008), a researcher influences and shapes the research process in two ways: as a person (hence, personal reflexivity is necessary) and as a theorist/thinker (hence, epistemological reflexivity is required). Below are my personal reflections which shed light on my interest on the topic, as well as my involvement in this dissertation.

I am a black, educated mother of two: my gay son and my daughter, who is younger. I am a South African who was born and raised in a village in the Eastern Cape. While growing up,

I was vaguely aware of the existence of men who behaved in a more feminine manner than most men. They also preferred the company of women to that of men. Unlike other men, who generally preferred to do things outdoors, these men did chores that are normally done by the women in the household. In retrospect, I realise that these men may have been gay, although this term was not used to describe them. In fact there was no name I can remember that was used to refer to their differentness. In other words, the term 'gay' was not an identity at the time, unlike nowadays. What is apparent from my memories of childhood is that gay men existed in the past, as they do today. Even more interesting is the fact that gay men during my childhood were not harassed as they are today in communities such as my own when I was growing up. Instead of facing harassment in their families, they were embraced and they were also not excluded from the community.

As a mother of a gay son, much like some of the other mothers in this study, I was aware that my son was different from most boys his age. Although he was not feminine, like some mothers reported of their sons, he was a very sensitive, caring and attentive child who had a warm and pleasant personality. At primary school, he was very happy and had many close friends who were boys. However, when he went to high school – a boys' only school – his sunny disposition changed. What alerted me to the change was poor performance at school. By the time he got to Matric, his marks had plummeted and he was suffering from depression. In consultation with him, he saw a psychiatrist and a psychologist. During this period, I had noticed a few things that left me puzzled, although I never paid much attention to them. First, although he had male and female friends, he was happier in the company of his female friends than in the company of his male friends. When going to the movies with his female friends, he was happy and looked forward to a good time. However, when out in the company of his male schoolmates, I remember noticing the discomfort he would feel. He would constantly ask me: "Do I look all right?"

It was during this period of great turmoil that I asked him if he was gay and he simply said: "Didn't you know?" I replied: "Why didn't you say so?" From an ensuing conversation I had with him, I remember his implying that he *had* told me. So, in a way, I feel that I, like some of the mothers in this study, perhaps did not want to know the truth about his sexuality. In other words, I adopted the proverbial ostrich approach, burying my head in the sand. His own reply to my enquiry about his same-sex attraction confirmed the argument by Valentine et al. (2003) that "young lesbians and gay men often surmise that their mothers may already 'know' about their sexuality" (p. 487).

3.4.2 The research site

Research sites are social spaces where the researcher meets participants (Devers & Frankel, 2000). I identified potential participants in this study mainly through OUT LGBT Well-being, in particular through lesbian, gay or bisexual young men and women who visited OUT, as well as through contacts of members of staff at OUT LGBT Well-being. I also identified potential participants for my study through a workshop organised by the United States Embassy at the University of the Witwatersrand. The workshop was aimed at establishing PFLAG in South Africa and was attended by mothers and their lesbian daughters, as well as various stakeholders who are concerned about the violence perpetrated on members of sexual minorities in some urban, semi-urban and rural areas in South Africa. These stakeholders included members of South African Council of Churches (SACC) , NPOs such as GALA, OUT LGBT Well-being, Sisonke Gender, Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW), and the International Centre for AIDS Care and Treatment Programme (ICAP). I also recruited participants from LGBT societies at three institutions of higher learning. In Pretoria, these were UP and OUT at the University of Pretoria and Flamboyant from the Tshwane University of Technology. In Johannesburg, it was Wits Activate at the University of Witwatersrand. I further advertised the study on the noticeboard at OUT LGBT Well-being. The main method of recruiting was word-of-mouth by lesbian and gay people, who gave me contacts. I experienced a lot of disappointments, as sometimes leads that seemed sure to work simply petered out. It would appear this happened because some potential participants were uncomfortable with having their life stories read about by the public.

3.4.3 The field work

To access the specific information I was investigating in this study, I used multiple methods of data collection, namely face-to-face interviews (which I recorded with the permission of the participants), observation, note-taking and writing a reflective journal.

I accessed the mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring through their children. I adhered to the ethical guidelines prescribed by the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) and the University of South Africa's (UNISA's) Board of Ethics. Where consent by the offspring of a potential participant was given, I called the participant and explained the interview process, focusing on the purpose of the study, length of the interview, use of a recorder, transcription of the interview, the voluntary nature of their potential involvement, as

well as related ethical considerations I would be guided by (see Section 3.4.7). If potential participants expressed interest in participating, we scheduled an interview date, a time and a location that were convenient to the participant(s). Before each interview, I checked that I had the following items and that they were in working order: the recorder, the interview schedule and the necessary stationery.

I began each interview by thanking the participant for agreeing to participate in the study. Then I introduced myself and the study. I explained the interview process, the nature of the participant's involvement. Together we read the consent form, and I requested participants to sign it. I checked with the participants whether there were any further questions before commencing with the interview. After the interview, I once again checked whether the participants had any questions. I then thanked them and terminated the interview and left.

I conducted four out of the six interviews in the homes of the participants in Mamelodi, a low-income area in the East of Pretoria. One interview took place at an institution of higher learning, in a room used for one-to-one consultations, where the mother of a bisexual young woman worked. One other interview took place in Katlehong, a low-income area in the East Rand, in the bedroom of the lesbian daughter. Most of the interviews were conducted on a working day, except for two interviews that were conducted on a Saturday. All the interviews took place in the morning, before midday.

3.4.4 The participants

The population of this study consisted of six black mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring who are out of the closet about the alternative sexual orientation of their children. The term 'outness' as used and understood in this study implies acceptance of a child's alternative sexual orientation.

To identify the participants, I used purposive and snowball sampling and (as described in the section above) I relied heavily on contacts, due to the stigmatisation of same-sex attraction and bisexuality in South African society. McBurney (2001) defines a purposive sample as one that is selected non-randomly, but for some particular reason. My choice of purposive sampling was informed by its ability to provide me with the right or suitable participants for the phenomenon under investigation. I chose a snowball sampling technique because as Gilbert (2008) asserts, it enables a researcher to get a sample through contacts and references. Snowball sampling fitted my study, because in many families having a family member who is same-sex

attracted tends to be kept a secret and therefore such information can only be obtained through contacts. Thus, the fact that mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual youths constitute a hidden population made the use of this sampling technique a fit for this study. Because of the sensitive nature of the topic, I ensured anonymity through use of pseudonyms, as recommended by Kaiser (2009).

The criteria for the inclusion of participants in this study were the following:

- Participants were only recruited from Gauteng to allow me easy access to participants, given financial constraints, and the fact that I live in Pretoria.
- Participants had to be out of the closet regarding their children's alternative sexuality.
- Diversity was ensured in the study by recruiting mothers from diverse social, educational and demographic backgrounds in order to obtain diverse views on parental reactions to disclosure of alternative sexuality and coming out of the closet about the alternative sexuality of their offspring.

Aside from the practical considerations for my choice (see above), I also chose Gauteng because I already had contact with a number young adults from OUT LGBT Well-being who are out of the closet and who were willing to put me into contact with their mothers in line with the requirements of UNISA's Board of Ethics. The choice of mothers only, rather than both parents, was informed by the fact that in black communities, care-giving and child-rearing are largely motherhood roles, and research shows that in South Africa, there are more single-parent households that are headed by mothers than by fathers (Dlamini, 2015; Kalule-Sabiti, Palamuleni, Makiwane, & Amoateng, 2007; Ntshongwana, Wright, Barnes, & Noble, 2015). Therefore, in such families, lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring would possibly come out to their mothers. The choice of mothers was also informed by the research findings of a study by Valentine (1997) that suggests that mothers are usually the first to be told because "much of the emotional work within families is usually done by mothers" (p. 487).

3.4.5 Data collection

Qualitative researchers gather multiple forms of data rather than rely on a single source. They may include interviews, observation and documents. Terre Blanche (2006) refers to this way of collecting data as triangulation, based on diverse sources.

In this study, to collect data from the participants, I employed open-ended, semi-structured interviews. The interview schedule was used to elicit information about the experiences of

black mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual children in relation to the mothers' coming out about their children's same-sex orientation. I chose interviews for two reasons: first, as a means of exploring and gathering narratives (stories) of lived experience; second, as a vehicle for developing a conversational relationship with each participant about the meaning and experience in question, as recommended by Ajjawi and Higgs (2007). I chose semi-structured interviews because they provided me with "an opportunity to hear the participants talk about a particular aspect of their life or experience" (Willig, 2008, p. 24). The advantage of using semi-structured interviews lies in the fact that they enable participants to share their stories in their own words. As the interviewer, I adopted an approach that was curious and facilitative, rather than confrontational and interrogative, in order to obtain as much information as possible about the phenomenon under study.

After analysing the face-to-face interviews, I conducted follow-up telephonic interviews with participants where I saw fit in order to get thick descriptions of the phenomenon being studied. As mentioned previously, another data collection technique that I used was a reflective journal in which I wrote my own thoughts after each interview and during the interpretation of the data.

3.4.6 Data analysis method

The design or method that I used in this study was Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Smith, & Osborn, 2003; Willig, 2008). It is a version of the phenomenological method. Willig (2008) distinguishes between two common approaches in phenomenology: the descriptive and the interpretative approaches.

The descriptive approach derives from the tradition of transcendental phenomenology. It acknowledges that perception can be more or less infused with ideas and judgements. Furthermore, descriptive phenomenologists take into consideration the role interpretation plays in the ways in which people perceive and experience the world. However, according to Willig (2008), they believe it is possible to minimise interpretation and to focus on that on "that which lies before one in phenomenological purity" (Husserl, 1931, cited in Willig, 2008, p. 55). To achieve this, descriptive phenomenology requires that a researcher brackets all past knowledge about the phenomenon that is being investigated. This knowledge includes both everyday knowledge and expert knowledge and theories. This requires a researcher to be "truly present to the phenomenon" (p. 86) as it presents itself in a particular instance, for example, through a research participant's account.

The second approach is interpretative phenomenology. Unlike descriptive phenomenology, interpretative phenomenology, according to Willig (2008), “aims to gain a better understanding of the nature and quality of phenomena as they present themselves” (p. 56). It does this by not separating description from interpretation. Instead, it considers all description to constitute a form of interpretation (Willig, 2008). In a similar vein, understanding cannot take place without those concerned making some preliminary assumptions about the meaning of what they are attempting to understand. This implies that a level of circularity is contained in the process of meaning-making. Therefore, unlike descriptive phenomenology, which attempts to bracket presuppositions and assumptions about the world, an interpretative phenomenological researcher works with and uses these presuppositions and assumptions in an attempt to advance understanding.

The aim of IPA, according to Smith and Osborn (2003), is “to explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world” (p. 51) and the main currency of an IPA study involves determining the “meanings [that] particular experiences, events, states hold for participants” (p. 51). However, Willig (2008) is quick to “accept the impossibility of gaining direct access to research participants’ experiences from the researcher’s perspective” (pp. 56-57). Instead, Willig (2008) recognises that such an exploration is influenced by “the researcher’s own view of the world as well as by the nature of the interaction between the researcher and the participant” (p. 57). A distinguishing characteristic of IPA is that it does not separate description and interpretation; instead, it draws on insights from the hermeneutic tradition and acknowledges that all description constitutes some form of interpretation (Willig, 2008).

According to Smith (2004), IPA has three characteristic features: it is “idiographic, inductive and interrogative” (p. 41). These characteristics are discussed in this order below, whereafter the stages in the data analysis are clarified.

3.4.6.1 Idiographic nature of IPA

Smith (2004) uses the term ‘idiographic’ to refer to the fact that researchers who use IPA should start with a detailed examination of one case at a time until some degree of closure or *Gestalt* of the case in question is achieved. Then the researcher can move on to the second case, and follows the same procedure, and so on. Cross-case analysis can only be done when the table of themes for each case has been established. The tables of each individual case can then be

interrogated against each other for convergence (similarities) and divergence (differences).

3.4.6.2 Inductive nature of IPA

The ‘inductive’ characteristic of IPA refers to the fact that researchers using it “employ techniques which are flexible enough” (Smith, 2004, p. 43) to accommodate “unanticipated topics or themes to emerge during the analysis” (Smith, 2004, p. 43). It is typical in qualitative research for researchers not to have specific hypotheses to verify or negate, based on the existing literature. Instead, IPA researchers construct a broader research question which allows for the collection of extensive data. As Smith (2004) puts it, “the most exhilarating data collection and analysis is often that which develops unanticipated while engaged with the material and the flexible data collection and techniques of IPA facilitate this” (p. 43).

3.4.6.3 Interrogative nature of IPA

Smith (2004) asserts that IPA differs from mainstream psychology in some of its epistemological assumptions and most of its methodological practices, but its psychological centre is important. For this reason, the key aim of IPA is that it attempts to make a contribution to psychology by interrogating or illuminating existing research. Therefore, the findings of the analysis are discussed in relation to existing psychological literature.

3.4.6.4 Four stages of data analysis

As mentioned above the data analysis method that I employed is IPA. I chose it because, as Smith and Osborn (2003) suggest, it assumes that the analyst is interested in learning something about the respondent’s psychological world. Willig (2008) uses the phrase “life world” (p. 56) to refer to the participant’s psychological world. In terms of its theoretical position, Biggerstaff and Thompson (2008), Smith and Eatough (2007), Shinebourne (2011), and Willig (2008) divide IPA into four stages. These are

- the initial reading of the transcripts, which aims to explore in detail participants’ personal lived experience and how participants make sense of that personal experience;
- the identification and labelling of themes;
- the linking of themes and the identification of clusters; and
- the production of a summarising table of themes with illustrative quotations.

During the first stage of IPA, I read and reread the texts (transcripts), while leaving the left-

hand margin for annotations of what was interesting or significant about what the respondent said, as suggested by Smith and Osborn (2003). Smith and Eatough (2007) also recommend the use of a reflexive diary that records details of the nature and origin of any emergent interpretations. I adopted this method.

In the second stage of analysis, I identified and labelled the themes that characterised each section of the text. During this stage, the initial notes were transformed into concise phrases whose aim was to capture the essential quality of the findings.

In the third stage, I introduced a structure into the analysis by clustering emergent themes and investigating connections between them. I identified what Smith and Eatough (2007) refer to as superordinate themes during this stage of analysis.

In the fourth and final stage of analysis, I produced a summarising table of the structured themes, together with quotations to illustrate each theme. I later integrated the themes across transcripts in order to identify shared themes that captured the essence of the participants' experience of coming out as mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual children. Biggerstaff and Thompson (2008) stress the fact that IPA adopts a method that is a "cyclical process where the researcher proceeds through several iterative stages" (p. 218). In the discussion of the findings in Section 4.4, the consolidated summarising table is included in three parts – I split it into three tables (see Tables 1 to 3) for the convenience of the reader, linking these tables specifically to the discussion of the three superordinate themes that emerged in the analysis.

3.4.7 Ethical considerations

The main method of collecting information in qualitative research is through human interaction. Terre Blanche et al. (2006) observe that there is a mistaken assumption that qualitative research is exempt from ethical considerations, based on the idea that qualitative method is conversational and that data analysis attempts to preserve the integrity of the data collected. Terre Blanche et al. (2006) refute this assumption, stating that qualitative research also involves many ethical issues.

Ethical guidelines that I followed in this study derive from Brinkman and Kvale (2008). A prerequisite for obtaining informed consent from the participants, according to these authors, involves the researcher's provision of the rationale for conducting the study and explanation of the general design of the study. Because this study explored the emotions and experiences of

mothers after discovering that their offspring are same-sex attracted or are bisexual, two written consent forms were issued: one to mothers of lesbian, gay and bisexual offspring (see Appendix 5) and the other to their offspring (see Appendix 4). The offspring were all over 18 years and could give informed consent for themselves. I informed all participants and their offspring fully about the nature of the interview and the research process. I also informed them that participation in this study was their own choice, and that they could terminate their participation at any given time. Finally, I also informed them that the study would be made publicly available to them after completion (see Appendix 1).

As previously mentioned (see Section 3.4.3), because the study involved human subjects and dealt with a sensitive topic, namely same-sex sexual orientation and bisexuality of offspring, I got approval for my study from UNISA's Board of Ethics, which adheres to the prescriptions of the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA). I did not envisage any harm from the interviews conducted with the participants, while acknowledging that the topic was sensitive. I also strove to ensure that the interviews afforded the mothers with an opportunity to reflect on what in many communities and households remains a sensitive and/or taboo issue, as well as a possibility to contribute to growth and healing. However, since the opportunity to reflect could also reopen old wounds of the past or unfinished business, participants were reassured that if the interview or research process proved to be too traumatic for a particular participant, the participant concerned had the right to discontinue the interview process at any time. Since this is a research study, and not a counselling engagement, I made appropriate arrangements for referrals, if the need for debriefing and/or counselling arose. In Pretoria, I secured counselling services at OUT LGBT Well-being.

I ensured the privacy of participants and respected it at all times. Since the subject of the study is a sensitive one for many people in some communities, I ensured confidentiality and anonymity of respondents through the use of pseudonyms. Because I needed to use an audio recorder in order to ensure the accuracy of the transcription, I sought permission from the participants to record the interviews and asked the participants to sign the informed consent forms before the interviews commenced.

3.4.8 Measures to ensure trustworthiness

In quantitative research, an important consideration is the reliability and validity of a study. The term 'reliability' implies that the same set of findings should be obtained repeatedly in

replications of the study. This term is suitable for research which adopts a positivist point of view. Terre Blanche et al. (2006) define reliability as “the degree to which the results are repeatable” (p. 92). This definition is more suitable for quantitative research. Unlike positivists who believe they are studying a reality that is stable, interpretive (and constructivist) researchers do not assume they are studying a stable and unchanging reality and therefore they accept that a study’s findings cannot be replicated. Lincoln and Guba (1985) use alternative terms that are appropriate to naturalistic research. To establish trustworthiness of a study, Lincoln and Guba (1985) use the terms credibility, authenticity, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. To achieve credibility of a study, they propose that the researcher uses techniques that allow for prolonged engagement in the field and triangulation of data sources, methods or investigators. Ponterotto (2006) asserts that thick description goes beyond surface appearances to include the context, detail, emotion and webs of social relationships. Furthermore, he goes on to say thick description includes taking note of voice, feelings, actions and meanings the participants bring to the research. In qualitative research, reliability is substituted by dependability, which acknowledges that the results will be subject to change and instability.

Similarly, objectivity in qualitative research is replaced by confirmability. Both can be established through an audit of the research process. In this study, I established credibility through supervisor involvement. The supervisor is an accomplished professor with expertise in the supervision of research on a variety of branches of psychology, especially sexualities. He reviewed the interview transcripts and engaged in ongoing discussions with me, and provided me with constant feedback.

I accomplished transferability in this study by providing ‘thick descriptions’ of responses of participants through direct quotations to capture their actual words. I also used cross-case analysis to enhance transferability. Cross-case analysis allowed for comparison of cases and pointing out similarities and differences. This enabled me, as Huberman and Miles (1994) suggest, to gain a deeper understanding of the conditions under which the phenomenon occurs.

Having discussed the methodology used in the study, I now proceed the presentation of research findings and discussion of the study’s findings.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present and discuss the research findings of this study. The chapter is divided into three sections. I first provide the context of the participants' coming out narratives in the form of short biographies of each participant. Then, in line with the chosen methodology, IPA, I present the main themes and sub-themes that emerged from the transcripts in a table, together with verbatim extracts from the interviews to provide lived context within which the themes emerged. This is followed by a discussion of themes and sub-themes in relation to the existing literature. As already indicated, I replaced the participants' names with pseudonyms to protect their identities, and these pseudonyms are used throughout the discussion.

4.2 Summaries of Participants' Narratives

4.2.1 Participant #1 – Vuyiswa

Vuyiswa is a 52-year-old Sepedi-speaking lay counsellor at Nwapa in Natalspruit, now known as Katlehong. Katlehong is a low-income area in the East Rand of Gauteng. She is married and has three children. The 33-year-old lesbian daughter is the eldest. She is followed by a younger sister who is 24 and a 15-year-old little brother. Although Vuyiswa's husband is not the biological father of her children, he is supportive and accepting of Vuyiswa's lesbian daughter. Vuyiswa's educational background is a Standard 6 certificate (Grade 8 in today's qualification classification). She works as a counsellor of people with diabetes, HIV/AIDS and cancer. Vuyiswa was totally open to the interview and was very forthcoming with information throughout the interview. At the time, Vuyiswa and her family rented two rooms at the back of a larger house belonging to a relative of hers. Vuyiswa's lesbian daughter uses one room, and Vuyiswa, her husband and her son share the other room, which also functions as a kitchen. The other daughter lives elsewhere. Vuyiswa is a strong Christian believer in God, and belongs to an Apostolic church.

I approached her at a workshop organised by the United States Embassy at the University of the Witwatersrand (see Section 3.4.2). She came to the workshop with her daughter, B, who works in a maintenance department at a local hospital. B's highest standard passed is Grade

11. The interview took place in her daughter's bedroom. Since discovering her daughter's same-sex attraction, Vuyiswa has been active in championing the rights of lesbian, gay or bisexual people. Vuyiswa is openly supportive of her lesbian daughter and is an ally of lesbian, gay or bisexual community.

4.2.2 Participant #2 – Mamana

Mamana is a 65-year-old single (never married) mother of four children: three adult girls and her gay son, who is 30 years old and is the youngest child in the family. The first daughter is 49 years old, the second is 45, and the third is 36. One of the daughters has since passed on. Mamana is now retired, but previously she worked as a clerk in a government department in Pretoria. Her home language is Sepedi and she resides in Mamelodi, a low-income area in the east of Pretoria, in Gauteng. She has also passed Standard 6 (Grade 8 in today's classification). Mamana is a deeply religious Anglican. She expressed frustration at the negative comments that some priests make about same-sex attracted people in their churches, and she felt helpless, because she felt one cannot express disagreement with what priests say during their sermons. However, Mamana received support from her other children, as they accepted their brother's same-sex sexual orientation long before she did and talked openly about it in front of her.

Mamana's gay son works for an NPO that caters for the well-being of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community in Gauteng. I approached Mamana through her son, J. The interview took place on the patio of Mamana's house. At the start of the interview, she was a bit reserved. It seemed as if it was difficult for Mamana to reconcile herself with the fact that her son, J, is gay. During the interview, she often sighed and her voice was melancholic, but as the interview progressed, she opened up to my questions and even volunteered some information. As a result we shared a few laughs about some things she perceived as strange about her son while he was growing up.

4.2.3 Participant #3 – Lina

Lina is a 65-year-old Sepedi-speaking nurse. She is divorced. She has two children: a daughter who is 35 and a gay son, A, who is 33 years old. Lina also lives in Mamelodi, a low-income area in the east of Pretoria, in Gauteng. She has a degree in nursing. In 1999, while her son was still at school, she went to work in the United Kingdom as a nurse in order to ensure that she could pay for her children's tertiary education. Lina's family is a close-knit family consisting of Lina, her daughter, her gay son A, and another male (the children's cousin, who is a few

years older than A). Lina asked this cousin to live with them in order to serve as a role model and guide A in male-related things such as washing properly, grooming and appropriate masculine behaviour. Although A has never disclosed his sexual orientation directly to Lina, she is supportive, and so is A's sister. Currently, Lina works as a clinic nurse in Mamelodi. Her son, A, has a BCom degree. He lives with his mother in Mamelodi, but works in Johannesburg and commutes from Pretoria. Lina holds very strong Christian beliefs and is a staunch Roman Catholic.

I accessed Lina through Mamana, J's mother. Mamana identified Lina as one of two mothers who were positive role models who helped Mamana with her adjustment process and acceptance of her son's identity as gay. Mamana's son J is very good friends with A. The interview took place on the veranda of Lina's home. At the start of the interview, Lina was reserved, but as the interview progressed, she became very outspoken about her experiences.

4.2.4 Participant #4 – Mantombi

Mantombi is a 55-year-old Sepedi-speaking married woman. She is a mother of two: a boy and a 34-year-old lesbian daughter. Mantombi's daughter, D, is an adopted child. Her biological mother is Mantombi's youngest sister, who, according to Mantombi, liked "good times" and did not want to settle down. Since Mantombi is the oldest child in her family of origin, the responsibility of looking after her sister's child fell on her. Mantombi's highest level of education is Standard Six (Grade 8). She lives in Mamelodi and is a domestic worker for a white family in Faerie Glen, a suburb in the east of Pretoria, in the Gauteng province. She commutes from Mamelodi five days a week. Mantombi's daughter, D, lives and works in Mamelodi, but has since left home. Mantombi's entire nuclear family is very supportive of her adopted lesbian daughter. The only family member who is not supportive of D is D's married biological sister, who is 26 years old. She disapproves of her sister's same-sex orientation and is ashamed of her, especially when D visits her sister's marital home.

I met Mantombi through a colleague at work with whom I had discussed my topic. My colleague told me that one of her partner's relatives has a gay daughter, and got me the contact. The interview took place at Mantombi's home in her sitting room. Mantombi was very comfortable during the interview and told me many details about raising a child with an alternative sexual orientation. Mantombi is a devout Christian and belongs to the Church of Apostles.

4.2.5 Participant #5 – Maria

Maria is a 50-year-old Swazi mother of three boys – 22-year-old twins and the gay son, who was 25 at the time of the study. Maria also lives in Mamelodi, with her husband and two children, in a friend's house, Participant 5 in this study. In the past, she worked at a retail store, Shoprite Checkers, as a cashier. More recently, she worked as a domestic worker for a white family in Faerie Glen, in Pretoria East, in Gauteng. At the time of the interview, she was out of a job, because her employers had emigrated to the United Kingdom. Of the six mothers, she is the only one who reported that she knew that her son is gay long before he disclosed the fact to her. Both Maria and her son N have a Grade 12 certificate. Maria's gay son lives and works in Johannesburg. Maria holds strong Christian beliefs and belongs to the Church of the Apostles. Maria's husband is not the biological father of her gay son. He is supportive and accepting of Maria's gay son, and so are N's twin brothers, and Mantombi's whole family.

I accessed Maria through Mantombi, Participant 4 in this study. When I arrived at Mantombi's place, I learnt that Maria is also a mother of a gay son and was also willing to be interviewed. The interview took place at Mantombi's home, where Maria, her boys and her husband, live. Of the six mothers, Maria was the most outspoken during the interview and was very curious about my own experiences raising a gay son.

4.2.6 Participant #6 – Mpho

Mpho is a 54-year-old Sepedi-speaking mother of two. She has a 29-year-old son and a 25-year old daughter who is bisexual. Mpho's highest level of education is a PhD in Educational Psychology and she works for an institution of higher education in the Gauteng province. Both mother and daughter live in a Pretoria East suburb in Gauteng. Her bisexual daughter, S, is studying towards an MA degree in Drama and is very active in the lesbian, gay and bisexual community. Mpho's daughter also works as an assistant lecturer at an institution of higher learning in Gauteng. Mpho is a strong Christian believer and a devout Roman Catholic. Following the discovery that her daughter is bisexual, Mpho received unconditional support from her son, but Mpho's mother and Mpho's younger sister were not very supportive. While it seemed it was mainly because Mpho's mother did not know what bisexuality means and seemed to think her granddaughter's sexuality was a passing phase, Mpho's sister appeared to be negative and judgemental. However, Mpho's best friend was very supportive of her.

I accessed Mpho's daughter, S, at OUT LGBT Well-being, where she attended fortnightly youth meetings for lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender people. The interview took place at Mpho's workplace in a room used for consultations and visitors. The atmosphere was very warm and cordial. Mpho was very open to my questions and was thoughtful and reflective in her answers.

4.3 Presentation of Findings

Using IPA, I analysed the participants' transcripts from the interviews I conducted with them. Three main themes/sets of themes with sub-themes emerged from the analysis of the data. These are the theme of the mothers' journeys; themes related to the study's research questions; and mothers' remaining concerns relating to their lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring. Each of these had a number of subthemes, as indicated in Figure 1 (below) that emerged from my analysis of the interview transcripts with representative extracts that illustrate the themes and sub-themes.¹

The first main theme is the nature of the mothers' journeys, with the following sub-themes: awareness of difference prior to discovery of their offspring's lesbian, gay or bisexual orientation; shock, confusion and disbelief; denial; searching for causality; searching for information; seeking support by confiding in others; and queering the family home.

The second set of themes address the study's research questions in the following order: reasons or motivations for the mothers' coming out; the impact of the mothers' coming out on their relationships with their lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring, and with the lesbian, gay and bisexual community at large; and the meanings these mothers ascribed to having a gay, lesbian or bisexual child.

Finally, the third set of themes relate to the concerns these mothers had regarding having children belonging to a sexual minority, in this order: the gender role of their lesbian, gay or bisexual child in a relationship, and the real or perceived fear of victimisation of the lesbian, gay or bisexual child in some communities.

¹ The findings discussed in detail below have already been presented in an article published while the dissertation was being finalised, "Parental coming out: the journeys of Black South African mothers through their narratives", in the *South African Review of Sociology*, 47(3) 110-128.

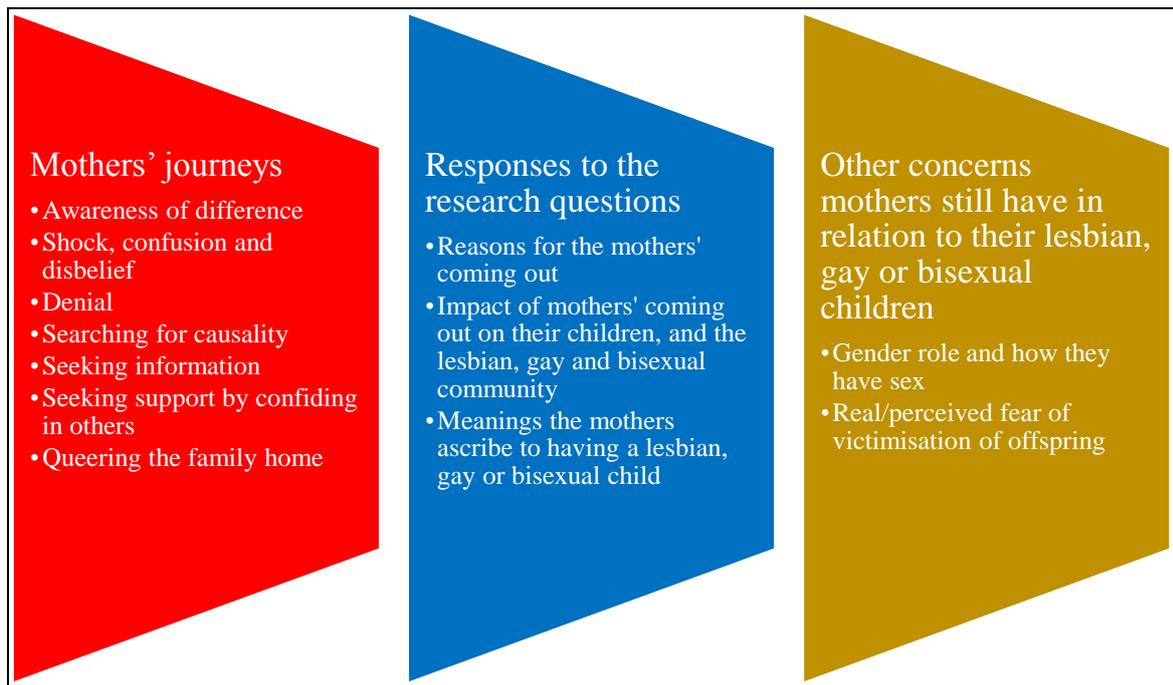


Figure 1. Summary of main themes and sub-themes

These themes are discussed in detail below. Each section starts with a table of that main theme, with its subthemes, and illustrative extracts from the interviews where these themes occur.

In each table, I include the participants' pseudonyms and line numbers in the transcript to enable easy cross-referencing to the data.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

4.4.1 Theme 1: The mothers' journeys

In this study, I asked the participating mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring to look back to the time when they first learnt that their children were same-sex attracted and to reflect on their feelings at the time, what they did, who they told or not told, whether they experienced any changes in the course of time, etc.

Table 1. Theme 1: The mothers' journeys

Sub-themes	Illustrative extracts
Awareness of difference prior to coming out	
<i>Tell-tale signs, including gender-atypical behaviour</i>	<p>“At age 7, she started to act funny ... she refused to wear skirts... and then when she walks she developed a swag – she had a bumpy walk. But later, she refused to wear girl’s clothes totally. At about 10/12 years she only wore boys’ clothes, she did not want girl’s trousers at all. [...] ...but I also noticed she liked fist-fighting ... but I thought it was just a childish thing she was doing I still did not realise ...” (Vuyiswa, 18-25)</p> <p>“I became fully aware when the teacher told me that B sends her romantic cards, the ones lovers send to each other and the message in the cards is for lovers.... That is when my eyes got open ...” (Vuyiswa, 63-65)</p> <p>“...I remember now is that J was always indoors. He never wanted to go outside the house.” (Mamana, 629-632)</p> <p>“He was effeminate, he behaved like girls and he had many friends who were girls. He could even sleep with these girls on the same bed and nothing ever happened ...” (Mamana, 648-655)</p> <p>“I remember something, when he was growing up, he liked cleaning and he would use the short broom the one mostly used by girls. I laugh now when I think about that. He wouldn’t use the long broom he wanted to go down when he swept. I now find this funny especially because I didn’t make anything of it then. [...] Also I realised that while growing up he never went out to parties with straight guys. Again this did not make me feel puzzled. <i>Hayi</i>, it has been an experience and a half.” (Mamana, 929-934)</p> <p>“Even before I left for England I had picked it up, his mannerisms and movement in particular were making me uncomfortable. [...] [I asked] Steve [a gay friend of Lina’s that she met in England while working there] ‘You know what, I’m worried I’ve been home and my son behaves more like a girl than like a boy, could it be that he is gay?’” (Lina, 1019-1027)</p> <p>“I first noticed only when he was about six years old. I could see that the child is indeed a gay. I did not want to talk about it especially to old people. In 2002, he himself said to me: “Mom, if I told you I was not a boy, would you be surprised?” (Maria, 1290-1293)</p> <p>“I knew because of her behaviour ... She acted more like a boy rather than like a girl. As a child, she preferred to wear trousers not skirts. And I would ask what the problem was and she would not say anything, but she would insist on wearing trousers. [...] Once she came from school and told me that there was this boy who said he loved her and that she beat him up.” (Mantombi, 1639-1643)</p> <p>“At about 12 years, I arranged to have her ears pierced as all girls her age do. She refused flat. I said, ‘Why, but you’re a girl?’ What’s wrong? Look all your friends wear earrings. How will you wear earrings?” (Mantombi, 1660-1662)</p> <p>“... When she was buying clothes last year she said we should go to the man’s section. I asked her why she was doing that. She told me she preferred boy’s clothes not girls’ clothes. I pressed on the questioning her hoping she would tell me the whole truth. [...] And then she bought a man’s black trouser, with back pockets. What crowned it for me was when she bought a man’s wallet. I</p>

Sub-themes	Illustrative extracts
	could not contain myself... I asked once more.... I said, ‘D, why are you buying a man’s wallet... You are a girl.’” (Mantombi, 1754-1763)
Shock, confusion and disbelief	<p>“They [people] call you <i>umfana</i> (a young man).” (Mantombi, 1664, in reference to her daughter)</p> <p>“Yes, I don’t worry about it and I like it – I’m happy when they say that. The boys greet me with ‘Heita my bru.’ And I like it.” (Mantombi’s daughter, 1664-1666)</p> <p>“To me it was Yhu hu? And I really thought she was joking because last month you were dating a boy ... and now this ... ?” (Mpho, 2043-2044)</p> <p>“I felt shocked. I asked myself questions and I answered them and I thought maybe the reason my child is like this is maybe because inside herself she is made like that?” (Vuyiswa, 110-112)</p> <p>“I suppose I was shocked and not expecting it and therefore did not see it (gender non-conforming behaviour) although it was there right in front of me... Eish! It was very difficult.” (Mamana, 662-663)</p> <p>“Even before I left for England, I had picked it up, his mannerisms and movement in particular were making me uncomfortable ...” (Lina, 1019-1020)</p> <p>“I did not show the shock because I felt he could not take it if he felt rejected. He was troubled, he was being isolated by others. He needed someone who was on his side. That is me, it had to be me, the mother.” (Maria, 1526-1528)</p> <p>“I was shocked and confused although there were tell-tale signs.” (Mantombi, 1690)</p>
Denial	<p>“At age 7 she started acting funny ...she refused to wear skirts, but we <i>forced</i> [my emphasis] her to wear them and then when she walked, she developed a bumpy walk. But later, she refused to wear girl’s clothes totally. She changed her actions. At about 10/12 she wore boys’ clothes, she did not want girls’ trousers at all”. (Vuyiswa, 18-21)</p> <p>“No, I didn’t really understand immediately ... but I also noticed she liked fist-fighting ... like a boy. But I thought it was just a childish thing she was doing. I still did not realise ...” (Vuyiswa, 24-25)</p> <p>“People could say things that upset you. Why does your boy look like this or that? Your boy is not like other boys. They would ask why he behaved like this or like that? Why does he look like this or that? [...] He was effeminate, he behaved like girls and he got many friends who were girls. He could even sleep with these girls on the same bed and nothing ever happened, <i>Hayi</i> it was not easy. [...] I think I was in denial. I did not want to see what was. Looking back, I can see there were signs...” (Mamana, 643-654)</p>

Sub-themes	Illustrative extracts
	<p>“No, but what I can remember is that when growing up he didn’t play with boys. He was always among the girls. In fact I realised this later. He never played with boys. I definitely was in denial because I was aware of the fact that he was not a typical boy.” (Mamana, 777-779)</p> <p>“I was trying to find out if she had a boyfriend. [...] Yes I guess maybe I was in denial, I would hear and see what she was doing, but in my mind I expected ‘normal’ things ... I expected her to have a boyfriend.” (Mantombi, 1696-1700)</p>
Searching for causality	<p>“Mh! You see B became a victim² ... when she was 5 years old. [...] Then after this accident, she became confused when she was with male people. She did not want to do anything with them. She didn’t even want her own father, even my own brothers when they played with her.” (Vuyiswa, 8-16)</p> <p>“And then it dawned on me that her behaviour was similar to mine ... the fact that I myself felt like that at some stage, felt like this [rejecting male suitors] because I had tried to be (and felt like having romantic relationships with women). [...] I was just doing it (turning to women for romantic love) because of anger ... You see I had been worse than my daughter ... I had been a victim [of rape] many, many, many times ... many, many, many times.” (Vuyiswa, 164-170)</p> <p>“Yes, I always blamed the father. I thought because he was not here we did not live with each other we separated and he was not around when J was growing up. I thought if he were around maybe things would never have been like this ... I thought things may have been different. Of course, now I know it’s not his fault.” (Mamana, 837-840)</p> <p>“How can I put this now? There was a time... he’s got a lot of female friends ... There are other friends of his in D6.³ There were only two beds in that house. Once he slept in this girl’s home and there were two beds only in the girl’s bedroom and because those parents know that J is gay – they were not worried about her sharing her room with him. It made me realise that those parents had accepted that J is gay. The fact that he could sleep in the same room with a girl the whole night and nothing happened was telling to me. [...] It told me that the girl’s parents were not worried about him hence they allowed him to share a room with their daughter in their house. That told me something... That they had in fact accepted that he is gay ... that he was not a threat, he was harmless. They trusted him. Most parents do not allow their daughters to share a bedroom with boys in their homes. The fact that he could share a room the whole night with a girl told me clearly he is gay.” (Mamana, 765-775)</p>

² B was raped when she was five years old

³ The name of a section in Mamelodi

Sub-themes	Illustrative extracts
	<p>“A was always surrounded by us and girls and this was worrying me a lot ... he was always with girls, he played with them all the time. I was concerned about that. I asked [the psychologist] if it was a problem.” (Lina, 963-965)</p> <p>“I thought it was the Drama thing. It happens in Hollywood. Once I read about it I felt like it was her world. It makes sense to her ... it is her world. Since not being a drama person I realised it did not make sense to me...” (Mpho, 2074-2076)</p>
Seeking information	<p>“I was so confused ... To me it was like ... I always loved it when I know what is ... That’s when I went to read some more about it. I could not understand the greyness of the area. [...] Reading made me think it was the drama thing ... they were just too free. How can somebody be like that today and like that tomorrow? What does that say about you as a person?” (Mpho, 2065-2071)</p> <p>“I asked her [Mpho’s daughter] what does it mean to be ‘bi’. I don’t understand, please explain... Because I have a (female) colleague who is married to another woman and they have children through artificial insemination, but hers, I didn’t know. I’ve also worked with people who are straight and I know it is choices people make about this. I asked: ‘But what does this one mean?’ I can’t remember the words she used ... I think she said, it depends on whom I fall in love with at any given time...” (Mpho, 2046-2051)</p> <p>“... and there was something in my house ... a gathering in my house and A came with the mother... Ah! That lady taught me something unaware. She was open with her boy ... and the mother would say, ‘A this and A that’. I looked at them, the bond between them was amazing. She was totally involved with him. I asked myself why can’t I support my boy? [...] ... and there was another lady, J’s mother she was also very supportive of her son. She appeared on TV with her son and she did an interview where she was talking openly about her gay son and she was educating people about having a gay child. She was making the public aware that all these kids ever want is acceptance. [...] I thought her brave ... Both helped me a lot; it was not easy for me. So these things built me up ... they helped me a lot, it was not easy.” (Mamana, 698-716)</p> <p>“[Social workers] explained to me that her behaviour is influenced by hormones. It has nothing to do with anger ... they said certain hormones make people (women in this case) behave in certain ways. They said I can take it to anger, but it has nothing to do with that ...” (Vuyiswa, 378-381)</p> <p>“In our training of MSMs (Men who have Sex with Men) we learnt that gender is not male or female, but it is the oppressive rule of the home ... the one that has to be followed. Some children have grown under strict gender rules, so after they are married they realise this is not their thing. Some run away from home, live in towns because of it. They run so that they can be who they want to be.” (Vuyiswa, 484-488)</p>

Sub-themes	Illustrative extracts
	<p>“... he (A) was always surrounded by us and girls and this was worrying me a lot ... he was always with girls, he played with them all the time. I was concerned about that. I asked (the psychologist) if it was a problem.” (Lina, 963-965)</p> <p>“I said ‘Steve [a gay friend of Lina’s that she met in England while working there], you know what, I’m worried I’ve been home and my son behaves more like a girl than like a boy, could it be that he is gay?’” (Lina, 1025-1027)</p> <p>“Once when I was in a taxi, one woman was talking about this saying her boy doesn’t like associating with boys. I moved next to her and I told her that I also have such a boy... and she [the woman in the taxi] went on to say the child must be an <i>isitabane</i>.⁴ [...] This word <i>isitabane</i> really upset me ... The woman could see this. She then said: ‘Don’t feel bad about this. It is not an anomaly ... it has always existed in the olden days and it is still here now but in the past it was hidden ...’ She told me as time goes on I will see clearly from his behaviour that he is a gay...” (Maria, 1411-1419)</p>
Seeking support by confiding in others	<p>“It was about 1999. That is when I went to the UK. Abroad, I had a friend, I made friends with someone who is gay, Steve. During our conversations with Steve, I said ‘Steve, you know what, I’m worried; I’ve been home and my son behaves more like a girl than a boy, could he be gay?’” (Lina, 1024-1027)</p> <p>“... ‘I don’t know whether what I’m doing is the right thing allowing him to be like this.’ The priest was a soft-spoken man. He said: ‘It is not for us to judge.’ What he advised me to do was to pray about it and he advised me to let God give me direction and I prayed about it. [...] I had a friend...M to whom I confided ... I confided my frustrations to her. She advised me to leave him alone and told me when he is ready he will go back (to church). She told me that the more we pester children, the more they resist.” (Lina, 1210-1215)</p> <p>“‘Mama, something is up with this child. Look at how she dresses and behaves...?’ [...] ‘Don’t worry this is how she is ... she is made like that ... she is not going to change. We can’t do anything about it.’ [...] Oh! Yes, she assured me that ‘this is how she was created by God ... nothing is going to change’.” (Mantombi, 1810-1815)</p> <p>“First, I spoke to my son, but I realised he already knew ... I trust my son a lot and we talk about everything. Then I spoke to my sister, the one who comes after me. [...] She listened, but you realise it is a taboo. It’s one of those things where you realise you have exposed yourself to people who look down at you and is asking, ‘What have you done as a mother?’ [...] The other person I</p>

⁴ Person with two sexual organs (intersex)

Sub-themes	Illustrative extracts
	<p>confided to is my mother. [...] My mom listened ... they both did not judge me though they just listened. I don't even think today she understands. I think she thinks it is a phase, but she never talks about it." (Mpho, 2164-2174)</p> <p>"Once when I was in a taxi one woman was talking about this saying her boy doesn't like associating with boys. I moved next to her and I told her that I also have such a boy ... and she went on to say the child must be an <i>isitabane</i>" (Maria, 1411-1412)</p>
Queering the family home	<p>"Yes, I am proud... I have a shirt that I wear, it says, 'my daughter she is a lesbian'. [...] Yes, if they have friends like them, we must allow them to come to our homes with their friends and as parents we should not say 'No you cannot come with your friends here, what will the neighbours say?' They must enjoy themselves here at our homes." (Vuyiswa, 605-610)</p> <p>"When relatives would come to the house and they tell him, 'don't be like a girl' blah, blah, blah etc. or ask him when he is going to get married, I'd say to them, "No uncle, it's not a boy he is a gay. They would also ask when he is going to get married. Again I'd tell them, 'No, he's not going to get married he is a gay...'" (Mamana, 795-798)</p> <p>"We had a party on his 21st, there were so many gays here. There were lots of gays. They were singing the birthday song, but saying: 'She's a jolly good fellow' (she laughs). One of my children (the one who passed on) said to me, 'listen to that song nicely, the song ... does not say, "He's a Jolly Good Fellow"... Hey?'" (Mamana, 829-832)</p> <p>"Oh that makes me think of something... about J ... and his activist work. Once, some gentlemen came from Germany and J was showing them around here in the township, at the schools. They passed by here at home and they chatted with me for a long time. They were so impressed with the work J is doing at his NPO. They asked me if I was not impressed with him. From that conversation I learnt about the good activist work my son is doing and I had never thought about it that way. So the German people opened my eyes to see the good work my own son was doing. They made me very proud of him...." (Mamana, 903-909)</p> <p>"... I saw the other side of a relationship. For me it was more of a relationship than anything else... I could see she was in love with this wonderful person ... But when I listen to her talk to this woman, and ... and ... they call each other, sometimes she'll ask me to give her my phone because she was going to phone etc. I'd listen to her talk about her partner, decisions they are making together, etc. For me to understand that this is a normal relationship ... it's no longer just two women together, but I see beyond that ... I see a relationship.... They would talk about the future. They'll talk about buying a house together." (Mpho, 2120-2127)</p> <p>"Yes, I would have preferred it if they were here at home, even if they made noise and I could not sleep, at least I would know my son is safe." (Lina, 1079- 1080)</p> <p>"At times I even cook for them and invite them for example, I cooked Christmas lunch..." (Lina, 1103- 1104)</p>

Sub-themes

Illustrative extracts

“At about twenty years, he asked me, “Mama, can you clean up the house and cook nice food, I have a visitor who is coming to visit here at home.” I asked him who the person was and why I was supposed to cook when it was not even a Sunday? I remember it was a Saturday, we normally cook a nice meal on Sundays. [...] Well, I cleaned and cooked and at about one o’clock, he announced that his friend had come and was outside. I told him to invite him inside. He came in and introduced himself and said he was my son’s friend ... he did not say ‘boyfriend’. He was respectful ...” (Maria 1547-1555)

When a son or daughter discloses that he or she is lesbian, gay or bisexual, parents and siblings experience a myriad of emotions, most of which are negative (Ben-Ari, 1995b; Caldwell, 2004; Crosbie-Burnett et al., 1996; Pearlman, 2005; Phillips, 2007; Saltzburg, 2004; Strommen, 1989; Willoughby et al., 2006). However, some studies (Crosbie-Burnett et al., 1996; Devine, 1983-1984; Saltzburg, 2004) suggest that parents of lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring usually already have some awareness of the fact that their child is different from peers of the child's gender, prior to the actual coming out as lesbian, gay or bisexual.

In this study, with the exception of one mother out of the six participants, these mothers reported that immediately after the disclosure they experienced a period of grief that was characterised by stage-like sequences consisting of awareness of difference, shock, confusion and disbelief, denial, searching for causality, searching for information, seeking support, and eventually queering the family home. These responses are discussed below, in this order.

4.4.1.1 Awareness of difference

This sub-theme refers to the mothers' early awareness that their child was different from peers of his or her gender prior to discovering that this son or daughter was same-sex attracted. The literature on same-sex orientation suggests that after disclosure by a son that he is gay, or by a daughter that she is lesbian, parents may suddenly remember that there were some tell-tale signs they had observed about their child (although they did not understand these signs at the time) that were indicative of the fact that their offspring was different from his or her peers (Crosbie-Burnett et al. 1996; Devine, 1983-1984; Saltzburg, 2004).

Devine (1983-1984) refers to this unconscious awareness as 'subliminal awareness'. It involves vague suspicions, often based on gender atypical actions or characteristics, for example, a girl who likes to play rough sports, or a boy who plays with dolls (Savin-Williams & Dubé, 1998). Some scholars also use the term 'early awareness' (Livingston, 2014; Saltzburg, 2004) to refer to the semi-conscious awareness that the parents of lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring report, indicating that this awareness often dates back to the childhood of their son or daughter.

In retrospect, all the participating mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual children, except for one, noted that their offspring were different from their peers during childhood years. Some harboured a suspicion that their offspring might be gay or lesbian before the actual moment of discovery and/or disclosure. For most of these mothers, this awareness was based on gender non-conforming behaviour that they observed, and that was quite unsettling for many of the

mothers. The tell-tale signs that alerted the mothers to the fact that their offspring's behaviour differed from that of their peers included the dominance of masculine behaviour in girls, as reflected in their refusal to wear skirts or dresses, a preference to be addressed with a masculine term of reference, for example, "my bro" (my brother) for Vuyiswa's and Mantombi's daughters. Other tell-tale signs exhibited by Vuyiswa's daughter, in particular, were a "bumpy" walk which resembled that of a young man and liking fist-fighting, another behaviour more prevalent in boys. In Mantombi's daughter's case, the unsettling behaviour was a preference for men's clothing rather than girls' clothing, and it started in early childhood. This continued to young adulthood when her daughter shopped in the men's section, buying only men's attire, including a man's wallet instead of a woman's handbag.

As with the lesbian women discussed above, certain gender non-conforming behaviour alerted the mothers of gay sons to the fact that their boys behaved in culturally different ways from other boys their age. This gender non-conforming behaviour by both the girls and boys in this study confirms research findings by Savin-Williams (1998), who mentions boys who prefers playing with dolls, and girls who play rough sports. In view of the fact that South African culture is largely patriarchal and heteronormative, Mamana, Lina and Maria's sons' behavioural characteristics clashed with expectations. From a very early age, all three boys preferred the company of girls to that of boys. According to Mamana, some of the gender atypical behavioural characteristics that her son exhibited included a preference for being indoors rather than outdoors, exhibiting effeminate characteristics and, as mentioned above, spending so much time in the company of girls that other parents permitted him to participate in sleepovers at girls' homes, which it is totally uncommon for black families to permit. In a similar vein, Lina's son's "mannerisms and movements", as well as his playing with girls all the time were the tell-tale signs which made Lina extremely "uncomfortable". Maria also reported that her son was overtly effeminate, so much so that she realised as early as when he was only six years old that her son N was gay.

International research on the subject (Kimmel and Llewellyn 2012; Lippa, 2008) also links gender non-conformity with the development of a same-sex orientation in later life. For example, according to Lippa (2008), gender non-conformity or gender atypical behaviour has been associated with the later emergence of an adult gay identity. In the *Hernandez-Montiel v INS* (2000) court case in the United States, the court established that "the ability to clearly identify an applicant as homosexual through gender non-conforming behaviors increased the

likelihood of persecution” (Kimmel & Llewellyn, 2012, p. 1089). It is on this basis that Kimmel and Llewellyn (2012, p. 1089) concluded that “gender nonconforming men are not just gay, but [they] are gay enough for asylum in the United States”. In other words, any gender non-conforming characteristics that same-sex attracted people exhibit may make them vulnerable to discrimination, prejudiced attitudes and, in some cases, persecution and abuse of all kinds. The findings of Kimmel and Llewellyn (2012) indirectly confirm those of a South African study by Nel and Judge (2008). According to Nel and Judge (2008), there is a relationship between “gender presentation and vulnerability to victimisation” (p. 19) and they argue that this points to “the gendered nature of homophobic discrimination” (p.19).

A study by Cook et al. (2013) produced interestingly different findings on the relationship between gender non-conformity and mental health among black South African gay and bisexual men. They found that black gender non-conforming gay and bisexual men in South Africa suffer neither more mental distress (unlike their white gender non-conforming counterparts in other countries such as the United States), nor more discrimination due to their gender non-conformity. Rabie and Lesch (2009) and Reid (2005) found that black gay and bisexual males in the South African context tend to be more out and overtly feminine. Consequently, Cook et al. (2013) speculate that black gay and bisexual men’s outness in South Africa seems to play a protective role in the environment in which they live.

In summary, awareness of difference as reflected by gender non-conformity in terms of behaviour does seem to function as a tell-tale sign or indicator of later development of gay identity, or identification of a person as lesbian or gay, according to the participating mothers in this study and the literature on the subject (Cook et al., 2013; Kimmel & Llewellyn, 2012; Lippa, 2008, Rabie & Lesch, 2009; Reid, 2005). Therefore the findings of my study do confirm those of the literature on gender nonconformity, as five out of the six participating mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring were alerted to the fact that their children belonged to a sexual minority by gender atypical behaviour during their sons or daughters’ childhood.

4.4.1.2 Shock, confusion and disbelief

This sub-theme refers to the dominant feelings the mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring experienced shortly after discovering their offspring’s alternative sexual orientation. The literature on parental reactions to disclosure that a son is gay or a daughter is lesbian suggests that in the period immediately following the disclosure, emotional reactions dominate (Griffin

et al., 1986; Phillips, 2007; Saltzburg, 2004; Savin-Williams, 1998). Vuyiswa's shock, confusion and disbelief became evident in the self-directed rhetorical questions she posed following her discovery. This sentiment is evident in the following comments: "I was feeling ... like ... Why is this child like this? What is going on with this child?" Later on, the source of Vuyiswa's confusion became evident when she mentioned that her daughter has one sexual organ. In South African semi-urban black communities, all members of sexual minorities are referred to with the pejorative label *isitabane*, which means a person with two sexual organs – a penis and a vagina (thus, in fact, intersex) (Arndt, 2009; Matebeni, 2011). Bearing this in mind, her shock and disbelief appear to be justified, since she knew for a fact that her child does not have both sexual organs. Yet, some relatives and the teacher who alerted Vuyiswa to her daughter's strange behaviour suggested that her daughter is *isitabane*.

Mamana's shock and disbelief, by contrast, were reflected more in the choice of words or phrases that she used following her discovery that her son is gay. These included phrases such as "I was stunned", "so I just stood there and I did not say anything", and "I had no words". All the words Mamana used suggest the extent of her shock. According to Peplau and Beals (2004), the shock, confusion and disbelief this mother suffered is not surprising, as most lesbians and gay men are raised by heterosexual parents who assume their children will also be heterosexual. During the interview, Mamana talked at length about the pain she felt and sighed deeply several times. This seems to suggest that although she stated that she had accepted her son's same-sex attraction as a fact, she had not completed grieving the loss of a heterosexual child she had assumed she had.

Lina's unease or disbelief is summed up by the word "uncomfortable", which she used to describe how her son's "mannerisms and movement" made her feel. Here too, Lina's son's failure to act like a boy was shocking to her, hence this mother's discomfort. According to Stewart (2002), this discomfort is partially caused by "courtesy stigma", which refers to stigma attached to the parent through association with their children as members of a sexual minority. Although Maria realised and accepted that her son is gay as early as when he was six years old, she nevertheless experienced shock and disbelief when her son told her later on that when the time came for him to get married, he would marry a man. The phrase, "I had never imagined..." accurately conveys her shock. Maria's confusion is also reflected in her contradictory responses when she told me she knew when the child was only six years old that he is gay. Yet, she implies that she never imagined he would not marry a woman.

Mantombi, by contrast, was shocked not by the words her daughter used, but by her daughter's actions, which were not congruent with Mantombi's ideas about femininity. One telling example was Mantombi's daughter's act of beating up a boy who expressed interest in her. Mantombi's shock and disapproval of her daughter's action were clearly expressed when she questioned her daughter's act of beating up her admirer. She also attempted to change her daughter's behaviour by explaining to her that "it is normal for boys to be interested in girls and girls in boys". Her daughter's refusal to pierce her ears for earrings, like her peers, was another form of behaviour that surprised and confused Mantombi while her daughter was growing up. Piercing ears for earrings is a common practice among black female adolescents, as it paves the way for the enhancement of what is perceived as feminine beauty. The fact that B, Mantombi's daughter, did not want to do that was shocking to her mother, as it marked B as different from her peers.

As with the other mothers, Mpho's shock and confusion became evident in the choice of words and phrases she used during the interview. For example, she used words such as "surprise" and the phrases "identity crisis" and "grey area", which reflected her lack of understanding and confusion regarding what her daughter was doing. This led to disbelief and confusion. The term "identity crisis" in particular, can also be read to mean she saw her daughter's behaviour as indicating some kind of instability, which might be transitory. This suggests that this mother possibly regarded the disclosure of bisexuality as some kind of a passing phase.

In conclusion, all six mothers expressed some shock, confusion and disbelief when they could not reconcile the behaviour and actions of their children with the cultural expectations of children of their genders. As time went on, the behaviour that worried these mothers did not stop, and this stage of shock, confusion and disbelief was replaced by denial, which is discussed next.

4.4.1.3 Denial

This sub-theme refers to the mothers' reaction to the discovery that their child is lesbian, gay or bisexual by ignoring the new knowledge, as also described by Griffin et al. (1986) and Savin-Williams and Dubé (1998). While not all the offspring disclosed their alternative sexualities to their mothers, some of the mothers pretended that they had not seen some of the tell-tale signs. Even those who were told directly preferred to pretend that no disclosure of their child's same-sex orientation or bisexuality had been made. In coming out literature, denial is seen as playing

a very important role. According to Griffin et al. (1986) and Savin-Williams and Dubé (1998), denial affords parents of members of sexual minorities time to regain their bearings and equilibrium. Griffin et al. (1986) refer to this type of denial which happens despite the fact that the parents know the truth as the “ostrich effect” (p. 14). Savin-Williams and Dubé (1998) argue that this denial is “an anxious one” (p. 7) and speculate that “...perhaps at some level the parents know the truth but refuse to believe the information, dismiss the child’s homosexuality as only a phase, or search for counter evidence” (p. 7). Saltzburg (2004) agrees with them and states that the “period of denial creates the coping space necessary for integrating the suspicions into their schema about their child and finding ways to manage the more concrete signs as they appeared” (p. 112).

The majority of the mothers in my study appear to have resorted to denial, especially shortly after the discovery. In Vuyiswa’s case, denial was evident when she admitted that, when her daughter was still 15 years old, her daughter told Vuyiswa that when she reached marriageable age, she would marry a woman and not a man. Yet she claims she was not aware that her child could be same-sex attracted. Furthermore, Vuyiswa’s denial is illustrated in the contradiction contained in the words she used when she explained how she got to know that her child was lesbian. In particular, her admission that she only became “*fully* [my emphasis] aware when a teacher in her daughter’s school reported to her that her daughter was sending her romantic cards as if they were lovers” suggests that on some level she had some awareness of this fact, which she then denied or dismissed.

Similarly, Mamana’s denial is suggested in the contradictions contained in what she told me during the interview. Her admission that her son’s alternative sexual orientation was discussed openly by her daughters in her presence, yet she was not aware, is indicative of her denial which she herself later confirmed. In a similar vein, Mantombi’s inquiry regarding whether her daughter had a boyfriend when Mantombi was fully aware at that stage that her daughter is lesbian is indicative of denial. Her actions suggest that she was using the strategy known as the “ostrich effect” as she chose to ignore what is well known to her about her daughter’s sexuality.

Mpho’s denial reflects the difficulties associated with coming out as bisexual, because multiple meanings are attached to bisexuality in the literature on disclosure (Li et al., 2013; McLean, 2007). McLean (2007) points out that for some of the people who identify as bisexual, it involves both emotional and sexual attraction to both men and women, while for others it may be emotional attraction to one gender, and sexual attraction to another. It may also involve only

sexual experiences with one gender, but emotional and sexual experiences and relationships with the other. McLean (2007) raises an important point regarding bisexuality, which is that “while society has come to grips, at least to some degree, with what it means to be gay or lesbian, there is less understanding of what it means to be bisexual” (p. 157). Confused denial became evident when Mpho responded to her daughter’s disclosure by pointing out that at first she thought her daughter was “joking because last month [her daughter] was dating a boy and now this”. Mpho’s comparing disclosure to a joke is indicative of her inability to legitimise it. What also becomes clear from Mpho’s utterance is that for her it is inconceivable to love both men and women. McLean (2007) confirms that this lack of understanding is common, arguing that this difficulty is compounded by the existence of many inaccurate stereotypes concerning bisexuality. These include viewing bisexuality as “not a real sexual identity”, but rather as a transitional stage to a “gay or lesbian identity” (McLean, 2007, p. 157). Rust (1995, p. 65) holds a similar view. Many people believe that bisexuals are in denial of their “true sexuality” (McLean, 2007, p. 157), and regard bisexuals as “untrustworthy, overtly promiscuous, sexually indiscriminate beings who will have sex with ‘anything that moves’” (Israel & Mohr, 2004, p. 122), as needing two lovers at once (a man and a woman) to be truly satisfied, or unable to be monogamous (Israel & Mohr, 2004, p. 121; Yoshino, 2000, p. 4).

By denying her daughter’s bisexuality, Mpho effectively dismissed it as a legitimate sexual category. It is for this reason that she argued that it reveals an “identity crisis”. By dismissing bisexuality as a legitimate form of sexuality, Mpho also invalidates it by rendering it ‘unintelligible’ or incomprehensible, as Bower et al. (2001) explain. Bower et al. (2001, p. 36) use the phrase “unintelligibility of bisexuality” to refer to the inability of people to comprehend bisexuality as a category of sexual identification. Bower et al. (2001) also argue that the dismissal of bisexuality as a legitimate form of sexual orientation points to the dominance of a monosexual binary in society, where heterosexuality and same-sex sexuality are constructed as the only valid categories of sexual identification. This happens regardless of the findings of available research, which increasingly portray sexuality as fluid (Diamond, 2008; PsySSA 2013).

Mpho’s reaction to the discovery that her daughter is bisexual also confirms one of the most common negative beliefs about bisexuality, as documented in the literature (Yoshino, 2000), which is that bisexuals are merely heterosexuals experimenting. This became apparent when she said: “But last week you were dating a boy....” Her daughter’s failure to “choose a side”

accounts for Mpho's confusion. Hence she views her daughter's bisexuality as indicative of indecision on her daughter's part. Indeed, this is evident when Mpho also asked whether her daughter was suffering from an identity crisis. In addition, Mpho's simplifying her daughter's bisexuality to the fact that she was studying Drama when she disclosed her sexuality suggested that Mpho thought her daughter may be merely mimicking Hollywood actors who enjoy more freedom to experiment with their sexuality. Again, she denied the reality of her daughter's sexuality by adopting a dismissive attitude.

In summary, despite the variations in the degree of denial, the majority of mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual children in this study used denial as a strategy to cope with the unwelcome news when the alternative sexuality of their children was disclosed. In most cases, this became evident through the contradictions in what they said or did. The literature on parental reactions suggests that after the denial phase, parents become preoccupied with possible causes of their children's alternative sexual orientation. This is what is discussed in the following section.

4.4.1.4 Searching for causality

This sub-theme refers to mothers' desire to seek an explanation for same-sex attraction or bisexuality by looking into possible causes. Phillips (2007) uses the term "cognitive dimensions" to refer to parents' preoccupation with what caused their children to have a non-heteronormative sexual orientation. Savin-Williams and Dubé (1998) argue that "as a defensive manoeuvre, parents search for an external cause for their child's homosexuality and become irrationally angry at this perpetrator" (p. 8). This could be a "bad second parent, an 'alternative' peer group or a gay/lesbian [/bisexual] teacher" (Savin-Williams & Dubé, 1998, p. 8). The reason for this defensive manoeuvre is to project blame and thus lessen the feelings of guilt and blame parents feel after discovery (Savin-Williams, 1998). In my research too, it appeared that once most of the participating mothers had gone past the denial stage, they became preoccupied with possible causes of their child's alternative sexual orientation.

For example, this became clear when Vuyiswa attributed her daughter's same-sex attraction to a rape that occurred when her daughter was five years of age. Vuyiswa's thinking is in line with one of the 12 most commonly held myths about the causes of same-sex attraction, namely that "a traumatic event with a person of the opposite sex can cause homosexuality" (Griffin et al., 1986, p. 28). According to Vuyiswa, there is a direct link between her daughter's rape and her rejection of males and, consequently, her turning to women for romantic relationships.

Vuyiswa supported her theory by pointing out that after the rape, her daughter “became confused when she was with male people”. She reported that this rejection of males also included close family members such as Vuyiswa’s brothers and Vuyiswa’s husband, the man who played the father figure in Vuyiswa’s daughter’s life. However, Vuyiswa’s interpretation was not surprising, given her own experiences as a rape victim while growing up in the townships surrounding Johannesburg. She said that this situation resulted in her hatred of men and in temporarily turning to women for romantic satisfaction. Given this context, it is not surprising that when her daughter refused to be held by male members of the family, after the rape incident, Vuyiswa inferred that this was naturally the result of the rape that her daughter had suffered in the hands of a male person. However, when I asked her if she thought her daughter could remember the rape, she said no.

Mamana and Lina also attributed their sons’ same-sex attraction to an external cause, namely the absence of a father figure in their homes when their sons were growing up. As the summaries of each participant’s journey reveal, Mamana is a single, never married parent. Lina got divorced when the children were still very young.

For Mamana, her son’s familiarity with women, which also extended to his son’s friends, who are girls, stemmed from not having male role models at home. What shocked Mamana greatly was the tendency for some of the parents in the community to allow her son, J, not only to stay over at their homes, but to share a bedroom with their girls during these sleepovers. In African culture, an unmarried boy and girl would normally not be allowed to share a room. Their action of allowing him to sleep over with the girls seemed to suggest that they regarded him as harmless, which can be construed as indicative of the fact that these community members knew that J is same-sex attracted.

Like Mamana, Lina attributed her son’s gayness to a lack of male role modelling while growing up. Both mothers seemed to operate under the mistaken belief that appropriate role modelling could have yielded different results. To try and remedy this situation, Lina invited a young male relative to live with them so as to model certain male behaviour to her son. However, this attempt to “correct” the situation did not succeed, as neither her son’s behaviour nor his orientation changed, despite this modelling.

After disclosure, Mpho also attributed her daughter’s bisexuality to an external cause, namely her daughter’s chosen field of study at university, Drama. She explained the logic of her

reasoning thus: “It happens in Hollywood” Mpho’s making connections between her daughter’s behaviour and that of film actors in Hollywood suggests that Mpho perceived her daughter as mimicking the allegedly fluid values of Hollywood film stars and singers like Katy Perry who, in 2008 recorded a hit song with a chorus stating “I kissed a girl and I liked it...”. During the interview, Mpho explained that such values are indeed not frowned upon in the Drama Department in her daughter’s university, as illustrated by the fact that in the Drama Department there was an ‘out’ couple that taught students dramatic performance.

In conclusion, most of the mothers in this study, in line with disclosure literature, attributed their children’s sexual minority status to external causes ranging from traumatic events with people of the opposite sex, to a lack of appropriate role models and mimicking celebrities.

One action that the mothers in my study also engaged in, to make sense of their children’s alternative sexual orientation, was to find reliable information about same-sex orientation and bisexuality respectively. This theme is discussed in the next section.

4.4.1.5 Seeking information

This sub-theme refers to the mothers’ attempts to educate themselves on the subject of same-sex orientation and/or bisexuality as an attempt to adjust to the discovery of their offspring’s same-sex orientation. Phillips (2007) argues that “a key approach which helps parents to accept their homosexual offspring is seeking information and exposure to the lesbian and gay community” (p. 9). Griffin et al. (1986) suggest that “healing can happen if you receive two things: knowledge and human support” (p. 43) Consistent with the available literature, the mothers in this study tried to cope with the discovery of their children’s sexual minority status by seeking information related to same-sex attraction and bisexuality from various sources, such as books, other parents of lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring, and people who are knowledgeable about alternative sexuality, including their own lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring.

Mpho, for example, first sought information on the subject from reading books. Later she sought information from her daughter by directly asking her daughter what being “bi” entails. The dialogue between Mpho and her daughter is in line with findings of literature on the subject, in particular, those of Ben-Ari (1995a), who is of the view that the responsibility of educating the parents of lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring about same-sex orientation (in this case bisexuality) falls on the offspring themselves. Ben Ari (1995a) recommends that lesbian,

gay or bisexual offspring should educate their parents prior to coming out of the closet. In order to ensure that the information conveyed to parents yields positive results, Ben-Ari (1995a) advises that lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring should frame coming out as an effort to increase intimacy and closeness with their families, an argument that is endorsed by Sprecher and Hendrick (2004). Similarly, Caldwell (2004) and Griffin et al. (1986) believe that the best resource for education may be the sexual minority child him- or herself. In Mpho's case, this manifested in the emerging close relationship between Mpho and her daughter, whose roles appear to have become reversed. Since the daughter evidently knows more about lesbian, gay or bisexual issues than Mpho, she is the one who has assumed the role of the teacher. In their case, the team effort became successful, as evidenced in the change Mpho underwent as time passed. This is reflected in the following admission: "It never occurred to me that one could be with both." But later she said: "So I can say I was very confused about this. Now I realise she has the best of both worlds...."

Griffin et al. (1986), Phillips (2007) and Saltzburg (2004) posit that another way in which parents can help themselves come to terms with having a sexual minority child is by finding mentors who are lesbian, gay or bisexual, mainly to show the parents that being same-sex attracted is not synonymous with deviance or immorality. Saltzburg (2004) summarises the mentor's role thus: "Embodied in the mentoring relationship is the unconscious process of deconstructing previously held images about gay men and lesbians and reconstructing new meaning" (p. 116). The word "deconstructing" is very important in this context, as it implies unlearning previous knowledge and taken-for-granted assumptions about sexual minority orientation, and replacing them with accurate information. In some ways, Mpho's daughter fulfilled this mentoring role to her mother. Because Mpho previously worked with gay and lesbian co-workers in the past, this proximity with lesbian and gay individuals may also have helped towards her adjustment progression, thus confirming assertions by Ben-Ari (1995b) and Herdt and Koff (2000) on the importance of exposure to people who are lesbian, gay or bisexual.

Unlike Mpho, who sought knowledge about same-sex orientation from reading and from her daughter, who played the mentoring role, Mamana acquired information about same-sex orientation by observing the behaviour of two accepting mothers of gay sons in her community. In the interview, she admitted the value of what one of the mothers taught her, even though the mother in question did not realise that she was fulfilling this role. In this case, role modelling

by Lina influenced Mamana to change her own behaviour towards her son positively, despite her unhappiness about her son's sexual orientation. Another mother who played an educative role to Mamana was a mother who showed unconditional love and support of her son, JK, in a live TV interview, by appearing together with her gay son. JK's mother's aims were two-fold. First, it was to educate people about and "to normalise" same-sex attraction by "making the public aware that all gay children ever want is acceptance". Mamana attributed the change in her behaviour towards her son J to these two mothers' positive influence. Through affirming their offspring's alternative sexual identities, they demonstrated to Mamana first-hand the strength of the bonds of kinship.

Vuyiswa also turned to education as a means of coming to terms with her daughter's same-sex attraction. On the advice of the teacher who was the first person to raise her awareness to the reality that her daughter was lesbian, she sought education from the social workers at the hospital in a place called Ekupholeni. This finding is in line with Griffin et al.'s (1986) pointing out that parents of lesbian or gay offspring can turn to counsellors, psychologists and other professionals for help after learning about their children's alternative sexual orientation. Although Vuyiswa initially attributed her daughter's lack of interest in men to the fact that the daughter was raped during childhood, the social workers provided her with alternative information regarding the development of same-sex orientation. She reported that the nurses attributed same-sex attraction to hormones rather than to anger against men. Griffin et al. (1986) recommend that parents and children alike should solicit help from counsellors, but caution that not all counsellors have up-to-date information about same-sex attraction.

In the course of the interview, the growth which Vuyiswa had undergone in the field of sexuality became evident when she talked about her own work as a counsellor at Ekupholeni. She reflected on the challenges faced by people who do not have a heteronormative sexual orientation, including those whose sexualities do not fit within the homo/hetero binary. She showed her vast knowledge towards the end of the interview by attributing the source of suffering of members of sexual minorities to "the oppressive rule of the home" which forces some children to run away from their homes to the cities, because they cannot live openly as belonging to a sexual minority while still living in their parental homes.

Lina also sought knowledge from the experts, for example, the school psychologist, when she first became concerned about the fact that her son associated more with girls than with boys. She also expressed her concern to a gay friend of hers in the United Kingdom about her son's

mannerisms, which were causing her discomfort. Lina evidently read her son's gender non-conformity as indicative of his being gay, a finding in line with the literature (Cook et al., 2013; Kimmel & Llewelyn, 2012; Lippa, 2008, Rabie & Lesch, 2009; Reid, 2005). In a way, Lina perceived Steve, her gay male friend from England, as a gay role model or mentor who could potentially help her adjust to having a gay child.

Like Lina, Maria sought knowledge about sexual minority orientation from a stranger in a taxi who was talking about her own son who is gay. Maria said: "I moved next to her and I told her that I also have such a boy... and she went on to say the child must be *isitabane*. The stranger in the taxi was very helpful to Maria in many ways. She demonstrated depth and understanding of the stigma Maria felt, and shared her knowledge on the subject with Maria. The stranger in the taxi also showed great sensitivity when she realised that Maria was hurt by the stigma attached to the label *isitabane*. She demonstrated this by reassuring her that the practice of same-sex attraction "is not an anomaly", adding that "it has always existed in the olden days and it is still here now, but in the past it was hidden". The conversation between Maria and the stranger in the taxi served a didactic function, and also normalised the issue of same-sex orientation. It also confirmed existing research in Africa about the silencing of same-sex orientation (Antonio, 1997; Epprecht, 2008; Msibi, 2011). By informing Maria that same-sex attraction is not an anomaly and has "always existed", but was expressed in ways that were "hidden" in the past, the woman in the taxi helped Maria correct some of the lies which Msibi (2011) argues we have been told about (homo) sexuality in Africa.

To conclude, one of the strategies mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring in this study employed to advance their adjustment to their children's sexual orientation was through seeking education about same-sex orientation or bisexuality. This happened through a variety of ways which include reading, seeking mentors, learning from their lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring or observing other mothers of lesbian and gay children.

Another action that the mothers in my study also engaged in to make sense of their children's alternative sexual orientation was confiding in others. This sub-theme is discussed next.

4.4.1.6 Seeking support by confiding in others

This sub-theme refers to the strategy used by many people when faced with difficulties, which is sharing their difficulties with similar or caring others. Czillinger (1983) suggests that healing can be achieved if one receives both knowledge and human support. Griffin et al. (1986)

concur, adding that “sharing our hurt with close friends can be a great source of comfort” (p. 43). Most of the black mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring in this study dealt with the shocking discovery by confiding in others. These confidants/confidantes ranged from family members to trusted friends, priests and total strangers. Crosbie-Burnett et al. (1996) state that the first person to be told in the family “bears the burden of knowing” (p. 398). This means the job of telling and not telling others lies in his or her hands.

Lina first confided her concerns in a trusted gay friend in England, who reassured her that gender atypical behaviour does not necessarily indicate that a child belongs to a sexual minority. Lina later found out that her son is indeed gay, but confiding in her friend allayed her fears at the time. Lina also confided in the Roman Catholic priest at her church, whom she described as a soft-spoken man who adopted a sensitive and tolerant view toward same-sex attracted individuals. His sensitivity and tolerance of difference became evident when he implied that, as Christians, they should not judge. His remark reveals that there are Christian priests who do not subscribe to the ‘same-sex sexuality is a sin’ perspective adopted by many Christians who participate in organised religion. The interaction depicted the priest as tolerant and understanding, but also revealed that at the time Lina still believed in the ‘same-sex sexuality is a choice’ discourse, as is evident when Lina asked the priest if he thought she was doing the right thing by “allowing” her son to be “gay”. Finally, besides confiding in the priest, Lina also confided in a trusted woman friend, M, who was very supportive.

Lina’s experience raises the question of reactions from religious circles to the members of sexual minorities and their practices. Griffin et al. (1986) identify four prevailing religious attitudes towards same-sex sexuality.

The first is the rejecting-punitive attitude. Theologians who subscribe to this view operate from the assumption that any sexual expression other than heterosexuality is unnatural and sinful. Often, they use two passages from the Leviticus chapter in the Bible to establish their position. The first, Leviticus 18:22, states: “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman, it is an abomination.” The second, Leviticus 20:13, states: “If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them.”

The second view is a rejecting non-punitive attitude. Theologians who subscribe to this view operate from the assumption that same-sex relations are unnatural, in that they violate the

commandments of the Creator. This is the official Catholic position on same-sex sexuality and is shared by many faith communities such as the Anglican, Methodist and many other organised religions. It rejects all same-sex *practices*, claiming that same-sex practices are ‘sinful’. However, it is not rejecting of the same-sex attracted *persons*, to whom it is morally neutral.

The third religious attitude is a qualified acceptance position. This attitude is ambivalent because, on the one hand, it seeks to stay within the official teaching on same-sex attraction and/or practice, while on the other hand, it is influenced by studies which show that same-sex sexuality is a natural condition for a certain percentage of the population.

The fourth religious attitude is one of full acceptance. This religious attitude, according to Griffin et al. (1986), accepts any sexual behaviour that is “consistent with an ethic of love – a responsible, ongoing communication with another human that involves commitment, trust and tenderness and respect” (p. 67).

In South Africa, there have been a number of shifts in organised Christian circles. In the Anglican Church, for example, Archbishop Tutu has broken ranks with conservative Christians who subscribe to the ‘same-sex sexuality is a sin’ discourse. In an interview on 26 July 2013 on the BBC channel, he said:

I would not worship a God who is homophobic and that is how deeply I feel about this. I would refuse to go to a homophobic heaven. No, I would say sorry, I mean I would rather go to the other place.... I am as passionate about this campaign as I ever was about apartheid. For me it is at the same level.

However, in South Africa, despite the reforms brought about by the Equality Clause contained in the Constitution, discrimination against same-sex attracted priests in the Anglican Church persists. Recently, this was illustrated by the resignation of Reverend Mpho Tutu, the daughter of Bishop Tutu, from her position as a priest in the Anglican Church of Cape Town, after marrying her life partner, who is also a woman (Huisman, 2006).

Like Lina, Maria did not confide in any close family members, but in a total stranger in a taxi. Herdt and Koff (2000) argue that parents who reach the integration stage often pursue what they refer to as ‘extra steps’, which include purchasing books, reading articles, talking to supportive and knowledgeable therapists and clergy, attending meetings of PFLAG, befriending other parents of gays and lesbians, and becoming familiar with local lesbian and gay communities. Most of the mothers took these ‘extra steps’ – Maria turned to a total stranger

for help while Lina turned to a gay friend, her priest and a trusted friend for support. Mpho turned to a friend as well.

Mantombi and Mpho also confided in their mothers. Mantombi's mother provided support and assurance as reflected when she said: "Don't worry this is how she is ... she is made like that ... she is not going to change. We can't do anything about it." By contrast, Mpho's mother's response was non-committal and less involved. Although her mother listened, Mpho suspected that she either did not understand exactly what being bisexual means, or she thought her granddaughter was simply going through a phase. One of the ways in which bisexuality is dismissed and rendered intelligible in society is by labelling it a transient phase on the way to a true heterosexual or same-sex sexual identity (Lynch, 2012). Another reason why bisexuality is unintelligible in society stems from the fact that when a bisexual woman dates a male person, she is considered heterosexual, while if she dates another woman, she is considered lesbian, never bisexual.

The two mothers' responses were interesting and telling of contextual factors that predict parental reactions to the discovery that their son or daughter belongs to a sexual minority. Mpho reported that she was brought up in a conservative environment with a strong Catholic background, in which a subject such as sexual minority practices was largely silenced. Mpho herself confessed to having heard rumours while she was growing up that there were people in her community who were alleged to be same-sex attracted. The word used then to refer to members of sexual minorities, according to Mpho, was 'hermaphrodite' – today the term used is 'intersex'. Given this context, it is not surprising that Mpho's mother responded with silence as the issue is a taboo in the conservative religious background she brought Mpho up in. Another family member to whom Mpho disclosed her daughter's sexual orientation was her younger sister. According to Mpho, her sister's reaction was ambivalent at best, because, although she listened, Mpho perceived her response as judgemental as the following quotation demonstrates: "It is one of those things where you realise you have exposed yourself to a person who looks down at you and is asking, 'What have you done as a mother?'" The mention of the word "taboo" aligned her younger sister's reaction with her mothers'; hence, their reaction with silence.

Vuyiswa and Maria were the only mothers who told me that they did not feel that it was necessary to disclose their child's orientation to family members, because these family members could see for themselves that Vuyiswa's and Maria's children belong to sexual

minorities. However, in the course of the interview, it appeared as if the real reason for not telling family members was fear of discrimination against their children. This became evident when Maria said that she first noticed that her son was gay when he was about six years old, but she “did not want to talk about it especially to old people”. Crosbie-Burnett et al. (1996) report a similar finding, arguing that some parents of lesbian or gay children “may struggle with wanting to be supportive of the lesbian or gay child or sibling, yet wanting to avoid the potential for creating problems in the extended family, especially among older generations who may not adjust well to the news” (p. 400). In both Maria and Vuyiswa’s cases, it would appear that the real reason for not telling family members was that these family members were negative about the topic and were using pejorative terms such as *isitabane*. For example, Vuyiswa reported that some of her relatives said: “Your child is *isitabane*. As for us we cannot stay with *isitabane*.”

According to Sprecher and Hendrick (2004), self-disclosure is “an act of intimacy and serves a maintenance strategy” (p. 857) in relationships, but the decision for a parent to disclose his or her child’s sexual minority status is not an easy one. This is because if a parent did so in a particular context, before the son or daughter has done so, the parent may unwittingly sometimes ‘out’ the person in a social environment where the person’s status is either not yet common knowledge, or is not yet approved by the person him or herself. Smuts (2011) also stresses the importance of context in relation to the plight of lesbian women in Johannesburg, who constantly need to “strategically assess different spaces, such as the workplace, certain public settings and/or the family sphere, to determine which sexual identity would come to the fore” (p. 24). Orne (2011) uses a similar term, “strategic outness” (p. 681) to refer to this kind of identity management that lesbian, gay or bisexual individuals often need to exercise in different contexts. Therefore, Vuyiswa and Maria’s narratives highlight challenges linked with disclosing the sexual minority status of another.

To conclude, the discussion above confirms that confiding in others is important for healing and reaching the integration phase, which is the last stage that signifies acceptance Strommen (1989). However, the decision to disclose lesbian, gay or bisexual orientation in public in general, both by those concerned and by parents of members of sexual minorities, should be taken with caution. In contexts that are intolerant of sexual minorities, “outing” lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring may expose them to harassment and violence, as was clear from the aftermath of the publication by the Ugandan newspaper *The Red Pepper* of the names and

pictures of the top 200 same-sex attracted persons in Uganda in a front-page story under the headline: “Exposed” (*Red Pepper Tabloid*, 2014).

Finally, confiding in others may lead some parents into the next phase, which is taking a stand (Griffin et al., 1986), which entails “verbally supporting a gay or lesbian child either directly or indirectly to someone else in society” (p. 101). This often results in “queering” of the family home (Gorman-Murray, 2008, p. 31). This is discussed in the next section.

4.4.1.7 Queering the family home

This sub-theme refers to the actions or steps that the mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring in this study took to try to normalise, validate or affirm their children’s alternative sexual orientation in their home spaces. In much disclosure literature, the family home is portrayed as a difficult space for youths who wish to come out of the closet, due to the fact that it has prevalently been viewed as a heteronormative space. However, Gorman-Murray (2008) argues that some family homes in Australia have reacted positively to disclosure and offered support to disclosing lesbian, gay or bisexual youths. These homes reject the normalisation of the nuclear home as a heteronormative and homophobic site, and instead portray it as accepting difference through supporting youths who belong to sexual minorities. Gorman-Murray (2008, p. 32) refers to such homes as queer spaces. The term “queer” implies acceptance or accommodation of same-sex sexuality in spaces where it was not recognised previously, but goes further towards the normalisation of an act that was previously considered “abnormal” or “unnatural” (Gorman-Murray, 2008; Mann, 2012).

Remarkably, the black mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring in my study not only acknowledged and/or accepted their offspring’s alternative sexual orientation, but also began to queer their homes – making them spaces which put up resistance against heterosexism by openly supporting the ongoing development of their offspring’s lesbian, gay or bisexual identities. This is consistent with the findings of Gorman-Murray (2008).

For example, Vuyiswa demonstrated this in several ways upon our arrival in her daughter’s bedroom, where the interview took place, drawing my attention to a photo of her daughter with her same-sex partner in an unmistakably affectionate position. Displaying photographs is something parents of lesbian, gay or bisexual children can do to “resist hetero-regulation within the family home” (Gorman-Murray, 2008, p. 40). Vuyiswa also proudly told me that she wears a T-shirt that says: “My daughter, she is a lesbian.” Through these actions, Vuyiswa

transformed her home from a heteronormative space into a queer space, one that challenges normativity, in this case, heterosexuality, as the only form of acceptable sexual orientation.

Like Vuyiswa's home, the fact that Mamana's home is transformed into a queer space was evident in her response to relatives who asked her son when he was going to get married (supposedly to a woman). Her response, "No, he's not going to get married – he is a gay" underpins the creation of what Gorman-Murray (2012) refers to as "a supportive and transgressive queer family home" (p. 32). By taking a stand against the family through her bold action of supporting her son's sexual difference from the norm to family members, Mamana's act marked the beginning of her attempts to normalise non-heterosexuality within her home space. Both Vuyiswa and Mamana's disclosure and subsequent queering their homes seems linked to the view expressed by Goldberg (2007), who associates disclosure with being "proud of one's family identity" (pp. 101-102).

Another way in which Mamana queered her family home is allowing her son to live with his boyfriend in an outside room in the family home, instead of banishing her child to another city. It is well known that in some townships in South Africa, being lesbian, gay or bisexual is stigmatised. In such contexts, it is common for families of lesbian, gay or bisexual youths not to support their offspring's alternative sexual identities publicly. By allowing her son and his partner to live as an openly same-gender loving couple in the family home, Mamana effectively rendered her home a queer family home. She also further portrayed her family home as queer and transgressive by celebrating her son's 21st birthday with her son's gay friends and her nuclear family members, singing "For she's a jolly good fellow". Her acceptance of her son as he is resulted in the merging of the son's gay family of friends and her own heterosexual, nuclear family, transforming the two into one big queer family.

Like Vuyiswa and Mamana, Maria queered her home. She welcomed her son's partner and cooked him a meal, a ritual that is associated with heterosexual couples in heteronormative homes. Maria's warm reception of her son's same-sex partner is transgressive and contributed towards "enabl[ing] new perspectives on social reality, subverting heterosexism and encouraging the exploration and naturalisation of same-sex desires, and promoting the development of GLB identities" (Gorman-Murray, 2008, p. 40).

Similarly, Lina transformed her home into a queer space by welcoming all her son's gay friends at her home. Her willingness to allow her son and his gay friends to spend late nights at her

home rather than having to worry about his safety when he is out late further demonstrated her commitment to transforming her home into a queer one. She also demonstrated her total acceptance of them by cooking them meals on certain holidays, an act which earned her the title of “cool mum”. Fields (2001) and Stewart (2002) refer to parents like Lina as ‘superparents’ or ‘exemplary parents’. Pearlman (2005) suggests that such mothers “were rewarded as a publicly identified parent of a lesbian daughter, a role that brought about gratitude and appreciation by other lesbians and gay men [and] provided them (the mothers) with new values, and expanded their identity and sense of self” (p. 135).

Finally, Mpho transformed her home into a queer space by accepting that love can be between a woman and a woman at one time, but between a woman and a man at another time. This was evidenced by the change she underwent which culminated in allowing her daughter to use her cellphone to make long-distance calls abroad to her girlfriend. Her acceptance of their relationship was evident in her relating how she listened to her daughter talking about future plans that she and her partner were making. This act of listening, and the words and phrases Mpho used during the interview such as “decisions they are making together”, “understand[ing] that this is a normal relationship”, “a beautiful relationship” and “future,” endorsed and validated her daughter’s bisexual identity. It also became evident that she was at this point seeing the relationship between her bisexual daughter and her same-sex partner with new eyes. It appeared that a new kind of epiphany had happened, as this mother’s conception of love seems not to be restricted only to individuals of opposite sexes; she now conceives of love as fluid, transcending such categorisation.

Most of the six participating mothers queered their homes by making them spaces that accept diversity in terms of sexuality. Gorman-Murray (2008) explains that “parental and sibling acceptance and support is one of the key fissures through which non-normative sexualities are constituted, and, against assumptions of the family home as a homophobic environment” (p. 39).

To sum up, in the homes of the black mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring in this study, the definition of the word “family” is not confined to heterosexual identities – it includes lesbian, gay and bisexual identities. These mothers confirmed the view of Gorman-Murray (2008) that “neither home nor identity is fixed, but [they are] rather mutually and continually (re)constituted” (p. 32). This is in line with what Valentine (2001, cited in Gorman-Murray, 2008) says about the discourses and practices operating in domestic spaces. She is of the view

that some identities are enabled, while others are disabled. These mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual children enable all the discourses and practices (heterosexual, same-sex sexuality and bisexual) thus encouraging sexual diversity.

From the discussion on the mothers' journeys towards acceptance of their lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring, I now turn to the themes that respond specifically to this study's research questions.

4.4.2 Theme 2: Responses to the Study's Research Questions

Three sub-themes addressing the research questions were identified, namely the mothers' reasons or motivations for coming out, the impact of the mothers' coming out on their relationships with their lesbian, gay or bisexual children, as well as with the lesbian, gay or bisexual community in general, and the meanings these mothers ascribe to having lesbian, gay or bisexual children. These are discussed in this order (see Table 2).

Table 2. Theme 2: Responses to the study’s research questions

Sub-themes	Illustrative extracts
Mothers’ motivations/reasons for coming out about their offspring’s alternative sexuality	
	<p>“There is no wrong they have done... I have concluded there is no dustbin where we should throw our children.” (Vuyiswa, 519-520)</p>
	<p>“Yes, I feel we should support them the right way ... openly. Not the tendency to distance ourselves from them <i>when people</i>.” (Vuyiswa, 526-527)</p>
	<p>“Yes, yes if I support my child, I should do so even when there are other people. I can’t turn against my child over someone who doesn’t understand her. Tell the people the child is all right. Claim her as your child and tell the people you accept as she is. [...] Yes we are not doing the right thing. We too as parents, we discriminate against our children, we suffer from stigma. So we need to stop the stigma and give them our unconditional love and support.” (Vuyiswa, 530- 538)</p>
	<p>“My girls accepted before me and they helped me a lot ... they were very helpful ... They made me see things differently... My children helped a lot. The bygone ... all of them were very influential. [...] Yes I supported him because I saw he was OK with the way he was. All I felt I could do is to support him. He was influential to me....” (Mamana, 751-759)</p>
	<p>“The parenthood”, I would say, “He is my child. Who else can carry him if not me as her mother? Even if he dropped out there in the street it’s me who would have to pick him up there. It’s me as the mother. It doesn’t matter ...some of them have been chased away from home because they are gay, when something goes wrong, the very parents are the first to go to their rescue. So why should I leave him?” (Lina, 1165-1169)</p>
	<p>“The journey (towards <i>outness</i>) was slow. But my acceptance was helped by the fact that there were many kids in this area who are gay that I saw. Some used to visit mine and come here at home. So I learnt that I’m not the only one with a gay child. Other people too have such children and they lived with them in their homes and they are treated normally. So seeing that helped me to be supportive too. I decided life must go on, his gayness has no reason to stop me going on with my life. But also, my son is a nice boy ... If he were to come here now, you would see... he is warm and huggy and loving.” (Maria, 1573-1579)</p>

“Many come to my house because of these two.⁵ This made us see that that there is nothing strange about these children. They are not few, but they are many. And let me tell you what, they differ from the ones we think are ‘normal.’ They are respectful, thoughtful, mature and very sensitive to the needs of others.” (Mantombi, 1894-1897)

“... for me it’s about being comfortable with and knowing that she is loved. I think ultimately that’s it. And I have seen that ... there is so much joy ... and just to know it is a normal relationship and I have heard them talking about their future together ...” (Mpho, 2138-2141)

“I would say, number one it is her... she is not in the closet. Everybody who knows her knows who she is and where she is... that she is bi... Her life is in the now. [...] Another thing that helped me is prayer. I’ve always wanted the best for my children. And I’m a great believer. I always told them... I believed that my children are in God’s and whatever is in God’s hands will flourish.” (Mpho, 2189-2193)

Impact of disclosure on relationship with lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring

“I was happy ... I was relieved we had talked about it because I knew others were ignoring him. You see from the way he was feeling, I knew if I showed surprise, he might end up committing suicide and I could not let that happen. I said, “It is OK my child. Gayness has always been there it’s just that long ago, people hid it... it was done underground. But now we are in the new South Africa, there is freedom and discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation is forbidden. It does not have to be a secret.” (Maria, 1330-1335)

“We were close ... we have always been close.” (Maria, 1348)

“Yes it did, we always had a comfortable relationship between us. He knew he could talk about anything.” (Maria, 1354-1355)

“Oh! We were close, but I was in denial I still wished he was not gay... I wish he was more of a boy.” (Mamana, 724-725)

“I remember once she said, ‘I told J my partner to leave her job... and she has....’ And we would talk about that. The fact that she trusts me enough to share her private life is good enough to me. I feel I have been accepted. I feel involved and I see the love and I feel very good. I feel involved in the same way I would have been involved if she was involved with a man.” (Mpho, 2128-2132)

Impact of disclosure on relationship with lesbian, gay or bisexual community

“I never had a problem with anyone of the boys whose places he goes to... I’m very much of a reserved person I didn’t just burst out things because I could not take it anymore. All the boys come here, his now recent friends.... The friends he is now going with,

⁵ Maria’s son N and Mantombi’s daughter D

have never seen me in an angry mood. I always say to them “Hi hi. At times I even cook for them and invite them for example, I cooked Christmas lunch.” (Lina, 1099-1103)

“It’s OK. J for example even calls me ‘supermom’. He’d say ‘Hi ‘supermom’, how are you?’” They are a very nice bunch of people.” (Lina, 1197-1198)

“As for me, I’ve always liked gays. I don’t criticise them, instead I take them as they are... I was always OK with them... they are good children, they are respectful and are nice in general. I have never had a problem with them.” (Maria, 1385-1388)

“But my acceptance was helped by the fact that that there were many kids in this area who are gay that I saw. Some used to visit mine and come here at home. So I learnt that I’m not the only one with a gay child. Other people too have such children and they lived with them in their homes and they were treated normally. So seeing that helped me to be supportive too.” (Maria, 1543-1546)

“I loved them too much [sic]. They are nice children, they are respectful and they are always happy. I treat them like other children.” (Maria, 1582-1583)

“Many come to my house because of these two. This made us see that there is nothing strange about these children. They are not few, but they are many. And let me tell you what, they differ from the ones we think are ‘normal’. They are respectful, thoughtful, mature and very sensitive to needs of others.” (Mantombi, 1894-1897)

Meaning/s mothers ascribed to having a lesbian, gay or bisexual child

“I think N is God’s gift to me. Through him, I feel God was teaching me about acceptance, about love – unconditional love. Having to deal with his sexual orientation made me a better person. I have learnt to choose what is most important to me. In this case, my child. Even when the family criticises him, I make it clear to them whose side I’m on.” (Maria, 1541-1544)

“God shows himself to us in hidden ways. Sometimes he gives us gifts which are difficult for us to accept. He wants to see what we are going to do with the gift he has given to us, whether it is good or bad. [...] I remember once I heard on radio, a man who was saying if he ever had a gay or a lesbian child, he would kill her/him with an axe. I remember being so upset by this man’s talk. I remember thinking this foolish man seems to think it is the woman’s fault when a child turns out gay. I remember thinking it is God only who creates children. Of course, we concern ourselves with how it happens and I think we will never get the answers we want. [...] I also sat down and thought about it. You know what, at my home there are three gay children in all. It is this girl, my sister’s boy and my last born brother at my own home. I think God wants to know what we are going to do with them now that he has given them to us as gifts from Him. Many come to my house because of these two. This made us see that there is nothing strange about these children. They are not few, but they are many. And let me tell you what, they differ from the ones we think are ‘normal’. They are respectful, thoughtful, mature and very sensitive to the needs of others. I tell you they are special. So in my mind, God has truly given us special (beautiful) gifts.” (Mantombi, 1883-1898)

“Eh! I also had the belief that this was the work of Satan. I know my girl. I believed my girl should be like others, I should get *lobola* from her, she is a girl, she is well-made etc. [...] But as time went on, I talked to my God and said “God! Does this mean this child is a gift from you...? [...] I said, “God you knew what was going ... You knew all along that B at a certain time will be like this. You created her. I did not know this. I have a problem simply because I gave birth to her as a girl. [...] “But God made her like that ... There can’t be a sin there. People might say it is a sin...because they expect girls to behave like girls and boys like boys.” (Vuyiswa, 460-471)

“*Eish!* I think it is God’s will. You cannot undo this. You cannot do otherwise.” (Mamana, 748)

“I have learned to accept gifts that he has given me, to be strong. I know because I prayed to have a boy and God gave me a boy. He is good to me, he does not fight with me because he is not the fighting type. Like other gays, he likes a good time, he’s always grooving, drinking, but he does not take drugs or give me a tough time like other people’s children who cause their parents heartaches.” (Mamana, 915-919)

“I have learnt that this is a gift and therefore I have no reason to punish him. I think God gave me A as a gift. I used to wonder whether this is one of the trials ... I also wondered whether this was the test in which He wanted to see what I am going to do. I also wondered if it was the devil who was fighting against my Christianity.” (Lina, 1203-1206)

“In my church, as a divorced person and then actually I shouldn’t receive Holy Communion. There are so many shouldnt’s and I did not listen to these things. To me it is not important ... To me what is important is between me and my God. It is private and spiritual I know she was created by that same God I even think that she (Mpho’s daughter) might even be more spiritual than I am. And who am I to judge her? I also believe everything happens for a reason....” (Mpho, 2227-2237)

4.4.2.1 Reasons or motivations for the mothers' coming out

This sub-theme seeks to explain the reasons that motivated these black mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual children not to only accept their children's sexual orientation, but also to come out about it, some in intolerant environments. It is general knowledge that South African townships are portrayed in the literature on sexuality as hostile spaces for black gay men, and especially for black lesbian women (Matebeni, 2011, in Tamale 2011; Sanger, 2010; Smuts, 2011), due to the ever-present threat of 'corrective' rape.

In Vuyiswa's case, it appears that her coming out about her daughter's same-sex orientation is linked to her desire to protect her daughter in an environment that demonises same-sex practices. Her coming out seems informed by her desire to let community members know that her daughter is a lesbian and that she, as a mother, accepts her daughter as she is. The township as an unsafe space; Vuyiswa mentioned a song sung by those who harass lesbians in the township where she lives. It says: "The world is corrupt: men are having sex with men and women are having sex with other women." Evidently, this mother's motivation for coming out is also linked to her need to pledge solidarity with her daughter against those who rape and murder lesbians. The notion of 'outness' as potentially having a protective function proposed by Cook et al. (2013) seemed to inform this mother's decision to come out about her daughter's same-sex orientation. Cook et al. (2013) speculate that 'out' non-conforming gay and bisexual black men may be protected by social networks of friends and family developed at an early stage, enabling them to live safely while living as openly gay.

Crosbie-Burnett et al. (1996, p. 400) also suggest that "other considerations about the decision to come out may include a desire to protect other family members, including the gay or lesbian child or sibling from discrimination" (p. 400). Vuyiswa explained that the subject of sexuality in some black urban/semi-urban communities is a sensitive one and the choice is usually strictly between adhering to community-approved ways of understanding sexuality and/or differing from the community by openly supporting your child's sexual identity. According to her, families should not have double standards. Instead they should claim their children by boldly affirming their children's alternative sexual identity.

Mpho linked her coming out to the fact that her daughter is not in the proverbial "closet". As Mpho put it: "Everyone who knows her knows who she is and where she is ... that she is 'bi'. Her life is in the now." Mpho's ability to move beyond questioning her daughter's

psychological state, as shown when she first asked her, “Are you in crisis?” demonstrates an expression of unequivocal love and support for her daughter.

Pledging unconditional love for her son seemed to be the motivation for Lina’s coming out as well. This is illustrated when she says: “Even if he dropped out there in the street – it’s me who would have to pick him up there. It’s me the mother...” What Lina seems to suggest here is that the mother-son bond is sacrosanct and therefore cannot be broken. The use of the emphatic verb “have to” coupled with the phrase “who else” reveals the degree of this mother’s commitment and her willingness to do anything in support of her son.

This expression of unconditional love and support is echoed by Maria, who said: “I told him I love him, gay or not gay.” This reassurance by this mother and other mothers in this study served an important function, namely to highlight the strength of these mothers’ relationships with their offspring. It indicated that love between them was constant and unchanging, before as well as after the discovery of their offspring’s same-sex attraction or bisexuality.

Scholars have put forward various reasons for the coming out of lesbian, gay or bisexual individuals. These include revealing that they no longer want to live a lie, but want to open up communication with others, strengthen family bonds, deepen love and provide opportunities for mutual caring and support (Ben-Ari, 1995b). Others believe that individuals come out to foster intimacy (Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004) or to improve interpersonal relations, enhance mental health and change society’s attitudes regarding same-sex sexuality (Boon & Miller, 1999).

In conclusion, the motivations for coming out for the mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring in this study ranged from expressing pride and solidarity with their child to a desire to protect their lesbian, gay or bisexual child against verbal and physical harassment and violence directed at them in intolerant communities, to maintaining close family bonds with the children and to expressing unconditional love and support for their offspring.

The next sub-theme is the impact of mothers’ coming out on their relationships with their children and the lesbian, gay or bisexual community at large.

4.4.2.2 *The impact of mothers' coming out on their relationships*

This sub-theme is divided into a discussion of 'out' mothers' relationships with their children, and with the lesbian, gay and bisexual community.

- The mothers' relationships with their children

I explored the changes (if any) that the mothers' coming out of the closet effected on their relationship with their lesbian, gay or bisexual children. All the mothers reported that coming out has strengthened their relationships with their lesbian, gay or bisexual child. In Vuyiswa's case, a strong mother-daughter bond was evident on two occasions. The first was when Vuyiswa intervened in her daughter's love-related problems, by advising her not to have all her girlfriends in one place. Their close mother-daughter bond was also evident during my first meeting with them at the University of Witwatersrand, where I recruited them for this study. Mpho also confirmed that since her coming out and acceptance of her daughter's bisexuality, the two of them have become close. She mentioned the long talks they have together where she listens to her daughter's plans with her girlfriend. The other mothers' improved relationships were evidenced by how readily they agreed when their children recruited them for this study. All the mothers understood how important their agreeing to be part of this study was to their offspring.

- The mothers' relationships with the lesbian, gay or bisexual community

All the mothers reported that their relationships with the lesbian, gay and bisexual community had improved considerably since the mothers came out, even though generally contact with this community is limited only to their offspring's friends. All the mothers in my study allow their offspring's lesbian, gay or bisexual friends free access to their homes. Maria welcomed her son's boyfriend to her home in the traditional way by sharing a meal with him. Similarly, Mamana's hosting her son's 21st birthday at her home and singing "For she's a jolly good fellow" with her son's gay friends was indicative of cordial relations between her family and the gay community, consisting of her son's friends. Lina's preference to host the boys' jam sessions at her house despite the likelihood of their being noisy is also telling. Furthermore, her title of the 'Cool Mum' among her son's friends is indicative of how well accepted she is by her son's friends.

Fields (2001) confirms that once parents of a lesbian, gay or bisexual child have embraced the stigmatised child and the whole stigmatised gay and lesbian community, the parents

transform into “superparents”. Griffin et al. (1986) summarise the value of telling others and its impact on the welfare of lesbian or gay individuals in general as follows:

There is an unspoken message conveyed when we speak for our gay children. It is that homosexuality does not need to be hidden or hushed up. Whether they know it or not, everyone has gay and lesbian relatives or friends within their family, business or friendship circles. Each time parents speak, they are helping all these people (p. 109).

4.4.2.3 The meanings the mothers ascribe to having a lesbian, gay or bisexual child

This sub-theme refers to what the mothers of sexual minority offspring in this study understood as the significance of having children with alternative sexualities. All the mothers in my study hold strong Christian beliefs. Vuyiswa belongs to an Apostolic Church, Mamana is an Anglican, Lina and Mpho are Roman Catholics and Maria and Mantombi belong to the Twelve Apostles Church. All of them saw their children as gifts from God. Mantombi even went so far as to say God wants to see what she was going to do with the gift He has given her. Lina felt that she cannot punish her son for being gay, because her son is a gift from God. In short, all the mothers in this study linked having a gay child to a test of their faith in God.

Another meaning which these mothers attributed to having offspring who belong to sexual minorities is that this was God’s way of teaching them about unconditional love and acceptance. This view was shared by all the mothers. As a result, all the mothers admitted that, although it was very difficult for some of them to reconcile themselves to the fact that their children were lesbian, gay or bisexual, the love they felt for their children sustained their relationship during the challenging times. For Maria, Vuyiswa and Mamana, having a child with an alternative sexual orientation has taught them to take a stand and speak out against unjust practices, even against acts by members of their own families, if need be, and not to sit on the fence on the issue. Maria suggested that having to deal with her son’s sexual orientation made her a “better person”. In other words, she suggested that she has transformed her outlook for the better, something which she seems to think would not have happened if her son were not gay. The notion of being a better person because of being a parent of a sexual minority child also came out in Kircher (2011), who mentioned one Christian parent who believes that adjusting to having a sexual minority child transformed him into being a “better, less judgemental and more accepting” (n. p.) person.

In conclusion, regarding the meaning these mothers ascribe to having lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring, it appears that for all the mothers in this study, their belief in God paved the way

towards their acceptance of their children's alternative sexual orientation. In particular, what seems to have helped in moving them towards acceptance of their offspring's lesbian or gay identity was the realisation that their children are created by the same God of love they believe in. The fact that this God is not the same as the one propounded by the guardians of orthodoxy did not emerge as an issue for these mothers. Of interest too, is the fact that none of the mothers subscribed to the 'homosexuality is a sin' discourse used in many African communities to discriminate against, stigmatise and alienate members of a sexual minority. Like the parents in the study by Kircher (2011), the mothers of black lesbian, gay or bisexual children in this study also seemed to believe that organised religion should help people who belong to a sexual minority instead of condemning and damning them. Finally, similar to findings by Phillips (2007), one of the lessons these black mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual children have learnt through opening up their worlds and embracing alternative sexual identities in their homes is that love for their children is the most important factor, not the sexual orientation of their children.

4.4.3 Theme 3: Other concerns mothers still have regarding their lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring

This theme refers to ongoing concerns these mothers still have even after reaching acceptance and coming out about the alternative sexual orientation of their children. Two sub-themes emerged. The first is their children's gender role and how they have sex. The second is real/perceived fear that their children may be victimised (see Table 3).

Table 3. Theme 3: Other concerns mothers still have regarding their lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring

Gender role and how they have sex
<p>“What made it difficult was the question I had ... “How do they have sex?” (Vuyiswa, 306)</p> <p>“The other thing that worries me is that I don’t know whether he acts as a female or as a male in the relationship.” (Mamana, 876-878)</p> <p>“Before he left, he asked for me and thanked me for allowing him to be my son’s friend and admitted that he is like my son. I then asked him if he is a man or a woman in their relationship. You must ask isn’t it? He said he was the man and my son was the woman.” (Maria, 1563-1565)</p> <p>“I think it is for me it was when I saw... I don’t know whether she is a boyfriend or a girlfriend... in the relationship.” (Mpho, 2118-2119)</p> <p>“No, not at all ... but for her, she does not see herself as a trans ... because then that construct would be used. In terms of gender issues I have not heard her verbalising that. Even the partner, J I think of her as a female ... I don’t know and I don’t think she wants to change.” (Mpho, 2151-2154)</p>
Real/perceived fear of victimisation of offspring
<p>“I tried to stop her. I said: “People will rape you” but she said, ‘Mom, you do not have the feelings that I have, you do not know how I feel inside.’ (Vuyiswa, 157-158)</p> <p>“<i>Maar</i> I was always worried if at around 6 o’clock, 7 o’clock (pm) and I don’t know where she is... I would be worried. I worried about where she is... ‘Have they caught her, raped her, killed her?’ I was worried about how she would cope as some people were threatening her in some Sections here in Natalspruit... But I realised that she was coping, until she was around the age in which she is now.” (Vuyiswa, 292-296)</p> <p>“My worries about my child now are that I don’t feel she is completely safe... in general. For example, she might go to a place where people are intolerant. In my heart, I know I will not let anyone harm my child. If ever someone does something to her, or a mistake happens to her, I will never give up. I’m afraid I might turn into a serial killer out of wanting to revenge her death... If ever something happens to her, she gets rapedor gets murdered, I would not rest until I have found the perpetrator... When will it stop? Our children being victims?” (Vuyiswa, 586-592)</p> <p>“Well I trust she is able to look after herself and I trust her. She also knows how to defend herself. She is quick to resolve problems through fighting with those who do something wrong to her? She is a no-nonsense person. But I tell her when she goes out,</p>

she must look after herself and to be cautious at all times and move in spaces that are safe where there are many people and to never be alone in places she does not know.” (Mantombi, 1720-1725)

“Yes it is, but once he had visited a friend in Ikageng after church and he had stayed there until it was late. I got worried a bit because he does not normally come home late. When he finally got back, I could see he was alarmed and I asked what had happened. He told me he met a group of boys which started abusing him and threatened to rape him to stop him from being *isitabane*. Fortunately, he managed to outrun them, but that told us that while Mamelodi is relatively safe, there are bad elements in our midst. But I hope he learnt that he should not wander around at night. Since then I’m not worried about anything ... you see, unlike other children, he does not take ... drugs ... he does not have many boyfriends... he is in a steady relationship. Right now I’m happy. I am relieved things are OK.” (Maria, 1595-1603)

“I hate this because I could see how gay children are being treated. They got pushed around, beaten, harassed etc. by their peers and they would fight with them for no reason whatsoever. I told him it worried me as a parent that he was always not around the house. I found it strange that he was always the one who was going to other people’s places. I was always worried when he is not back. Is he safe? I’d say to him call wherever you are I need to know you are safe. I hated the fact that he’d come during the early hours of the morning you don’t think about us as parents especially us single parents. Also I work on Saturdays ... when a neighbour’s dog barks at night I’d hope it’s him. Literary I spent sleepless nights waiting and worrying about him. I said to him why don’t you stay here with your friends for the hours you spend elsewhere.” (Lina, 1067-1076)

“Yes, I would have preferred it if they were here at home, even if they made noise here and I could not sleep, at least I would know my son is safe.” (Lina, 1079-1080)

4.4.3.1 Gender role and how they have sex

At the time of the interviews with the black mothers in this study, all of them reported that they had accepted the alternative sexual orientations of their children and had also come out of the closet about their offspring's sexuality. This sub-theme refers to the role (male or female) which the lesbian, gay or bisexual child plays in his or her relationship(s). In lesbian and gay literature (Boonzaier & Zway, 2015; Eves, 2004; Swarr, 2012), this is referred to as being butch/femme, or being the top/bottom or insertive/receptive partner. A full description of the butch/femme distinction is provided in Section 2.2.

Similarly, Cook et al. (2013) suggest that gender non-conformity is pervasive in the expression of same-sex sexuality in South Africa. The findings of a study by Murray and Roscoe (2001) reveal that the expression of same-sex sexuality in South Africa tends to reproduce a binary of masculinity and femininity among black gay men, more than in developed countries. This is confirmed by other South African studies, such as a study by Rabie and Lesch (2009), who report that it is 'normal' for feminine black gay men in a South African township to visit (relatives) with females in the community and to participate in female activities (such as drawing water from the tap). Reid (2005) found that in some black same-sex relationships, there are 'wives' and 'husbands' with clearly defined boundaries. Given the prevalent acceptance of these binaries in the expression of alternative sexualities, it is not surprising that the mothers in this study showed some interest in knowing the roles played by their lesbian, gay or bisexual child in their relationships.

Three mothers, Vuyiswa, Mamana and Mpho, expressed concern or interest in knowing the gender role their children perform in their relationships. Mamana expressed her concern regarding the role her son performs in the relationship with his partner during the interview thus: "The other thing that worries me is that I don't know whether he acts as a female or as a male in the relationship." Maria, unlike Mamana, directly questioned her son's partner regarding the role each performs in their relationship. She told me that just before leaving, her son's partner asked for her. He thanked Maria for the warm welcome in her home. Maria said: "I then asked him if he is a man or a woman in the relationship ... He said he was the man and my son was the woman." However, the fact that Maria did not ask her own son for this information, while claiming that the two of them are very close, might be indicative of the fact that sex talk is still a somewhat taboo subject in a parent-child relationship.

Similarly, Mpho, as the mother of a bisexual daughter, also showed some concern about the sexual role of her daughter. She mentioned not knowing whether her daughter is “the boyfriend ... or the girlfriend ... in the relationship”. However, when I asked why this was important, she gave me an ambivalent answer. Firstly, she said her mentioning of the sexual role was prompted by the fact that her daughter mentioned that one day she would be Mrs B (the partner’s surname). However, later on when I told her that not knowing the gender role of the child bothers some of the mothers I interviewed and therefore wanted to know if it bothers her too, she said it was not the case with her, but raised yet another issue, which is that her daughter does not see herself as transgender. Mpho’s reply seemed to suggest that if her daughter were transgender, it would have been a problem.

In view of the fact that none of the participating mothers could provide a reason for her interest in knowing the sexual role of her same-sex attracted offspring, it would appear that their interest is linked to the fascination many heterosexual people seem to have about lesbian and gay couples in general, and the belief that men who are gay want to be women, while women who are lesbian want to be men (Boonzaier & Zway, 2015; Kheswa & Wieringa, 2005; Matebeni, 2011; Murray & Roscoe, 2001; Rabie & Lesch, 2009; Reid, 2005; Swarr, 2012). This seems to explain (but not condone) the motivation for some black men to carry out ‘corrective/curative’ rape as a way to teach such men and women (in particular, ‘out feminine men and butch lesbians) their place in society and to stop them from challenging patriarchal power. When I asked Mamana and Maria why they did not ask their children about this, they reported that they felt uncomfortable, as they considered the issue a private matter. This discomfort confirms what Antonio (1997) says about the silence that prevails around sexuality in the African context, as well as the view that sexuality is a taboo subject; hence family members cannot discuss it openly and freely.

Vuyiswa’s concern appeared to be slightly different, as she seemed to be more curious than worried, in particular, about how her daughter and her same-sex lover have sex. It is not surprising that Vuyiswa was not concerned about the sexual role of her daughter, because from the earlier discussion, it was evident from the gender non-conforming characteristics her daughter exhibits (a “bumpy” walk, masculine dress, etc.) and behaviour (beating boys who bother her, etc.) that she is masculine and therefore probably plays the male role in the relationship. Furthermore, her preference for being referred to as “bro”, a term used for young

males in urban areas, and her tendency to beat her girlfriends during quarrels also suggests that she plays a masculine role in her relationships.

To conclude, three mothers out of the six showed concern regarding the gender role their child performed in their relationships, while one mother appeared to be curious about how her daughter and her lover perform the sex act. Another issue that became evident during the interviews regarding matters to do with sex is that talking about sex is taboo subject between parents and their offspring. This seemed to account for why these mothers of offspring with alternative sexualities silenced this conversation with their offspring, although they were obviously curious about it.

4.4.3.2 Real/perceived fear of victimisation of offspring

This sub-theme refers to the real or perceived fears the mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual children have regarding the welfare of their children in some communities. Since the advent of democracy and the Constitutional reforms, which protect individuals against legal discrimination based on a variety of identities including sexual orientation, there has been greater visibility of alternative sexualities in South Africa. Violence against sexual minorities, especially in the form of hate crimes, has become prevalent in South Africa (Nel & Judge, 2008). In particular, the murder of lesbian women and gay men, as well as the notorious ‘corrective’ rape of lesbian women and gay men tells of the real risks and threats facing members of a sexual minority and challenges confronting them and their families in South African society today.

Although there was general consensus from the Mamelodi mothers that their area was safe for lesbian and gay people, three of the four mothers explained that an omnipresent threat of sexual violence was always hanging over their children’s heads, in the form of verbal or physical assault, or even rape or murder. However, all of them acknowledged that this pertained only to certain pockets of the township, and was caused by few intolerant individuals who make the township unsafe for members of a sexual minority in general.

That Mantombi is concerned about the victimisation of her daughter became evident when she replied to my question about safety in Mamelodi by saying she trusted that her daughter was able to look after herself and knew how to defend herself. However, her admission that she often urged her daughter to be cautious, especially when she visited areas she did not know, indicated concern. Like Mantombi, Maria’s concern became evident when she related how

despite Mamelodi's being a relatively safe place, once when her son had visited a friend at a place called Ikageng, he was almost violated by a group of boys who said they were going to rape him in an effort to stop him from being *isitabane*. Maria reported that her son managed to escape by outrunning them. An important issue that came up from the interview with this mother is that, contrary to popular belief that lesbian women are the only ones that are vulnerable to corrective rape, in reality, this is not necessarily true. Research by scholars such as Louw (2014), Mkhize, Bennet, Reddy and Moletsane (2010), Nel and Judge (2008) and Sanger (2010) confirm that 'corrective' rape affects both lesbians and gay men. Louw (2014) addresses the erroneous notion that 'corrective' rape affects only lesbian women in his article "Men are also corrective rape victims". Similarly, a joint study by Out LGBT Well-being and of South Africa Centre for Applied Psychology (UCAP) in (2003) confirmed that instances of 'corrective' rape of men were not uncommon in South Africa. Louw (2014) reported that in that same study "the percentage of black gay men who said they have experienced corrective rape matched that of the black lesbians who partook in the study" (n. p.).

Lina, one of the mothers, also added her voice on the issue of safety in Mamelodi. She shared with me that she often lay awake whenever her son had not yet returned home. She also told me during the interview that she had observed that in general, gay children get pushed around, beaten and are generally harassed by their heterosexual peers. This worry about the safety of her son led this mother to grant her son and his friends, permission to stay until late at her home as a measure to ensure his safety.

Of the four mothers who expressed their opinions on this theme, Vuyiswa, the mother from Katlehong in the East Rand in Gauteng, appeared to be the most worried about the safety of her daughter. From the beginning to the end of the interview, fear of rape dominated this mother's thinking. Consequently, she reported trying to "stop her" daughter from being lesbian and warning her saying: "People will rape you." Vuyiswa's warning directed to her daughter does not only reveal Vuyiswa's concern about the welfare of her offspring, but also portrays her as not yet fully comprehending that same-sex attraction is not a choice. Up to the end of the interview, fear of victimisation of her daughter was evidently a constant concern for her, to the extent that she even expressed the fear that if her daughter were to be raped, she would be forced to "turn into a serial killer".

To sum up, the discussion above has revealed that the majority of the participating mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring showed that although they had some safety concerns

regarding their children's welfare in some communities, this is not widespread. However, given the press reports of violence against sexual minorities in the big cities of South Africa and particularly townships, it is understandable why some of these mothers harbour some fears of victimisation of their children. In light of this, I would argue that the mothers' coming out of the closet about their children's alternative sexual orientation is also a strategy aimed at protecting them.

Having discussed the findings of this dissertation, and considered them in the light of the available literature on the subject both in South Africa and abroad, I now turn my attention to the study's conclusions, limitations, and recommendations.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary and Conclusions of the Study

In this chapter I provide a summary of the overall findings of this dissertation and draw conclusions from the study as a whole. This is followed by recommendations and limitations of the study.

South African black urban communities have diverse populations with equally diverse attitudes and views towards alternative sexualities in general, and towards people who belong to sexual minorities in particular. These communities are, on the one hand, characterised by a strongly patriarchal culture, backed up by religious beliefs which insist on heterosexuality as the God-given norm, and on any deviation from this norm as deserving of social ostracism or punishment. On the other hand, they are modern communities with people, who as individuals, show agency in relation to how they live their lives, in particular with regard to decisions pertaining to their private lives. The *Constitution* (RSA, 1996) outlaws discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in South Africa. This has strengthened the position of sexual minorities in South Africa, but mainly on paper. What is happening all over the country currently is that members of a sexual minority (as I have highlighted in the introduction in Chapter 1 of this study), due to the stigma emanating from their perceived sexual and/or gender deviance, “are also frequently discriminated against, through criminal acts because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity” (Nel & Judge, 2008, p. 20). The literature on discrimination and hate crimes (Eliason, 1996) suggests that homophobic hate crime increases as lesbian and gay communities become more visible. In a similar vein, in South Africa, there appears to be a link between the visibility of sexual minorities in today’s society and the development of a strong anti-homosexuality sentiment in some quarters.

In South Africa and on the African continent as a whole, opposition against sexual minorities and their lifestyle has come from among people with the highest levels of authority. Examples include the state presidents of some African countries, including South Africa’s Jacob Zuma, who was quoted in the *Mail and Guardian* of 26 September 2006 as saying that “when I was growing up an *ungqingili* [a gay] would not have stood in front of me. I would knock him out” (Mail & Guardian, 2006). Another newspaper, the *Sowetan*, cited in the same edition of the

Mail and Guardian of 26 September 2006, quoted him as having condemned same-sex marriages, labelling them “a disgrace to the nation and to God” (*Mail & Guardian* 2006). Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe was quoted as having described the gay men and lesbian women of Zimbabwe as “worse than dogs and pigs” (Shoko, 2010) and forced the closure of a fair booth by Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe at the Zimbabwe International Book Fair (GALZ, 1996). Sam Nujoma, former president of Namibia, in a speech on 14 February 1997, together with South West Africa People’s Organisation (SWAPO), called homosexuals of Namibia “white” and “perverts” (*Mail & Guardian*, 1997). The worst gay-bashing of homosexuals came from the current president of Uganda, Yoweri Museveni, who told a CNN reporter during an interview on 24 February 2014 that “homosexuals are disgusting”, urging the West to “respect African societies and their values” (Verjee, 2014). As mentioned before, because these negative sentiments come from powerful figures of authority in the different countries, I argue that it is not surprising that on the African continent we are experiencing a rise in hate crimes. I also argue that there is a possibility that the dominance of anti-same-sex sexuality discourses, especially ones directed at lesbian women, are informed by the perception that lesbian women are challenging patriarchy and sexual norms in today’s society.

Given this scenario, it is to be expected that that families with children who belong to a sexual minority would find it challenging when their offspring come out of the closet to them. The main dilemma parents of lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring face revolves around whether they should accept their sexual minority child and risk alienating themselves from society, or, whether they should side with society’s negative views towards sexuality and reject their lesbian, gay or bisexual child, thus risking cutting ties with their own child.

Furthermore, the Family Acceptance Project (FAP) findings (Ryan, 2009) suggest that young lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender children’s family and caregivers have a great impact on their lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender children’s health risk and well-being, and in particular, on their physical and mental health. Furthermore, a comparison between rejected lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youths and those who were not rejected shows that rejected youths

...were more than eight times likely to have attempted suicide; nearly as six times likely to report high levels of depression; more than three times likely to use illegal drugs and finally more than three times likely to be at high risk for HIV and Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). (Ryan, 2009, p. 4)

Bearing in mind the dominant discourses on same-sex sexuality in black urban communities and the reforms contained in the Equality clause of the *Constitution* (RSA, 1996), as well as the findings of FAP research on the other, I set out to trace the journeys of six accepting ‘out’ black mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring from the moment of discovery to the moment of acknowledgement or acceptance, with the aim of understanding what parents go through when their sexual minority children come out. More importantly, in a country where violence against sexual minorities is rife, I wanted to establish the motivation behind these parents’ coming out about their children’s alternative sexualities, including whether there is a role (if any) that parents of sexual minorities can play to alleviate the risks associated with being lesbian, gay or bisexual.

Having looked closely at the lived experiences of these black mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual children vis-a-vis literature on parental coming out, I found that the findings of this study concur with those of previous studies (Caldwell, 2004; Griffin et al., 1986; Pearlman, 2005; Phillips, 2007; Savin-Williams & Dubé, 1998), in relation to initial reactions of the mothers. The study also adds some new insights. I begin by highlighting the similarities between the findings of this study and those of existing studies, and then move on to differences, considering the contribution this study makes to the field of study.

5.2 Similarities Between the Findings of This Study and Those of Prior Studies

Regarding initial parental reactions, this study concurs with previous studies (Ben-Ari, 1995a, 1995b; Griffin et al., 1986; Saltzburg, 2004; Savin-Williams & Dubé, 1998; Strommen, 1989), by portraying the journeys of the six mothers as traumatic and stage-like. Most research on parental reactions to disclosure by a child or discovery that a child is lesbian, gay or bisexual follows the popular grief model Kubler-Ross (1969), which considers responses to the death of a family member. This model has been applied because the discovery implies the “death” of a parent’s prior vision of a son or daughter as heterosexual and all the hopes and ideas associated with that vision. Available research also shows a marked difference between the mothers who suspected that their children might have a sexual minority orientation and those who had not, even in cases where the offspring exhibited gender non-conforming behaviours. For example, Saltzburg (2004, p. 115), found that parents who had strong suspicions throughout childhood that their children might belong to a sexual minority adjusted more easily than those who had not. It appeared that the gradual accumulation of awareness positively supported their adjustment after disclosure in adolescence. As Saltzburg (2004) seems to

suggest, their years of speculation may have prepared the mothers for the disclosure. By contrast, the mothers who did not suspect, in line with previous findings, went through the grief-like stages associated with bereavement posited by Kubler-Ross (1969), namely shock, confusion, denial, etc., while the mother who had some suspicions expressed relief after disclosure.

Shock, confusion and disbelief followed by denial also dominated shortly after disclosure for the mothers both in this study and in previous studies. For example, one mother asked her daughter what was going on in her life, hoping the daughter would tell her that she had a boyfriend when the mother already knew that her daughter was lesbian. In both the existing literature on parental reactions on disclosure of alternative sexual orientation and in this study, after the denial phase, some parents blamed an external cause for their child's same-sex sexuality. For example, in the study by Savin-Williams and Dubé (1998), some parents listed a bad second parent, an "alternative" peer group, or a gay teacher as bad influences. In my study the perceived perpetrators ranged from a traumatic event such as childhood rape in Vuyiswa's daughter case, to the lack of black male role models in cases where the mothers were single parents in Mamana and Lina's sons' cases. Another suggestion was mimicking the Hollywood lifestyle in Mpho's daughter's case.

Both the existing studies and this study suggest that exposure to educational materials and confiding in others moved the parents of lesbian, gay or bisexual children toward a stage of acceptance or outness of their child's alternative sexual orientation. One mother's adjustment leading to acceptance was aided by watching positive role models who are also parents of lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring. The mothers disclosed to a range of people, including their own mothers for Mantombi and Mpho, a priest and friends for Lina. Some of these people expressed unconditional support, for example, the priest and Mantombi's mother, while others expressed quiet disapproval, for instance, Mpho's mother and younger sister.

Many of the mothers appeared to have reached the integration stage, because many of them appeared to have normalised having a child who is a member of a sexual minority to the extent of transforming their homes into queer spaces, as also reported in the Australian study by Gorman-Murray (2008). For example, Maria showed this by welcoming her son's boyfriend and sharing a meal with him, as it is done in the case of heterosexual relationships. Mamana celebrated her son's birthday with a diverse group consisting of heterosexual family members and same-sex oriented friends of her son. Vuyiswa queered her home by becoming a

peacemaker between her daughter and her girlfriend whenever fights occur. Vuyiswa also queered her home by drawing my attention to the displayed photograph of her daughter and her lover, something that is not common if a couple is not heterosexual. Lina queered her home by allowing her son's friends to feel at home in her home, an act which earned her the title of "supermom". Out of the six mothers, Vuyiswa is the only mother who went on to become a proud mother of a lesbian daughter. Her actions in advocacy work as well as the shirt she told me she owned, with the words "My daughter, she is a lesbian" are telling. To sum up, for all the black mothers in this study, one thing that is evident is that a schema shift has occurred from seeing themselves as mothers in typical South African families to seeing themselves as mothers in a family with a lesbian, gay or bisexual child.

5.3 Differences Between the Findings of This Study and Those of Prior Studies

Contrary to the findings of most prior studies, which suggest that organised religion is an obstacle to parental acceptance (Goldfried & Goldfried, 2001; Shoko, 2010; Subhi & Geelan, 2012) the mothers in my study did not report experiencing conflict between their Christian beliefs and values on the one hand, and having a child with an alternative sexual orientation on the other. Consequently, rather than viewing their sexual minority children as aberrations, as many Christian teachings proclaim, these black mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual children in my study saw their lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring as gifts from God. They interpreted the challenging situation that confronted them as forcing them to practice the true Christian teaching of unconditional love and acceptance of others. In this way, these mothers' faith in God, it would seem, enabled them to reject the two prevalent discourses and/or myths on same-sex sexuality used to crusade against same-sex attracted people. Instead, they became accepting and supportive of their sexual minority offspring publicly. They also rejected the view that same-sex practice or desire is a sin by using the very Christian values of love contained in organised religion to accept rather than reject their children with an alternative sexual orientation. It would seem that these mothers' realisation that their lesbian, gay or bisexual children were created by God, motivated the mothers to accept their children unconditionally.

Besides learning about unconditional acceptance, the majority of the mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual children in this study also learnt about the nature of love in general. From having sexual minority children, these mothers learnt that love does not subscribe to the binary categorisation of same-sex sexuality and heterosexuality. Instead, they learnt that love, like sexuality, is fluid, as suggested by scholars such as Diamond (2008). While reviewing the

literature on lesbian and bisexual women's sexual identities, Diamond (2008) found that female sexuality is more fluid than male sexuality. This view was reiterated by Mpho's daughter during the mother-daughter talk following the daughter's disclosure. For example, Mpho learnt through her daughter's bisexuality that love can be between a man and a woman at one time, or between a woman and a woman at another time. Other mothers, like Vuyiswa, Mamana, Lina, Maria and Mantombi, also learnt that love is not restricted to individuals of opposite sexes, but can be between people of the same sex.

Having lesbian, gay or bisexual children also transformed these mothers in many ways. One significant way is by giving them a voice. This enabled them to speak out against discrimination of their sexual minority children by society. Griffin et al. (1986) posit that speaking up serves a variety of functions. Firstly, the more parents speak out, the more they rid themselves of their own homophobia. Secondly, speaking up can be a way of sharing their pain. Thirdly, they educate those who do not have accurate information about same-sex sexuality. In the case of this research, some mothers have become allies of sexual minorities or activists for lesbian, gay or bisexual issues. The very act of coming out about the sexual minority status of their children is symbolic of the parents' pledge of solidarity with their children against societal prejudice and discrimination. This bold act by the mothers resulted in their changing their homes from being strictly heterosexual spaces into being queer spaces – spaces that bridge the hetero/homo divide.

Having summarised the study and drawn conclusions from its findings, I now turn to limitations of the study.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

Although this study has succeeded in adding the voices of black mothers of sexual minority children in coming out literature, the study has several limitations which are discussed in this section.

Firstly, the study specified that only black mothers who are out of the closet could participate. This meant that the voices of 'out' mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring from other races were not taken into account. It would be interesting to learn whether or not coming out journeys of mothers from different races are similar or different, as well as possible reasons for these. Another obvious limitation is that only accepting mothers' journeys are explored. Exploring the experiences of unaccepting mothers would have enriched the study further, as I

would possibly have obtained a fuller picture into reasons why some mothers do not accept their children's alternative sexual orientation in the South African cultural context, but the recruitment of such mothers posed a problem.

Secondly, I introduced myself as a mother of a gay 25-year-old son, and as someone who is doing research towards a Master's Degree in Psychology. The disclosure of my identity as similar to that of these mothers' may have influenced the way the mothers responded to the questions I posed. Furthermore, investigator effects may have occurred. This means that there is a possibility that I may have distorted data, since I am researching a phenomenon that I am personally interested in. Thus, distortion resulting from personal biases may have occurred or could occur.

Thirdly, another obvious limitation is that the selection of participants was done through purposive sampling and the geographical location was limited to Gauteng. This meant not all probable participants were given a chance to participate. Furthermore, I had to access the mothers through their offspring. Therefore, some mothers may have agreed to participate not so much of their own volition, but because they knew how important their participation was to their offspring.

Fourthly, another limitation of this study is its retrospective nature and therefore its reliance on memory as a tool for remembering how the participants felt at a time in the past when they discovered their children were sexual minorities. An obvious weakness of this method is that memory can be selective and therefore can be unreliable.

Lastly, one of the limitations of this study is related to the social class of the black mothers. Although I made an attempt to recruit black mothers from diverse class backgrounds, the small sample size means that I cannot make any generalisations regarding potential differences between persons of differing social class backgrounds.

Having stated the limitations of this study, I now turn to recommendations for future research.

5.5 Recommendations

In view of the fact that this study focused solely on the journeys of 'out' mothers of black lesbian, gay offspring, in other words, sexual orientation only, its findings do not address mothers of other sexual minorities such as transgender (gender identity) and intersex

(biological variance). Future research which explores the journeys of mothers of offspring who belong to these sexual minorities would share valuable insights pertaining to similarities and differences between their journeys, if any.

This study focused on the experiences of black mothers of lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring only, in order to get a fuller picture of the impact discovering that a family member is lesbian, gay or bisexual. The experiences of other members of the family, such as fathers, siblings and the extended family, where applicable, should be explored. This is important because the literature on disclosure of sexual orientation suggests that the coming out of a family member impacts the family unit as a whole, so the perspectives of other family members would enrich understanding of the experience.

Furthermore, this study excluded research on black mothers who are not accepting of their children's same-sex orientation or bisexuality. Their inclusion may have shed insight into why some parents cannot go beyond the grief and loss of the child they thought they have and the fantasies and dreams they have for that child.

Lastly, including mothers from other races and cultures would be highly beneficial as it would provide us with knowledge of whether there are differences or similarities in how mothers of all races react to disclosure of a son or daughter's alternative sexual orientation.

In summary, this study's aim was to contribute to existing research on parental reactions to the coming out of their lesbian, gay or bisexual offspring. In particular, this study focused on 'out' mothers of sexual minorities with the view of finding out why they saw it fit to come out about the identities of their offspring some in communities which are hostile. Of importance is that this study succeeded in capturing the voices of a group of mothers from a marginalised group, voices that are not normally heard, particularly on this issue.

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APPENDIX 1:
COVERING LETTER TO LESBIAN, GAY OR
BISEXUAL PERSONS

Dear

Thank you for allowing your caregiver (mother/granny/aunt/sister) to participate in this study. For the purposes of this study, the term “mother” includes any primary caregiver such as your granny, aunt, older sister, etc. This study traces black mothers’ journeys “coming out of the closet” regarding the sexual orientation of their offspring from the period of their lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) offspring’s coming out to the present moment – beyond the closet. In view of the fact that we live in a society which presumes that everyone is heterosexual, this study examines how selected black mothers of LGB offspring arrived at accepting or acknowledging their offspring’s same-sex orientation/attraction to the point of “coming out” about their offspring’s identity to others in the family and in society in general.

This study will be conducted by myself, a Master’s student at the University of South Africa (UNISA) under the supervision of Prof. Juan Nel of the Department of Psychology at UNISA. Since my research focus is sexual orientation and not gender identity or biological variance, mothers of transgender and intersex offspring have been excluded. Although this study may not benefit the participants and their offspring directly, I sincerely hope it will facilitate healing and growth, as well as advance knowledge in this under-researched field of study. I also hope that the results of this study will at least benefit other mothers of LGB offspring who have recently come out of the closet by equipping these mothers with effective strategies to deal with the disclosure of their offspring’s same-sex orientation/attraction or bisexuality.

The criteria for inclusion in this study are that mothers

- are black,
- have offspring who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual,
- have been out of the closet about their son or daughter’s same-sex orientation or bisexuality to a variety of people for two and a half years or more, and
- live in Gauteng.

Attached to this e-mail there is a short informed consent form which you are requested to please fill out if you are at all interested in letting your mother take part in this study. Please note that this does not commit you to anything, but enables me, the researcher, to identify participants from a range of backgrounds. Please note that all correspondence will be treated with the strictest confidentiality.

This project, including the proposal and ethical aspects, has been reviewed by the Ethics Committee of the Department of Psychology at the UNISA. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards

Khulukazi Soldati-Kahimbaara

khulukazi.soldati@gmail.com

Cellphone No.: 082 511 6283

APPENDIX 2:
SELF-COMPLETION QUESTIONNAIRE
YOUTH'S BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION WITH GUIDANCE

The purpose of this form is to ascertain the eligibility of your mother for participation in the study.

Please complete the following form.

Your personal details and your mother's:

Your name & surname: _____

Your mother's name and surname _____

Your pseudonym: _____

Your mother's pseudonym: _____

Your age: _____ Your mother's age: _____

Your home language: _____

Your mother's home language: _____

Residential address:

Your physical address & name of suburb: _____

Your mother's address & name of suburb: _____

Level of education:

Grade 0 – Grade 7 _____

Grade 7 – Grade 12 _____

Diploma _____

Undergraduate _____

Graduate _____

Postgraduate _____

Religious affiliation (Circle the applicable description):

Christian/Muslim/Jewish/Other (write name) _____

Contact details:

Your cell number: _____ Your mother's cell number: _____

E-mail address: _____

Your mother's e-mail address: _____

Your sexual orientation (Circle the applicable sexual orientation):

Lesbian / Gay / Bisexual

Number of months/years out of the closet to your mother:

0 weeks – 6 months _____

More than 6 months – less than one year _____

1 year to 2 years _____

2 years to 3 years _____

3 years and more _____

APPENDIX 3:
SELF-COMPLETION QUESTIONNAIRE WITH GUIDANCE

**Preliminary questionnaire for potential participants in the study entitled:
Black mothers' journeys: Coming out about their offspring's sexual orientation**

Please complete the questionnaire below:

Mother's personal details:

Offspring's name: _____

Your name: _____

Your pseudonym of choice: _____

Age of offspring: _____ Age of parent: _____

Your home language/s: _____

Home language/s of offspring: _____

Residential area (Circle the applicable option):

Your residential area: Suburb / township / rural area / central town

Your offspring's residential area: Suburb / township / rural area / central town

Your level of education (Circle the applicable option):

Primary school level / Secondary school level / Matric / Diploma / Undergraduate / Postgraduate

Offspring's level of education (Circle the applicable option):

Grade 0 – 7 / Grade 8 – 12 / Matric / Diploma / Undergraduate / Postgraduate

Your marital status (Circle the applicable option):

married single divorced widowed cohabiting/ living together

Number of biological children, if any (Circle the applicable option):

1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5 or more

Your religious affiliation (Circle the applicable option):

Christian (Specify denomination, e.g. Anglican) _____

Judaism

Hindu

Islam

Other (Please specify) _____

Contact details (in order to make contact with you for the interviews):

	Yours	Your son's or daughter's
Cell number, if any		
Landline number, if any	H/W N/A	H/W N/A
E-mail address, if any		

Offspring's sexual orientation (Circle the applicable option):

Lesbian (an attraction between two females on various levels – emotionally, physically, intellectually, spiritually and sexually)

Gay (an attraction between two males on various levels – emotionally, physically, intellectually, spiritually and sexually)

Bisexual (an attraction to people of the same and opposite sex on various levels – emotionally, physically, intellectually, spiritually and sexually)

Total number of months/years you have been out of the closet (Circle the applicable option):

Overall:

Less than 6 months	6 – 12 months	1 – 2 years	2 – 3 years	3 years and more
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To the rest of the family:

Less than 6 months	6 – 12 months	1 – 2 years	2 – 3 years	3 years and more	Not out
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To community members:

Less than 6 months	6 – 12 months	1 – 2 years	2 – 3 years	3 years and more	Not out
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To work colleagues:

Less than 6 months	6 – 12 months	1 – 2 years	2 – 3 years	3 years and more	Not out
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Thank you for your co-operation

APPENDIX 4: CONSENT FORM

Department of Psychology
University of South Africa
Pretoria
South Africa

Offspring's Consent Form

Dear Sir or Madam

My name is Khulukazi Soldati-Kahimbaara, a student enrolled for MA Psychology Research Consultation (MA(RC)) degree at UNISA under the supervision of Prof. Juan Nel. I am conducting a study entitled "Black mothers' journeys: Coming out about their offspring's sexual orientation". Since the study's focus is the discovery by a mother that an offspring (in this case, you) is lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB), I hereby request your permission for your mother to participate in this study.

The purpose of this study is to investigate when, how and to whom black mothers come out about their children's same-sex orientation in light of anti-lesbian, anti-gay or anti-bisexual sentiment in many black communities. The procedure will consist of semi-structured interviews which aim to unpack the aftermath of emotions, thoughts and behaviours that black mothers experienced following the disclosure by their children of their LGB identity. Each interview will take approximately 90 to 120 minutes.

One of the benefits of participating in this study is the opportunity it affords participants to reflect on a sensitive and taboo issue. This reflection may contribute to growth and healing. Furthermore, the ultimate value for the research findings of this study is not only for participants and their families, but also for other mothers (and their families) who make the same discovery that their offspring have same-sex attraction and who may feel at a loss regarding what to do and how to react to the news. The benefit of participating in this study is also linked to the advancement of knowledge concerning LGB issues in society in general, and in particular, among black Africans.

In light of the sensitivity of this research topic, I acknowledge that it may stir uncomfortable emotions for your mother which may impact on your relationship. To counter this, services of a clinical psychologist will be secured if the need arises. Your mother has also been informed that her participation is voluntary and that she has a right to withdraw from the study at any given time. To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms will be used instead of participants' real names. For privacy and confidentiality, only my supervisor and I will have access to the raw data. Please note that your mother will be under no obligation to answer any questions she is not comfortable with. However, her permission to audiotape the interview will be requested in order to ensure accuracy of the transcription.

I have read the informed consent form provided above. I voluntarily agree to allow my mother to participate in this study. I note that I have a right to print a copy of this consent form for my personal information.

Signature:..... Date:

APPENDIX 5:

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Department of Psychology
University of South Africa
Pretoria
South Africa
Cellphone number: 0825116283

Participant Consent Form

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is Khulukazi Soldati-Kahimbaara, and I am a student doing an MA Psychology degree at UNISA under the supervision of Prof. Juan Nel. I hereby invite you to participate in the study entitled “Black mothers’ journeys: Coming out about their offspring’s sexual orientation”.

The purpose of this study is to investigate when, how and to whom black mothers come out about their children’s same-sex orientation in light of the heterosexism and homonegativity that is prevalent in black communities. The procedure will consist of semi-structured interviews which aim to unpack the aftermath of emotions, feelings and behaviour that black mothers experienced following the disclosure by their children of their bi/lesbian/gay identity. Each interview will take approximately between 90 and 120 minutes.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty. You have a right to withdraw from the study at any time. Your participation in this study will be completely anonymous. Thus, the researcher will ensure that no personal information provided by participants can be linked to their responses. You are also assured that only the researcher, transcriber and supervisor will have access to the data. Pseudonyms will be used instead of names to ensure anonymity.

Regarding risks, the only foreseeable risk in this study may come from the fact that it examines a sensitive topic which is treated as taboo in many communities. One of the benefits of participating in this study is the opportunity it affords to participants to reflect on a sensitive and taboo issue. This reflection may contribute to growth and healing. Furthermore, the

ultimate value for the research findings of the study is not only for the participants, but also for those who are also in the same situation. The benefit of participating in this study is also linked to the advancement of knowledge concerning LGB issues in society in general, and in particular, among Africans.

Please note that you are under no obligation to answer any questions you are not comfortable with. You are hereby requested to grant the researcher permission to audiotape the interview in order to ensure accuracy of the transcription.

Ihave read the informed consent form provided above.
I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the right to print a copy of this consent form for my personal information

Signature.....

APPENDIX 6:

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Samples of questions asked during the first interview:

- Tell me about your reactions when you first discovered that your child is attracted to others of the same sex as themselves?
- Whom did you first confide in? In other words, whom did you trust to share your offspring's disclosure with? Whom, if anyone, did you talk to (e.g. a psychologist, a priest, a friend, another parent, etc.)?
- What emotions, if any, did you feel immediately on learning about your child's alternative sexual orientation?
- At what point, if at all, did you discuss this matter with your son or daughter?
- What were the issues about your daughter's or son's sexual orientation, if any, that you struggled with the most?
- Why was this the case?
- When did you disclose to others that you are a parent of a sexual minority child?
- What made you decide to disclose that you are a parent of a sexual minority child?
- What made you accept your son's or daughter's same-sex sexuality or bisexuality?
- What are the prevalent attitudes of the community about same-sex sexuality?