LIVED EXPERIENCES OF BLACK LESBIAN CONGREGANTS AT THE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN BETHLEHEM, FREE STATE

By

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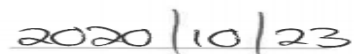
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ABSTRACT

The moral debate of lesbianism and Christianity has often been a controversial topic amongst Christians. The Bible has been a guide for the Christian civil society throughout the history of Christianity. These teachings guide people to live a life of purity and spiritual maturity. The Bible advocates for heterosexual relationships and views homosexuality as an immoral sexual orientation. On the other hand, in traditional black society, people are taught to practice the spirit of *'ubuntu'* which involves displaying the qualities of humanity and compassion towards others regardless of their background or current state. As lesbians are not identified as being 'typical' traditional women, this creates a sense of wonder about how these unconventional women experience strict and traditionally oriented institutions in their societies such as the church. This study explored the lived experiences of black lesbians who attend the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church. This church is situated in the township of Bohlokong in the Free State, South Africa. The study was rooted in a qualitative paradigm and an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) design was used to explore the topic. Data was collected using a method of individual semi structured interviews where participants were given the opportunity to express themselves in their home language. Purposive sampling was used to select eight black lesbian participants who were all 18 years old and above. These participants are full members of the AME Church. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to analyse participants' responses. The results indicate that the participants go through unpleasant experiences in the hands of the church. Furthermore, the results revealed the impact and effect that these experiences have on the black lesbians within the church setting.

 The results of this study assisted in exposing and contextualizing the subjective experiences that black lesbians encounter at the AME church.

KEY TERMS: African Christianity, homophobia, patriarchy, Phenomenology, Interpretative

Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), same sex relationships, sexual orientation education.

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CHAPTER 1

CREATING CONTEXT

1.1 Introduction

In their study on the experiences of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered (GLBT) people, Smith and Horne (2007) discovered that at the time of coming out, participants who were affiliated with mainstream Judeo-Christian faiths reported greater faith conflict than those affiliated with Earth-spirited faiths. According to Botha (2006), it is vitally important and relevant to question how Christianity should regard individuals in same sex relationships and how the latter should regard Christianity. He responds to these questions by making reference to the Bible and stating that:

> "True Christianity cannot but accept the Biblical verdict that homosexual conduct is sin. The Bible's view that acceptable sexual intercourse for people should be between people of the opposite sex, in a monogamous, exogamous, heterosexual permanent marital relationship, is a core value of Scripture" (Botha, 2006, p. 9).

Finding oneself a companion or life partner is a wonderful feeling and experience, but finding one who shares the same views and sentiments as you do, for instance a religious belief system, is arguably a match made in 'heaven'. The moral debate of lesbianism and Christianity has often been a controversial issue. For instance, in *The Black Pride Survey 2000* participants expressed several concerns with regard to lesbianism and Christianity, one of them being the heterosexist language that is recognised and encouraged in Black Churches (Chaney and Patrick, 2011). Trammell (2015) highlights the fact that individuals in same sex relationships are still invisible to one large body of Americans who are Christians, unlike in many cultural

and media settings where this obstacle has been overcome. According to Ernest (as cited in Trammell, 2015) these Christians are under the impression that there are Christians and there are people in same sex relationships, but supposedly no homosexual is a Christian.

Shemer (2013) argues that from a biblical perspective, a church does not only refer to the physical structure of the building, but also refers to a body of believers. Christianity law encourages believers who attend church to do so freely without fear of being ridiculed, judged or marginalised by anyone, as church is not a place for multiplying one's problems, but rather a place of tranquillity and joy (Shemer, 2013). Most importantly, the Bible accentuates two laws that are considered the biggest laws that Christians should abide by, which are to love God and to love all mankind (Orangia Conference Lay Organisation Trans, 2013).

Heterosexuality has been the basis of an ideal marriage and family structure in the black Christian society (Achunike and Nnebedum, 2008). One of the main reasons for this view or preference of sexual orientation is the natural procreation that exists within heterosexual relationships (Achunike and Nnebedum, 2008; Zion, 1992). The fertility of a woman is treasured in the black society because she carries and brings life on earth (Mashamba, 2009). Being childless can have unfavourable consequences for a black woman, for instance, being insulted with derogatory infertility remarks by women who themselves have bore children (Mashamba, 2009). Child bearing is also one of the reasons why a bridal price "Lobola" is paid to a bride's family when she gets married into her husband's family as her new family hopes that she will bear children for their son (Semenya, 2014). Therefore, being a female in a same sex relationship may potentially draw such negative consequences depending on the values and morals of a particular culture or religious belief system.

Socialisation also plays a significant role in the sexual orientation that a person eventually leans towards (Baron and Branscombe, 2012). Passer et al., (2009) define socialisation as "the

process by which culture is transmitted to new members and internalized by them" (p.18). Different societies have unique sexual norms and rules that accept or condemn certain sexual practices, and deviation from the norm could arguably lead to unpleasant consequences or punishment (Baron and Branscombe, 2012). Khau (2012) states that in the Basotho culture, girls are socialised from a very young age by their elder sisters to prepare for their 'future' husbands. One of the traditions that the Basotho people follow to achieve this goal is to encourage these girls to voluntarily enrol into traditional initiation schools once they reach puberty. Enrolling at a traditional initiation school has been a norm, but not an obligation for the Basotho people for many generations and there, girls are taught about sex and how to be good wives to their future potential husbands (Khau, 2012). Should a female refuse to attend the initiation school, she will bear the costs of being considered and treated as a mere girl child by her peers and older women who have attended the school (Khau, 2012). This evidence reveals how these strict norms socialise young Sotho females into leading heterosexual lifestyles and practices. The pro-heterosexual norms might cause the Basotho people to be reluctant to accept same sex relationships as heterosexuality has been an internalised way of life for them (Khau, 2012).

The statistics of females who are in same sex relationships show that these females characterise less than 2% of the female population (Jones and Yarhouse, 2000; Prado-Castro and Graham, 2017). This is a very small minority compared to females who are in heterosexual relationships and it creates a sense of wonder whether females in same sex relationships are recognised and understood especially in their individual local church communities in South Africa. Rodriguez (2010) expressed that the heterosexually-oriented majority in the church could gain a lot from an in depth understanding and association with Christians who are in same-sex relationships. However, even though campaigns such as The 16 Days of Activism against Women and Children abuse has been going on for 29 years now, many females especially those in same sex

relationships are still being abused and killed in our South African townships today (Mkhize, Bennett, Reddy and Moletsane, 2010). These are the same township communities where Christian churches (that ironically teach humility and love) are located.

According to a study reported on Mamba (2016) website, an estimated total number of 530 000 adult South African females and males, across all population groups, living in both rural and urban areas identify themselves as homosexual, bisexual or gender non-conforming. With such a small number of people reporting their sexual orientation as either homosexual, bisexual or gender non-conforming, I pondered how minority females in same sex relationships fit into one of the most gender stereotypic and patriarchal institution like the Christian church (Rodriguez, 2010).

Levy and Reeves (2011) stated that for many Christians, religion is the foundation and centrepiece of their lives. They further added that many gay, lesbian and queer individuals with a Christian upbringing often experience a conflict between their religion and sexual identity (Levy and Reeves, 2011). Therefore, this study focuses on the lived experiences of females in same sex relationships who are members of the AME church in Bethlehem, South Africa.

1.2 Problem statement

This study needs to find out what the lived experiences of females in same sex relationships at the AME church in Bethlehem are. Furthermore, it needs to unpack how these experiences affect the females on the emotional, spiritual, physical and mental dimensions. One major limitation about most research conducted in the area of female Christians in same sex relationships is that most of the literature on this topic is from Western countries like the United States of America. With this research study I am hoping that the findings will provide a clear picture of the current situation and experiences of black lesbian Christians in traditional African churches.

1.3 Research question

The core research question is: What are the lived experiences of black female congregants who are in same sex relationships at the AME church in Bethlehem? The research question will hopefully unpack actions, behaviour and attitudes that fellow congregants display on them.

1.4 Objectives of the study

The research question of this study aims to unpack the lived experiences of black lesbians in their respective local churches, particularly in the township of Bethlehem. Firstly, I am particularly interested in their conscious experiences and the impact thereof, as a result of direct or indirect attitudes, behaviours and actions displayed by their fellow congregants and pastors. Secondly, I am also interested in exploring how their lived experiences impact or affect them spiritually, psychologically, emotionally and physically. From the literature that I have reviewed, it appears that most studies and research done on females in same sex relationships who are Christian have been conducted in non-South African contexts (Achunike and Nnebedum, 2008).

Therefore, it is essential and beneficial that a study exploring black lesbian lived experiences within a Christian context be conducted in a South African township. Thirdly, I am interested in unpacking whether the study participants possess a repertoire of coping mechanisms or support structures and if they do, how they make use of them and whether these coping mechanisms and support structures are beneficial for them.

I hope that this study will create a safe space for the participants to share their lived experiences and that it will bring a sense of comfort to them knowing that they have disclosed to someone who has actually listened to them.

1.5 Background to the research context

The research study was conducted in Bohlokong, a township located outside the town of Bethlehem, in the Free State province. Bethlehem is situated on the N5 national road between Bloemfontein and Durban, and is the principle town in the Eastern Free State which was founded in 1864 on a farm called Pretoriuskloof (Dihlabeng, 2017). When directly translated the name Bohlokong means place of pain or sadness. On the other hand, the mother town of Bohlokong, Bethlehem, has a biblical derivation meaning "House of Bread" which is very suitable as this town forms the centre of a fertile wheat-growing region (Dihlabeng, 2017). According to Statistics South Africa (2011) Bohlokong falls under the Dihlabeng Local Municipality (see figure 1 and figure 2) which is situated inside the boundaries of Thabo Mofutsanyana District Municipality. It has a population size of 35003 which makes up 27.19% of the entire local municipal population.
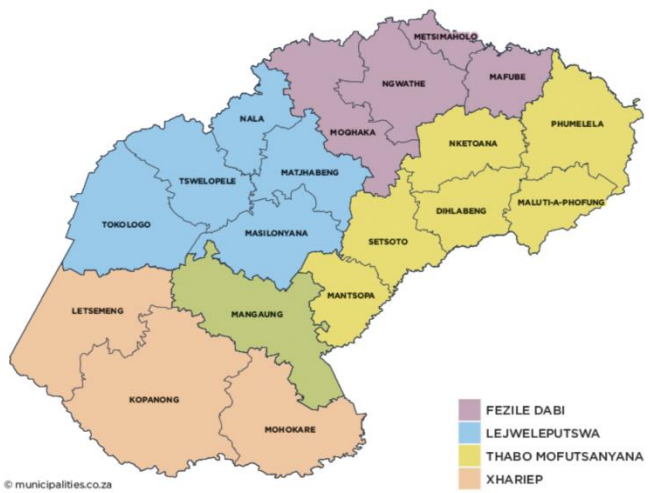
Figure 1: Location of Thabo Mofutsanyana District Municipality within the Free State province. (Source: municipalities.co.za)

Figure 2: Location of Dihlabeng Local Municipality within the Thabo Mofutsanyana District Municipality. (Source: municipalities.co.za)

The majority (77.5%) of the residents of Bethlehem are Sotho speaking while other minority languages are: Afrikaans (11.9%), Zulu (4.8%), English (2.4%), and other languages lie at (3.4%). The living conditions are fairly bearable with infrastructure and services such as

running water, sanitation, electricity and refuse removal accessible to the majority of the population (Statistics South Africa, 2011). In addition, informal dwellings (squatter camps) are present in a small fraction of the township (Dihlabeng, 2017; Statistics South Africa, 2011).

With Bethlehem being the principal town in the Eastern Free State, the local municipality is always seeking new ways and ideas of improving both the town and the township of Bohlokong. They try to bridge the opportunity and accessibility gap between the township and the town by implementing new improvements such as the local community radio station, tar roads, traffic lights, Wi-Fi hotspots and internet access at libraries Dihlabeng, 2017).

Agriculture plays a vital role as it contributes 29.4% to the economy of the area. The main hub for wheat research in the country is situated 10 kilometres north of Bethlehem. Besides farming, other economic activities include the private sector (17.2%), social services (15%) and trade operations at approximately 11% (Dihlabeng, 2017; Statistics South Africa, 2011). In addition to farming, Bethlehem also prides itself as being the retail, medical, and educational hub for the Eastern Free State. Contrary to national statistics of high unemployment rate of 30.1% (Statistics South Africa, 2020), Bethlehem prides itself on lower levels of unemployment (4.2%) with job opportunities varying from unskilled, skilled and semi-skilled jobs (Statistics South Africa, 2011). As a result, people around neighbouring towns come and seek employment and residence here (Dihlabeng, 2017).

There are several churches in and around Bohlokong that are both registered and unregistered. These churches include the Catholic Church, Methodist Church, Zion Christian Church, Anglican Church, African Methodist Episcopal church and several Pentecostal churches (National register of independent churches, 2017). The community has a deep sense of commitment to their respective churches and they cherish the values and principles instilled by them (Dihlabeng, 2017: National register of independent churches, 2017).

1.6 Homosexuality and traditional South African churches

The moral debate of lesbianism and Christianity has often been a controversial topic amongst Christians (Smith and Horne, 2007). The Bible advocates for heterosexual relationships and views homosexuality as an immoral sexual orientation (Alozie, Thomas, and Akpan-Obong, 2017). On the other hand, in traditional black society, people are taught to practice the spirit of *'Ubuntu'* which involves displaying the qualities of humanity and compassion towards others regardless of their background or current state (Ferim, 2016).

A person who possesses the qualities of Ubuntu is defined by Ferim (2016) as one who is:

> "open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, based on a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs to a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished when others are tortured or oppressed" (p. 7412).

Ferim (2016) further adds that according to Ubuntu principles, "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am (p. 7412). If this philosophy is practiced by all, then South Africa ought to be a non-violent and peaceful country where everyone is free to embrace and express their true selves without fear and doubt.

In as much as the philosophy of Ubuntu promotes the spirit of humanity and collectiveness amongst people, there are rules and norms put in place in communities at different institutions, one of them being the church (Mtshiselwa, 2010). One of the norms put in place by Christian law in the Bible for Christian individuals is that same sex relationships are an abomination and sin. A scripture quoted from the Bible that emphasises this point is written in the book of Leviticus, and it reads thus: "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"

(Leviticus chapter 20, verse13, New International Version). From this scripture one can clearly comprehend the magnitude of the consequences of Christian individuals who choose to be in same sex relationships. As Ubuntu concerns collectiveness and belonging, the implications could be that an individual within the collective would have to conform and subscribe to the community's values (Visser and Moleko, 2012). These norms and rules have been passed on, socialised and internalised into Christian communities over the many years of Christian civilization. Resistance to these norms could result in unpleasant consequences for those who act against them (Mtshiselwa, 2010).

Achunike and Nnebedum (2008) highlight the fact that though homosexuality, lesbianism and gay marriage is a common phenomenon in Europe and America, in Africa, especially among Christians, these sexual orientations are unacceptable and viewed as unchristian, unbiblical and un-African. If, in African countries, females in same sex relationships are not identified as being 'typical' traditional women, how then do these unconventional women experience strict and traditionally oriented institutions in their societies such as the church? According to Walter Wink (as cited in Constantine-Simms and Gates JR, 2001, p. 76) issues of sexuality are tearing apart the Christian community as never before. Lister (2001) further adds to that notion that homosexuality is not just tearing apart the African American churches, but is also affecting Black churches worldwide and it threatens to fracture entire communities and churches.

Constantine-Simms and Gates JR (2001) also highlight that most African leaders like Sam Nujoma of Namibia, Daniel Arap Moi of Kenya and Frederick Chiluba of Zambia are all in agreement that same sex relationships are a scourge that defies the Christian teachings and African traditions. Constantine-Simms and Gates JR (2001) further assess this situation by stating that, "If homosexuality is viewed by conservative African leaders and the fundamentalist religious right as disease and sin, then the only cutting-edge rationale guiding this view is an attempt to deny its existence" (p. 170).

Sexual orientation and same sex relationships in particular have been a matter that has not been entertained much by the African Christian society as they have historically been governed by strict societal norms as well as Christian law (Alozie, Thomas, and Akpan-Obong, 2017). Hellweg (2015) expresses that because of these strong laws and norms, for example, the passing of the Anti-Homosexuality Act by Uganda in 2014 as well as strict Biblical references of the immorality of same sex relationships, most females in these relationships have not been reported or 'come out' in the African society in general. Even though same sex relationships and marriages seem strange to Africans, South Africa is the exception as it has a sizable white population that supports same sex marriages (Achunike and Nnebedum, 2008).

1.7 Rationale for the study

The study will hopefully be beneficial to traditional African churches in black communities within South Africa, because it will be an eye-opener on the lived experiences of black female members in same sex relationships in these churches.

It is important to pursue this study because stigma and negative stereotypes on females in same sex relationships have been on the rise in South Africa (Mkhize, Bennett, Reddy and Moletsane, 2010). These negative thoughts and feelings have, in recent years, in many of our South African township communities, manifested into violent criminal acts such as corrective rape and ruthless murders (Mkhize, et al., 2010). These are all acts of homophobia which are "acts of disgracing, humiliating, and even attacking anyone whose gender identification is unconventional" (Mkhize et al., 2010, p. 11-12).

Black females in same sex relationships will hopefully also benefit from this study because it provides a platform for them to describe and explain their lived experiences in relation to the church. In her speech of awareness, the minister of the Department of Social Development emphasised that all South Africans should accept and treat lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender,

queer and intersex (LGBTQI) communities with dignity and respect for their human rights (Mosete, 2017). Mosete (2017) also highlighted that people are not defined by their sexual orientation. Therefore, individuals in same sex relationships should feel free to lead normal and fulfilling lives without the fear of being ridiculed or victimised.

South African society is mostly socialised and governed by patriarchal principles and values that expect women to occupy subservient positions with limited power and authority (Visser and Moleko, 2012, p. 295). Social influence which is defined by Byron and Branscombe (2012) as "efforts by one or more persons to change the behaviour, attitudes, or feelings of one or more others" (p. 254) is difficult to reverse once it is internalised in a person or people (Byron and Branscombe, 2012).

Alozie et al. (2016) found that very little research has been conducted to explain variation in attitudes toward homosexuality in non-Western countries. In addition, very few studies that examine the relationship between being in a same sex relationship and Christianity have been conducted (Barton, 2010). Even though there is a general belief that people in Africa are against same sex relationships and are unaccommodating of gender diversity, there has never been any factual information supporting that claim, as hardly any research has been conducted on Africans to gather their views on this matter (Mamba, 2016).

Based on the above mentioned information I believe that it is vital and beneficial for Africans, in particular South Africans to articulate and produce their own narrative about the lived experiences of individuals in same sex relationships, particularly lesbians, as they represent a small minority of the female population (Prado-Castro and Graham, 2017).

1.8 Definition of concepts and abbreviations

Black is "a racialized classification of people, usually a political and skin colour-based category for specific populations with a mid to dark brown complexion" (Colman, 2009, p. 39). *In this study the term 'black' does not include Indian, Coloured or other. It refers to African people.

Homophobia is defined as "an extreme and irrational aversion to homosexuality and homosexuals" (Kavanagh, Mantzel, van Niekerk, Wolvaardt, and Wright, 2007, p. 554).

Homosexual generally refers to "Feeling or/and involving sexual attraction to people of one's own sex" (Kavanagh et al., 2007, p. 554).

Homosexuality is the sexual orientation in which one is primarily attracted to members of the same sex. Homosexuality equally refers to "sex between males and sex between females, though in practice, lesbianism is used to refer to sexual relations between females" (Achunike and Nnebedum, 2008, p. 17).

Heterosexism refers to "discrimination or prejudice against homosexuals on the assumption that heterosexuality is the norm" (Kavanagh et al., 2007, p. 543).

Heterosexual often refers to someone who is "sexually attracted to the opposite sex" (Kavanagh et al., 2007, p. 543).

Lesbian refers to a "homosexual woman" (Kavanagh et al., 2007, p. 664).

LGBTQI is an initialism that stands for Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer and Intersex (Mosete, 2017).

Sexual orientation is "the predominant predilection or inclination that defines a person as a heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual" (Colman, 2009, p. 694).

1.9 Chapter outline

This study will explore the lived experiences of black lesbian females in traditional African churches in South Africa by focusing on the AME church as a representation of these churches. The dissertation consists of five chapters. The current chapter, **Chapter one**, sets the scene for the rest of the dissertation.

Chapter two addresses the literature concerning attitudes, behaviour and actions of Christians towards female Christians who are in same sex relationships. I will also explore the lived experiences of females in same sex relationships from different perspectives. The chapter will also discuss the relationship between religion (Christianity) and homosexuality. I will then discuss psychological frameworks that explain and explore sexuality development and maturity. This chapter is more of a theoretical chapter than a literature review as the chosen research design (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis) does not require a comprehensive literature review.

In **Chapter three** the methodology of this study is discussed. The research methods employed in the study, the processes of how data was collected and analysed, and ethical considerations are discussed in this chapter.

In **Chapter four** the results and discussion of participants' experiences will be presented. Themes that were derived from interviews with participants will be featured in this chapter. These themes will be linked to the theoretical perspectives explored in chapter two and three.

Chapter five will consist of a synthesised summary of the study and also its evaluation. It will also include the strengths and limitations, as well as recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I provided a contextual background of my inquiry which comprised of the research question, rationale, aims and objectives and the significance of the study. I also outlined the chapters of this dissertation.

This chapter focuses on the literature review pertaining to my study. I begin with a brief discussion on the psychology of religion, with emphasis on the psychoanalytic, sociobiological and cognitive perspectives. The link between psychology and sexuality will then be explored with reference to the psychoanalytic perspective, social learning theory and gender schema theory. The determinants of sexual orientation will also be discussed. I will specifically unpack the biological, sociological, psychological and biopsychosocial perspectives of sexual orientation. Lastly, the often thorny subject of female same sex relationships within Christian churches will be explored and uncovered in detail.

2.2 The psychology of religion

The psychological study of religion requires that we, first and foremost, understand what religion entails. It has been brought to people's attention that a homogenous interpretative perspective of religious phenomena is not available due to the diversity of approaches that come from varied psychological currents such as the objective, deep, and humanistic tradition (Pankalla and Kosnik, 2018). Furthermore, Wulff (as cited in Pankalla and Kosnik, 2018) stated:

It is not possible to provide a clear definition of the subject of this discipline in the face of a changing global social situation and there is a variety of ways of understanding religion as a phenomenon that has an impact on psychological functioning of a human being. (Pankalla and Kosnik, 2018, p. 154)

However, according to Hood, Hill and Spilka (2018) religion may encompass "the supernatural, the non-natural, theism, deism, atheism, monotheism, polytheism, and both finite and infinite deities; it may also include practices, beliefs, and rituals that almost totally defy circumscription and definition" (p. 8). The field of psychology of religion is composed of multiple studies that have used a broad spectrum of theoretical frameworks to clarify the psychological meaning and patterns of collective and individual religious contents, ideation, and practice (Gale, 2005).

For the purpose of this study I will be focusing on three psychological theoretical perspectives on religion, namely the psychoanalytic, sociobiological and the cognitive orientation.

2.2.1 Psychoanalytic orientation

The psychodynamic perspective searches for the sources of behaviour within the inner workings of our unique pattern of traits, emotions, and motives by emphasising the unconscious processes (Passer, Smith, Holt, Bremner, Sutherland and Vliek, 2009). According to the psychoanalytic theory, religion is argued to be the result of a "primeval action now anchored in the human consciousness" (Roubekas, 2013, p. 266). In addition, the psychoanalytic perspective is often perceived to be reductionist in its interpretation of religion in a sense that such experiences are depicted as products of psychological factors and containing no other validity. Furthermore, religious beliefs are interpreted as based in fantasies, as a sign of psychological immaturity and harmful to one's psychological health (Cohen, 2019). Cohen

(2019) further unpacks the analytic religious scepticism by referring to Freud's depiction of religious beliefs that views religion as some sort of false science that diverts neurotics from facing the reality of life and replaces painful reality with wishful fantasy. For instance, Christians believe that there is an afterlife in heaven after one passes away. The Bible scripture promises in John chapter 11, verse 25: "Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die." According to the psychoanalytic theory this scripture may be interpreted as attempting to console aggrieved mourners by imparting false hope that their loved one who has passed on is still living and that they will meet again in future. This may help individuals cope with pain or unpleasant reality faster and easier 'knowing' that there is a higher being that will resolve their life challenges and obstacles (Roubekas, 2013).

2.2.2 Sociobiological orientation

In this section the sociobiological orientation will be explored from the Christian religion perspective. The reason why I choose to discuss the sociobiological perspective is because it explores morality, which also plays a vital role in this study as Christianity views same sex relationships as taboo and immoral (Masango, 2002; Smith and Horne, 2007). According to socio-biologists, all moral and religious systems, including Christianity, exist because they assist in promoting the survival and reproduction of the group (Caltabiano and Sarafino, 2002).

The sociobiological perspective was first proposed by E.O Wilson who was an entomologist. He felt that his experience with social insects could be applied to people (Hood et al, 2018). According to the sociobiological perspective, religious belief becomes "an evolutionary product shaped by natural selection and therefore conferring a genetic advantage on people" (Hood et al., 2018, p. 61). It is a universal human behavioural tendency that lives at the core of society and supresses an individual's personal interests in the favour of the groups with which

people are affiliated. Survival and reproduction are enhanced through submission to the social body (Hood et al, 2018).

This is achieved by teaching numerous beliefs and having people participate in rituals and ceremonies. For instance, Christians commemorate Jesus' crucifixion every year during Easter and also eat the Holy Communion in remembrance of the body and blood of Jesus that was shed at the cross (Orangia Conference Lay Organisation, 2013). The outcome is that genes contributing to conformity will increase in the rate of recurrence, and those that counter obedience will slowly be removed. Wilson thus made reference to cultural Darwinism, which presupposes that failure to follow the rules not only threatens the survival but makes one less acceptable as a mate, reducing the likelihood of passing on certain genes to posterior generations. Sexual selection and reproduction among group members are reinforced, whereas unconventional and noncompliant behaviour can lead to ostracism (Hood et al., 2018; Stanford University, 2016).

The sociobiological perspective is somewhat similar to operant conditioning where organisms learn to associate their behavioural responses with specific consequences (e.g., with Christian religion it is taught and believed that if one gives one's life to Jesus Christ one shall be saved) (Coetzee, 2006; Passer et al., 2009). However, the sociobiological theory has been criticised for promoting genetic determinism and neglecting the complexity of human behaviour as well as the impact of the environment on human development (Caltabiano and Sarafino, 2002).

2.2.3 Cognitive perspective

The cognitive perspective is concerned with comprehending mental processes such as memory, perception, thinking, and problem solving, and how they may be related to behaviour (Amazon, 2019). Jean Piaget's cognitive development theory suggests that children progress through four stages of mental development. This theory focuses on understanding how children acquire

knowledge and on the nature of intelligence (Cherry, 2019). Piaget's cognitive development theory treats intellectual development similar to the sequence of distinct body forms found in animals such as butterflies that undergo changes in form as they progress through their life cycle. Piaget's analogy perceives development of the intellect as a similar kind of sequence of transformation between different ways-of-knowing-in-the-world (Rogers and Rogers, 2001).

The developmental stages as articulated by Piaget are discussed below.

The first stage is the sensorimotor stage that occurs from birth to two years. The main achievement at this stage is object permanence which implies knowing that an object still exists, even if it is hidden (McLeLeod, 2018; Vlok, 2010). The preoperational stage that occurs from two years to seven years is the second stage. During this stage, young children are able to think about 'things' symbolically, meaning that they are able to make one thing stand for something other than itself. During this stage, the child still has difficulty grasping the viewpoint of others (McLeLeod, 2018; Vlok, 2010). The third stage is the concrete operational period between seven and eleven years. Piaget considered the concrete operational stage as the turning point in the child's cognitive development as it marks the beginning of logical thought. This means that children are able to contrive ideas. (Vlok, 2010; McLeLeod, 2018). Finally, the fourth stage is the formal operational stage which occurs between the ages of eleven and fifteen and lasts until adulthood. During this time, people develop the ability to think about abstract concepts, and logically test hypotheses. The individual is able to think about hypothetical and abstract concepts they have yet to experience. Abstract thought is important for planning regarding the future. For instance, in spirituality or religion people may believe that there is an afterlife when they pass on one day, even though they have not physically experienced an afterlife (McLeLeod, 2018; Vlok, 2010). Gelman as cited in Vlok (2010)

suggests that Piaget hypothesized that the stages occur in the same predictable sequence for everyone, although the exact age at which a child enters the next stage differs according to the individual and the culture (Vlok, 2010).

Cognitive science of religion states that religious belief emerges through universal pre-given cognitive mechanisms (McLean, Cresswell and Ashley, 2016). Soliman, Johnson and Song (2015) presuppose that religion is an embodied cognition which is the belief that the mind is the locus of religiousness. However, this assumption may be limited by people's own ideology of mind. What is considered as "religious" or "spiritual" for some is merely "anomalous" for others (Hood et al., 2018).

Earlier scientists identified these anomalous or abnormal experiences within a reductionist frame and often attributed them to magical thinking. Boyer (2001), a reductionist theorist identified two concepts, first, what he calls the "naturalness of religious ideas" and second, the cognitive mechanisms by which he asserts that "religion is explained" (Hood et al., 2018). He assumes that counter-intuitiveness is involved in spiritual or religious experiences. He explains his position by stating that there are a limited number of "supernatural templates" that create religious and spiritual beings and events by the application of counter-intuitive properties to them. However, there are limits to the nature and type of counter-intuitive properties that a person, animal, or object can have (Barrett, 2010). For example, if a ghost is to be credible, it can walk through a wall, but it must have other characteristics associated with "real" persons to be believable. Thus, what makes something counter-intuitive is that one cannot infer anything further from the counter-intuitive property. Boyer (2001) claims that the list of "spiritual templates" created by counter intuitiveness is wholly limited (Barrett, 2010; Hood et al., 2018). Table 1 presents this list.

Table 1. Boyer's catalogue of supernatural templates	
Counter-intuitiveness applied to:	**Examples**
+ Persons *	
Physical properties	ghosts, gods with immaterial bodies
Biological properties	gods that do not grow old or die
Psychological properties	unblocked perception; prescience
Tools and artifacts	
Biological properties	statues that "bleed"
Psychological properties	statues that "hear" what you say

**⁎Animals can also have all these properties.

Source: Hood, Hill and Spilka (2018, p 316)

Boyer argues that this limited range of templates constitutes the cognitive basis for the diverse contents of mythology, science fiction, cartoons, and religious writing. Thus, Boyer explains religions by an evolutionary process that mixes two cognitive mechanisms selected for survival value, to identify physical objects, and to identify animate objects that might be potential predators. This reductionist view of religion asserts that persons are predisposed to postulate counter-intuitive agents, especially when ambiguous stimuli are framed within cultural predispositions that support such conclusions (Barrett, 2010; Hood et al., 2018).

2.3 Psychology and sexuality

Passer, Smith, Holt, Bremner, Sutherland, and Vliek (2009) define sexual orientation as "one's emotional and erotic preference for partners of a particular sex" (p. 492). Furthermore, sexual orientation differs from other components of gender and sex, such as biological sex which is the physiological and genetic aspect of being male or female, gender identity - the psychological sense of being male or female, and social gender role - the cultural norms that dictate femininity and masculinity (Louw and Louw, 2009). There are several types of sexual orientations that are commonly described, namely, heterosexuality and LGBTIQ which is an acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer individuals (Farlex International, 2019). For the purpose of this study, I am focusing on the lesbian part of the LGBTIQ acronym which refers to female individuals who prefer intimate partners of the same-sex (Louw and Louw, 2009).

Psychology addresses sexuality from an individual's perspective and environment. Psychology's approach to sexuality focuses on the motives behind sexual behaviour and factors that influence that motivation (Rogers and Rogers, 2001). There is no one psychological perspective, but several perspectives exist, including cognitive, emotional, behavioural and physiological components of human sexuality (Bolin and Whelehan, 2009). For this section I will be focusing on three psychological viewpoints on sexuality namely, the psychoanalytic approach, social learning theory and gender schema theory.

2.3.1 Psychoanalytic perspective

Psychodynamic theories assume that relationships, especially the earliest ones, are important to human development (Kloppenberg, 2016). For most children, the first important relationship is with the primary care giver, usually the mother, and this relationship influences how an infant later defines her or his identity, including gender (Shrier, Tompsett and Shrier, 2004). The

development of masculine or feminine identity is due to the relationship that exists between mothers and children (Wood, 2011). For instance, a mother may interact more with her daughter, keeping her physically and psychologically closer than her son, because the mother herself is also gendered (Baron and Branscombe, 2012).

Sexuality development is explained by the psychoanalytic perspective as stemming from a series of psychosexual stages where the pleasure-sensitive areas of the body are focused (Passer et al, 2009). According to Sigmund Freud, children go through a series of psychosexual stages that lead to the development of the adult personality (Cherry, 2019). During the five psychosexual stages, which are the oral, anal, phallic, latent and genital stages the erogenous zone associated with each stage serves as a source of pleasure (Cherry, 2019).

Each psychosexual stage of development is marked by conflicts that can help build growth or delay development. If these stages are completed successfully, a healthy personality is the result. Should some issues not be resolved at an appropriate stage, fixations which are the persistent focus on earlier psychosexual stages can occur. In other words, until the conflict is resolved, the individual will remain 'stuck' in this stage (Cherry, 2019; Steinmeyer, 2006).

During the first stage, the oral stage, which occurs from birth to age one, the infant's primary source of interaction occurs through the mouth. At this stage the sucking reflex is important. Immoderate gratification or frustration of oral needs can result in fixation on oral themes of self-indulgence or dependency (Rogers and Rogers, 2001). Children then enter the anal stage during the second and third years of life where pleasure becomes focused on the process of elimination. During potty training, the child is faced with society's first attempt to control a biological urge. According to Sigmund Freud, harsh toilet training can result in a fixation which causes overemphasis on cleanliness, orderliness and rigid rules and rituals. These individuals are referred to as anally retentive. In contrast, extremely

lax potty training may result in a fixation which causes an individual to be messy, negative and have a dominant adult personality and such individuals are referred to as anally expulsive (Rogers and Rogers, 2001; Steinmeyer, 2006).

The third stage known as the phallic stage is arguably the most controversial stage which begins at the age of four to five. This is the time when children start to obtain pleasure from their sexual organs. During this stage, early sexual awakenings occur. Female children discover that they lack a penis and consequently blame their mothers for such, which Sigmund Freud considered as the more desirable sex organ. As a result, they wish to bear their fathers' children as a substitute for the penis they lack (Rogers and Rogers, 2001). This conflicting situation involving resentment towards the mother and love for the father is termed the Electra complex. The phallic stage is a milestone in the development of gender identity, for children usually resolve these conflicts by suppressing their sexual impulses and moving from a sexual attachment of the opposite-sex parent to identification with the same-sex parent (Rogers and Rogers, 2001).

During the fourth stage the phallic phase draws to a close and introduces the latency stage during which sexuality becomes dormant for approximately six years. Sexuality re-emerges in adolescence during the genital stage. It is in this last stage where erotic impulses find direct expression in sexual relationships (Rogers and Rogers, 2001).

Corey (2013) expresses that female same sex attraction and relationships is said to be influenced by the female phallic stage, specifically the Electra complex. The phallic stage involves the female child striving for her father's love and approval. In a study of psychosexual fixation and defence mechanisms in a sample of young Japanese women, Mogami (2010) found that phallic fixation was associated with projection as a defence. This included aggression, meanness and exercise of power which "may be linked to some same sex relationship

characteristics in females" (Mogami, 2010, p. 84). Some psychoanalytic literature emphasise the unresolved oedipal conflicts, but add that neglect and abuse by both parents as well as developmental disturbances in the mother-child relationship also contribute towards the ideal girl ultimately becoming attracted to other girls (Downey and Friedman, 1997).

On the other hand, Young-Bruehl (1998) as cited in Jacobo (2001) offered an alternative developmental theory initiated by Freud regarding the instincts wherein the ego instinct is seen as affectional and the sexual instincts as sensual. The ideal would be for these two instincts to exist in harmony after normal developmental periods in which one might dominate. Young-Bruehl (1998) as cited in Jacobo (2001) argued that "theory of instinct development unwrapped instincts from heterosexual object choice, thus allowing for bisexualities" (p. 681). In addition, he noted that the interplay between affectional and sensual instincts will be multidetermined from body influences, that is, hormonal reasons as well as emotional-relational reasons. According to this theory, the balance of ego instinctual and sexual instinctual drives and objects is as essential as understanding one's identifications and relations and conflicts (Jacobo, 2001).

Kloppenberg (2016), however, points out a few shortcomings with Freud's psychoanalytic perspective of sexuality and gender development. For instance, he indicates that Freud's universalisation of femininity in women is not representative and leaves out crucial details when interpreting sexual development in women. Freud assumed that all women develop along one of three ways: "the first leading to sexual restraint; the second involving fantasy identification with men, with homosexuality as a possible outcome; and the third involving the development of what he called "normal" adult femininity" (Kloppenber, 2016, p. 140). Even though these hypotheses might hold truth for some individual women, they do not cater for the complex variability of individual female development. As a solution, he recommended that: "The non-normative psychoanalytic mode of thought developed by Freud must be integrated with more recent formulations about gender and sexuality in order to conduct psychoanalysis"

(Kloppenberg, 2016, p. 133). O'Connor and Ryan (1993) as cited in Izzard (2006) oppose the creation of 'lesbian' as a descriptive or ontological category. They suggest that lesbians may share certain experiences, problems and dilemmas which result from living in a homophobic world, but it is a mistake to assume that 'lesbians' have something in common psychologically by virtue of being a lesbian. In addition, the Freud's theory of sexual development is critiqued by addressing the split between identity and desire (one cannot be and have the same sex) which is seen as underpinning the classical Oedipus complex (Izzard, 2006; Maguire and Dewing, 2007). Izzard (2006) further suggests that homosexuality involves a different construction of the role of gender in relation to desire. This may involve translating gender difference into forms which are not represented concretely by male and female individuals – "thus loosening the tie between gender identity and biological sex" (Izzard, 2006, p. 49).

Hamer (1990) also highlights that despite the fragility of femininity in the writings of several feminists working with psychoanalytic theory, there has been a reluctance to address heterosexuality in the same way. This is ironic since heterosexuality and femininity are formed in the same moment when the Oedipal complex begins (Maguire and Dewing, 2007). In conclusion, Hamer (1990) makes a statement that the "reluctance to question the status of heterosexuality has led to a frustrating unevenness in feminist psychoanalytic discourse, in which the status quo has been problematized and yet the already existing alternatives to a heterosexual norm are still largely untheorized " (p. 139).

2.3.2 Social learning theory

The social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) was theorised by Albert Bandura and according to this theory, people learn from one another, through observation, imitation, and modelling. This theory developed from the legacy of behaviourism and it tilted psychology in a more scientific direction, unlike the unconscious drives that Freud studied (Beabout, 1998; Ryle, 2015).

According to the social learning theory real human behaviour can be directly observed and people learn through observing others' behaviour, attitudes, and outcomes of those behaviours (Ryle, 2015). In addition, human behaviour is a continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioural, and environmental influences. (Caltabiano and Sarafino, 2002; Ryle, 2015).

Bandura (1977) explained that in order for effective modelling to take place, there were necessary conditions that had to be met. The first condition is **attention**, and various factors such as complexity and prevalence can increase or decrease the amount of attention paid. The second condition is **retention** and it refers to remembering what one has paid attention to. This includes symbolic coding, mental images, cognitive organisation, symbolic and motor rehearsal. **Reproduction** is the third condition and it involves one reproducing the image observed from self and physical capabilities. The last condition is **motivation** and it involves having a good reason to continue imitating. It includes motives such as past (traditional behaviourism), promised (imagined incentives) and vicarious (seeing and recalling the reinforced model) (Fuss, 1991; Taskin, 2016; Uwah and Ebewo, 2011).

The social learning theory claims that individuals learn how to act in a masculine and feminine way primarily by imitating others and getting responses from others for their behaviours (Wood, 2015). Children imitate the behaviour and communication that they see on television, movies, and DVDs, as well as the communication of parents, teachers, siblings, and others (Wood, 2015). Initially, young children mimic almost anything. However, as the people around them start rewarding only some of those behaviours, children tend to augment and repeat the rewarded behaviours (Cameron-Ellis, 1999; Smith and Hamon, 2017). In the same way, individuals within the church may obtain the same negative attitude towards people in same sex relationships as other members and leaders in the church through modelling their

behaviour, thus sustaining within members of the church a negative attitude towards people in same sex relationships (Cameron-Ellis, 1999).

Since children prefer reward to punishment and neutral responses, they are likely to develop gendered patterns of behaviour that others approve. As parents and others reward girls for what is considered feminine and discourage behaviours and attitudes that are masculine, they shape little girls into femininity (Wood, 2015). Although each person is born with certain inclinations, it is our social world that magnifies or tones down those inclinations (Wood, 2015).

The underlying assumptions of the social learning theory, however, have raised problems when they were tested using empirical research. According to Maccoby and Jacklin (1974); Williams (1987) as cited in Ryle (2015), children in experiments do not always pick a same-sex playmate to model nor do they always identify with a parent of the same sex. In addition, research perceives children as passive recipients of their culture's ideologies about gender and sex-typing, and there is little room for considering children as playing an active role in this process (Berk, 2013; Ryle, 2015). For instance, in a British research study conducted on preschool boys and girls, Rust et al. (2000) as cited in Berk (2013) proved that gender and sex-typing are indeed a passive process. The results revealed that boys with the lowest masculine behaviour scores had older sisters, whereas girls with the highest masculine behaviour scores had older brothers even though they were raised to lead heterosexual lifestyles (Berk, 2013).

2.3.3 Gender schema theory

Rogers and Rogers (2001), highlight that a number of psychologists have been critical of the social learning theory's conceptualisation of gender role acquisition, as it casts children as too passive. They indicate that children's behaviour, however, shows evidence of developing complex, schematic cognitive categories for gender, which forms a framework for gaining their gender-related knowledge (Rogers and Rogers, 2001).

Gender schema theory was introduced by psychologist Sandra Bem in 1981 and asserted that children learn about male and female roles from the culture in which they live (Cherry, 2019). Bem was influenced by her desire to remedy what she believed to be shortcomings in the psychoanalytic and social learning theories. The term schema was developed to describe the conceptual frameworks through which people perceive and make sense of the world around them (Ryle, 2015). This theory uses an information-processing approach that explains how environmental pressures and children's cognition work together to shape gender typing (Berk, 2013). Gender schemas have an impact not only on how people process information, but on the attitudes and beliefs that direct "gender-appropriate" behaviour (Ryle, 2015). The gender schema theory puts emphasis on social and cultural influences which focuses on cognitive organisation (Rogers and Rogers, 2001; Cherry, 2019).

Gender schema theory proposes:

> "that sex typing derives in large measure from gender-schematic processing, from a generalized readiness on the part of the child to encode and organize information – including information about the self – according to the culture's definitions of maleness and femaleness" (Rogers and Rogers, 2001, p. 49).

According to this theory, children adjust their behaviour to align with the gender norms of their culture from the earliest stages of social development (Cherry, 2019). In addition, sex typing is mediated by the child's own cognitive processing. The gender schema theory further proposes that gender-schematic processing is itself derived from the sex-differentiated practices of the social community (Cherry, 2019; Rogers and Rogers, 2001). For instance, a child who was raised and lives in a traditional culture may believe that caring and raising children is a woman's role, while the labour market is a man's department (Berk, 2013; Cherry, 2019).

The concept or proposition of the gender schema theory has been, however, criticised. It has been noted that once research was conducted to support the nature of the process of the gender schema theory, little work followed after (Hook, 2012). One other weakness of the theory is that it does not justify how social interactions or biology impact gender development. In addition, the gender schema theory makes measuring schema difficult as the content of the theory remains unclear. Finally, cognitive schemas are not good at predicting future behaviour, therefore a person's gender schema may not match the behaviour a person displays (Starr and Zurbriggen, 2017; Woodington, 2010).

Francis and Paechter (2015) argue that in order to avoid essentialism and the reification of gender distinction, we need to apply three different elements in the categorisation and analysis of gender: spectator perspective, respondent perspective and social context. This three-fold approach to gender categorisation will enable us to "simultaneously hold the elements contributing to gender productions, without compromising their complexity" (Francis and Paechter, 2015, p. 787).

Although the gender schema theory has been criticised, Starr and Zurbriggen (2016) suggest that this theory may be a good candidate for theory bridging in order to create a stronger theory that better explains human behaviour. Furthermore, the bridging has the potential to add a deeper developmental and cognitive component to explain how self-objectification begins and why some women might be more prone to it than others (Starr and Zurbriggen, 2016).

2.4 Determinants of sexual orientation

In order to fully understand the concept of sexuality and where homosexuality might stem from, it is vital to closely examine and explore the determinants of sexual orientation. As I have mentioned above, sexual orientation is defined by Passer et al., (2009) as "one's emotional and erotic preferences for partners of a particular sex" (p. 492). There are different and opposing

views on how and where sexual orientation stems from. Below I discuss some of the views and concepts of what determines one's sexual orientation.

2.4.1 Biological perspective

Biological processes, including genetic, hormonal, vascular and neural factors are used to explain human sexuality (Kok, 2004). Human development begins in one of the two fallopian tubes of a woman when the male sex cell penetrates the female sex cell through a process known as fertilisation (Bolin and Whelehan, 2009). This process takes place when the nuclei of the sperm cell and egg cell unite to form 46 chromosomes which are then referred to as the zygote and the beginning of a new human being (Louw and Louw, 2007). The gender of a child is determined by what are called sex chromosomes, that are referred to as X and Y chromosomes. Women have two similar X chromosomes while men have one X chromosome and one Y chromosome. If a sperm carrying the X chromosome is the first to penetrate and fertilize the egg, then the child will be a girl. On the contrary, if the sperm carrying the Y chromosome is the first to penetrate the egg, then the chid will turn out to be a boy (Austin, Bezuidenhout, Botha, Du Plessis, Du Plessis, Jordaan, Lake, Moletsane, Nel, Pillay, Ure, Visser, Von Krosigk and Vorster, 2012; Bolin and Whelehan, 2009).

In addition to determining the sex of an individual, the sex chromosomes also have genes that play a role in other hereditary characteristics. These characteristics are known as sex-linked characteristics and can be illustrated for example, by the condition of haemophilia. On the other hand, there are characteristics that are determined by interaction between genes which is referred to as polygenic inheritance (Dandalo, Munhenga, Kaiser and Koekemoer, 2018; Roberts, Paul, Yorgov, Santorico and Spritz 2019). A characteristic such as intelligence is known to be a polygenic characteristic (Austin et al, 2012; Louw and Louw, 2007).

According to Berk (2013), evidence shows that genetic and prenatal biological influences are largely responsible for same sex attraction. In addition, in our evolutionary past, same sex attraction may have served the adaptive function of lessening aggressive competition for other-sex mates, thereby encouraging the survival of group members (Berk, 2013). Even though the biological factors mentioned above may influence sexuality, biology alone does not determine sexual decisions; rather, other social variables such as religious tradition, cultural values, personal values, learning and experiences also contribute to sexuality (Kok, 2004).

2.4.2 Sociological perspective

The sociological perspective considers childhood and/ or adolescent upbringing and experiences as some of the determining factors underlying sexual orientation. According to the sociological perspective, differences in sexual behaviour in subgroups of a society are explained by differences in religion, race, country of origin, socio-economic status, age, educational level, and gender (Kok, 2004). In other words, how one has been socialised which is according to Passer et al. (2009) "the process by which culture is transmitted to new members and internalized by them (p. 580)", plays a role in one's sexual behaviour.

In addition, Passer et al. (2009) explain that parenting also influences a child's development, such as assisting a child in developing a gender identity which is a sense of 'femaleness' or 'maleness' that becomes a central aspect of one's personal identity. This includes dressing children in gender stereotypical ways such as girls wearing pink dresses and boys being dressed up in blue pants. According to Golombok et al. (2008) as cited in Berk (2013) younger children receive more direct training in gender roles than older children, thus gender typing occurs especially swiftly during early childhood.

Religion may also play a role in shaping and grooming an individual into a norm conforming sexual orientation. According to Bowland, Foster and Volser (2013) for Christians, the church

is an important source of support and identity formation. In that light, Christians in same sex relationships have experienced psychological harm due to religious heterosexism and homophobia (Bowland et al, 2013). For instance, Trammell (2015) highlights that for centuries, Christians have generally regarded same sex relationships as an abominable sin. The rejection of same sex relationships is understood as absolute within Christian subculture (Trammell, 2015). These strict norms have forced many Christians who are in same sex relationships to make the hard decision of either rejecting religion to accept themselves or rejecting themselves to conform to their religious doctrine (Bowland, Foster and Volser, 2013).

Within the South African context, Mkhize et al. (2010) highlight that derogatory terms, such as '*Nongayindoda*' in isiZulu, are used to stigmatise black women thought to be living beyond accepted heterosexual norms. In addition, black females in same sex relationships in South Africa are targets of social, cultural, and political violence. This violence includes hate speech, gender-based violence, and homophobia amongst others (Mkhize et al, 2010. For example, in a study conducted on LGBTQI students' experiences at a South African rural based university, Mavhandu-Mudzusi and Sandy (2015) found that themes that emerged from the study were mainly: religion-related stigma and discrimination, heterosexualisation and the impact that religion-related stigma and discrimination had on these particular students. A female participant in a same sex relationship in this study shared one of her past experiences where a male student threatened to rape her and claimed that "corrective rape was the best way to change her satanic behaviour" (Mavhandu-Mudzusi and Sandy, 2015, p. 1053).

Masango (2002) highlighted that there was a growing evidence of rejection, isolation, discrimination and condemnation as sub-human of individuals in same sex relationships. He further postulates that the issue of same sex relationships is particularly problematic for the church in Africa and poses a challenge to African churches (Masango, 2002). In African churches same sex relationships are hardly ever spoken of and when mentioned, the church

denounces homosexuality and condemns people in same sex relationships (Masango, 2002). Earth-spirited movement evolved in the 1960s as a response to mainstream religions, that normally denounced sexual freedom (Smith and Horne, 2007). Earth-spirited faiths believe in maintaining belief in and connection to a "higher power", for example, a god, but focusing more on the individual experience of spiritual connectedness with nature. As a result, some LGBT individuals have since been drawn to earth-spirited faith as it affirms their sexual orientation while remaining spiritually connected (Smith and Horne, 2007).

2.4.3 Psychological perspective

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), sexual orientation refers to a person's sense of identity and based on those attractions, related behaviours, and membership in a community of others who share those attractions (Longley, 2018; Visser and Moleko, 2012). In addition, all sexual orientations are seen as normal aspects of human sexuality and no individual sexual orientation is a form of mental illness. Psychological research has found that the feelings of emotional, romantic, and sexual attraction that eventually form adult sexual orientation usually emerge between ages 6 and 13 (Longley, 2018). However, feelings of attraction can develop and change at any age, even without any prior sexual experiences. For example, people who practice celibacy and abstinence are still aware of their sexual orientation and gender identity (Longley, 2018).

According to Baron and Branscombe (2012), automatic processing occurs when "after extensive experience with a task or type of information, we reach the stage where we can perform the task or process the information in a seemingly effortless, automatic, and nonconscious manner" (p. 48). In a study conducted by Cesario, Plaks, and Higgins (2006) as cited in Baron and Branscombe (2012), participants were primed with photos of men labelled "GAY" or "STRAIGHT". The experimenter then entered the venue in what seemed to be

unrelated procedures and acted in a very hostile manner towards the participants. The key question of the experiment was: would participants whose negative stereotype of gays had been primed to behave more hostilely than those whose stereotypes of heterosexuals had been primed? The results indicated that when interacting with the experimenter, participants showed greater hostility if they had been primed with faces labelled "GAY" than with faces labelled "STRAIGHT" (Baron and Branscombe, 2012). This research led to the conclusion that once activated, schemas may also trigger motivated efforts to prepare for interacting with persons or groups who are the focus of these schemas (Baron and Branscombe, 2012).

For instance, "corrective" rape, also known as curative or homophobic rape, occurs when one or more people are raped because of their perceived sexual orientation or gender identity in an effort to cure them from their orientation (Campo-Engelstein, 2015). Corrective rape is identified as a hate crime which can be defined as: A crime, usually violent, motivated by prejudice or intolerance toward an individual's national origin, ethnicity, colour, religion, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, or disability (Campo-Engelstein, 2015). Although South Africa has some of the most progressive legislation regarding same sex relationships, many still view this sexual orientation as unacceptable. Koraan and Geduld (2015) state that in the last 15 years since the year 2000, at least 31 murders have been linked to lesbianism and an average of 10 females in same sex relationships are raped every week in South Africa with the motive being to "correct" their sexual preferences. A newspaper article reported by Jordaan (2017) stated that two men were arrested for the rape and murder of a Soweto woman who was involved in a same sex relationship. Her brutal violation was believed to be motivated by homophobia (Jordaan, 2017). In another incident, a couple in a same sex relationship was gang raped at their home in Nelspruit, Mpumalanga, in eastern South Africa by a group of men who, according to the victims, wanted to teach them how it felt like to be a woman. One of the victims expressed that their cries fell on deaf ears as nobody came to their rescue (Thorpe,

2016). This statement might imply that the society condoned same sex relationships as they did not respond to the women's cry for help. Such acts of cruelty may have unpleasant after-effects for females in same sex relationships as they are at an increased risk for major depression, eating disorders, generalised anxiety disorder, panic disorder, poor self-esteem, alcohol dependency, drug dependency, and comorbid diagnosis (Bowland, Foster and Vosler, 2013).

Automatic processing can also be seen with females in same sex relationships who have been rejected by people who believe that heterosexual relationships are the only ideal and correct form of relationships (Visser and Moleko, 2012). After being faced with constant discrimination some females who are in same sex relationships build up resentment towards everyone else even though not all people are against same sex relationships. They will then start seeking comfort with groups that share the same interests as they do, for instance, associate themselves with other females who are also in same sex relationships (Visser and Moleko, 2012). These examples further prove that once activated, schemas may trigger motivated efforts to prepare for interacting with persons or groups who are the focus of these schemas (Baron and Branscombe, 2012).

2.4.4 Biopsychosocial model

Kok (2004) stresses that these days, human sexuality should be discussed from a biopsychosocial perspective that acknowledges biology, psychology and sociology as equally valid and important in sexuality. The biopsychosocial model's basic premise is that physical, psychological, and social health processes are persistently and equally affected by psychosocial stresses that kindle either health or illness (De Vos and Kirsten, 2015). In a study that was conducted on patients who were suffering from lower back pain, Bardin (2003) emphasised that biological outcomes should be complemented by outcomes of the psychosocial aspects of

back pain that measure the considerable functional and emotional impact on the quality of life of patients experiencing back pain and incorporating the biopsychosocial model helped improve the health of the patients immensely (Bardin, 2003).

The biopsychosocial model can also be used in interpreting and explaining sexual identity development. Kok (2004) explains and explores ten stages that he suggests have implications for a person's expression of his or her sexuality which incorporate the biopsychosocial perspective. I will briefly mention these stages.

The first stage is the chromosomal sex stage. At this stage, one should look out for any irregularities in the chromosome pattern. Disorders of sex chromosomes can present as Turner's syndrome. Individuals with this disorder may need either a testosterone or oestrogen replacement therapy for development of secondary sexual characteristics (Coleman, Dickenson, Girard, Rider, Candelario-Pérez, Leonardo, Becker-Warner, Kovic and Munns, 2018; Kok, 2004; Kuhlman, Urizar, Robles, Yim and Schetter, 2019;).

In the second stage, the gonadal sex stage, the presence of testicles and ovaries is questioned. A condition known as hermaphroditism, where a person may have both an ovary and a testicle can be present in his/her body. Another condition known as ovotestis can be present, where a mixture of ovarian and testicular tissue is found in the gonad (Coleman et al., 2018; Kok, 2004; Kuhlman et al., 2019).

The third stage is the hormonal stage. At this stage, one asks whether the individual has more androgens or more oestrogen and progestin. The fourth stage is sex of internal organs. At this stage, one asks if an individual has, for instance, a prostate gland or is there a uterus. In the fifth stage, the sex of external organs stage, the question of whether one has a penis or a clitoris, a scrotum or labia is asked. Brain sex stage is the sixth stage. One assesses if a person has male or female structures and levels of chemicals. Sex assigned at birth is the seventh stage. This

stage refers to the external genitalia that are visible to the eye. Sometimes these genitalia can be ambiguous or of the sex opposite to that of the chromosomes. The eighth stage, gender identity refers to whether a person thinks they are a boy or girl. Transsexuals have a gender identity disorder and the sex they identify with, psychologically, does not match the biological characteristics they possess. The second last stage is the gender role stage which refers to what a person says or does to make others think that he or she is male or female. However, terms such as androgyny and metro sexuality have been created as typical, male and female roles have changed over time (Coleman et al., 2018; Kok, 2004; Kuhlman et al., 2019). The last stage is the sexual orientation identity and there is no simple answer to the question of what causes sexual orientation. However, it appears to be combination of nature (biological factors) and nurture (psychosocial and social factors) (Kok, 2004. According to Cherry (2019), nature refers to all the genes and hereditary factors that influence who we are. Nurture, on the other hand, refers to all the environmental variables that impact who we are.

These stages incorporate biological, psychological and sociological perspectives in trying to explain how sexual orientation develops. These three perspectives overlap and also influence one another as all are equally important and valid in shaping and determining one's sexual orientation.

2.5 Female same sex relationships and Christian churches.

Before discussing the different dimensions of female same sex relationships and Christian churches, I will first define Christianity and Christian identity. Christianity is defined by Matthews (2000) as an Arabic monotheistic religion based on biblical revelation and includes the central events of that revelation, that is, creation, incarnation, redemption, and eschaton. In addition, Coetzee (2006) expresses that Christian identity has many facets and can also be discussed from various angles. Christian identities can be divided into five main groups

namely, the Church of the East, Oriental Orthodoxy, Eastern Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Protestantism (Sisemore, 2003). However, Coetzee (2006) focuses on the Reformed perspective of Christianity which forms part of the Protestant Christian denomination. He defines the Reformed perspective as follows:

As Reformed churches we confess that we are called Christians because we are members of Christ by faith. In Christ, we partake of His anointing with the Holy Spirit on the following grounds:

- We may openly confess His Name;
- We may present ourselves as living sacrifices of thankfulness to Him;
- We may fight against sin and the devil in this life with a free and good conscience;
- Hereafter we shall reign with Him eternally over all creatures (Coetzee, 2006, p. 157).

Coetzee (2006), however, points out that in spite of this very clear definition of what Christian identity embodies, many people who call themselves Christians do not live by this confession (Bennema, 2015; Cotzee, 2006). Below are the various factors that may affect or influence one's Christian identity.

Social influence plays a vital role in the kind of character a person may eventually grow up to adopt. It involves "efforts by one or more persons to change the behaviour, attitudes, or feelings of one or more others" (Baron and Branscombe, 2012, p. 254). In social settings such as the church, we often observe normative social influence where people alter their behaviour to meet their religious expectations. Gender stereotypes such as those that view women as submissive, sensitive, and weak exist in social institutions such as the Christian church (Taylor and Snowdon, 2014). With religion being a very strong agent of socialisation, it makes one wonder how unconventional and nonconforming conduct such as being in same sex relationships is

viewed and accepted in Christian churches, especially if this conduct comes from fellow Christians.

Becoming aware of experiencing an attraction towards someone of the same sex, could, at first, lead to a sense of confusion and alienation. However, this is not always the case, especially for individuals who are aware of their sexual orientation (Lapinski and McKirnan, 2013). As a result, same sex attraction is typically kept secret and personal so that a person's identity cannot be threatened. In addition, with religious individuals, this secrecy is mainly associated with increased involvement with religious activities (Lapinski and McKirnan, 2013). According to Ward (2005, as cited in Chaney and Patrick, 2011), "given the importance of religion and church involvement, homophobia within the Black community has been found to be linked to religious beliefs, historical sexual exploitation and racial survival consciousness" (p. 202) The Christian doctrine condones same sex relationships, however, Barton (2010) points out that according to Christian dogma we are all born with original sin, even the heterosexual born again Christians are not spared. Although individuals in same sex relationships are seen as sinful in Christian faith, they also, like all other sinners, have the same redemption available (Levy and Reeves, 2011).

If Christianity condones same sex relationships, then what should happen to female Christian church goers who are involved in same sex relationships? Do they not deserve to belong and practice Christianity as their sin is too great to accept? Bowland, Foster and Vosler (2013) point out that many Christian males and females in same sex relationships have experienced psychological harm due to religious heterosexism and homophobia. Some research further indicates that males and females in same sex relationships perceive the church the least supportive and most hostile social institution (Bowland et al, 2013). Individuals in same sex relationships internalise guilt and shame because their sexuality is often at odds with their religious beliefs (Bowland, Foster and Vosler, 2013). Lapinski and McKirnan (2013), for

instance, point out that previous studies suggest that conservative religions such as Christianity oppress LGBTIQ individuals and communities by opposing same sex marriages. Achunike and Nnebedun (2008) presuppose that these marriages are perceived as being unchristian, unbiblical and un-African. Preller (2011, as cited in Semenya, 2016) highlights that "STATS SA has recorded that the number of cohabiters mostly being LGBTQI individuals has increased at an alarming rate adding up to more than two million people" (p. 3). This fact is also prevalent in other parts of the world such as Ann Arbor, where the Population Studies Centre at the University of Michigan confirms it. If Christianity opposes same sex marriages, will this not lead to another immoral act of 'vat en sit' (Cohabitation) by African Christian couples in same sex relationships (Semenya, 2016)? One of the many reasons for 'vat en sit' amongst same sex couples as pointed out by Semenya (2016) is the decline of confidence in religious institutions to provide guidance. He also adds that it is these very institutions' responsibility to provide the solution to this issue by educating couples.

Achunike and Nnebedum (2008) indicate that same sex marriages are particularly common in many western countries where some have not only recognised same sex marriages, but also legalised and celebrated them in churches. Even though same sex marriages are viewed as an immoral act by most religions, civilised countries and society at large, which includes the Christian doctrine and African culture (Masango, 2002), Achunike and Nnebedum (2008) postulate that same sex relationships may have found their way in some African countries like Nigeria. For instance, Rev. Rowland Jide Macaulay who pastors House of Rainbow Metropolitan Community Church in Lagos, Nigeria, since 2006 actively moderates an online e-group where his aim is to "raise awareness and bring love and comfort to many black or African lesbian, gay, bisexual, transvestite and transgender people over the world" (Achunike and Nnebedum, 2008, p. 24). In addition, South Africa has, for instance, witnessed a celebrity same sex marriage recently where the Olympic gold medalist, Caster Semenya, married her

long-time girlfriend in a SePedi traditional wedding ceremony in 2015 (Biyela, 2015). With the above-mentioned facts and the legalisation of Civil Unions by South Africa in 2006, could this mean that black Africans in this country are gradually accepting and adapting to western and modern customs and slowly deserting traditional ones with regards to sexual norms (Department of Home Affairs, 2017)?

In a qualitative study that was conducted to explore the disconnect between the African American lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community and the Black Church, Son of Dallas Pastor (2009, as cited in Chaney and Patrick, 2010) pointed out that one Black Church Bishop, T.D. Jakes, admitted that even though he was against violence towards gay people he would never want to hire a "sexually active" gay person to his ministry.

Levy and Reeves (2011) highlight that lesbian individuals with a Christian upbringing often experience conflict between religion and sexual identity. They make an example with the largest protestant denomination in the United States which has made it clear that homosexuality is not a valid alternative lifestyle. Several international research studies have been conducted in an effort to understand how gay, lesbian and gay Christians deal with conflict between religious beliefs and sexual identity and how this affects their spiritual journeys. Levy and Reeves (2011) provide a brief summary of different research findings around this topic. They highlight that Yip (2003, as cited in Levy and Reeves, 2011) found that many of these Christians end up becoming critical of institutionalised religion while others leave and look for congregations that are accepting of their sexual identities (Rodriguez and Oullette, 2000). Another study conducted by Couch, Mulcare, Pitts, Smith, and Mitchell (2008, as cited in Levy and Reeves, 2011) pointed out that female Christians who are in same sex relationships deal with these conflicts by reacting in either of the following actions: "rejecting their sexual identity, rejecting their Christian identity, integrating the sexual and Christian identity, compartmentalising or living with the conflict" (Levy and Reeves, 2011, p.64).

2.6 Conclusion

According to Soldati-Kahimbaara (2017), a paradoxical situation exists in South Africa where 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. Having looked at some of the research and studies conducted on the lived experiences of females in same sex relationships, it is clear that the abovementioned statement is still prevalent today, even within religious institutions. Sexual orientation refers to the "predominant predilection or inclination that defines a person as a heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual" (Colman, 2009, p. 694). According to the American Psychological Association (APA), a person's sense of identity is based on those attractions, related behaviours, and membership in a community of others who share those attractions (Longley, 2018; Visser and Moleko, 2012). It is clear that sexual orientation forms part of an individual's identity which cannot be easily changed or erased. Therefore, the church should be a very important source of support and identity formation for self-identified Christian females in same sex relationships (Bowland, Foster and Volser, 2013).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHOD AND DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

An in-depth literature review from the previous chapter attempted to paint a picture of the current situation of the lived experiences of Christian females in same sex relationships in their respective churches, both locally and internationally. However, the focus of this study was to find out how and where the situation stands in South Africa and in particular traditional African churches. This chapter will focus on the methodological aspects that informed this inquiry.

Uwe (2014) defines a research design as a plan for collecting and analysing evidence that will make it possible for the investigator to answer whatever questions he or she has posed. He further explains that the design of an investigation impacts on almost all aspects of the research, from the moment data is collected to the selection of the techniques of data analysis (Uwe, 2014). Because I was exploring the lived experiences of participants, this study was rooted in a qualitative paradigm and an interpretative phenomenological research design was adopted.

In this chapter I discuss the methodology and methods used in this study. I unpack how the phenomenological research design, in particular Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and qualitative interpretative paradigm informs this inquiry. I also discuss the research process comprehensively. Ethical considerations are further discussed, with measures to ensure trustworthiness explored. The role of the researcher and practicalities of conducting qualitative research are also discussed.

3.2 Research paradigm

IPA researchers are particularly interested in what happens when the everyday flow of lived experience takes on certain significance for people. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2012) make a practical example of how IPA operates by making us imagine a person who is about to take a swim on a hot summer's day. They assert that one may not be mindful of the pebbles under one's feet until one removes one's shoes, and then find that one has to hobble the last few steps down to the waterline. Momentarily then, you are made aware of the flow of your experience; for most of the time, however, you are immersed in it, rather than explicitly aware of it (Smith et al., 2012).

Creswell (2007) provides a metaphoric explanation of what he thinks qualitative research necessitates, by referring to it as an "intricate fabric composed of minute threads, many colours, different textures, and various blends of material" (p. 35). However, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) as cited in Creswell (2007) provide a clear and substantial definition of what qualitative research entails and what its characteristics are. Their definition follows below:

> "Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretative, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 3).

Qualitative research involves closer attention to the interpretative nature of inquiry and situating the study within the political, social, and cultural context of the researchers, participants, and the readers of the study (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975; Creswell, 2007). There are several characteristics that are identified by Creswell (2007) within qualitative research. I discuss these characteristics below and also link them to my inquiry.

Natural Setting - Qualitative researchers tend to collect data at the site where participants experience the issue or problem under study. They do not bring participants into an unnatural situation, nor do they send out instruments for participants to complete (Creswell, 2007; Willig, 2013). A major characteristic of qualitative research involves gathering information by actually talking directly and up-close with people, observing them behave and act within their natural context (Creswell, 2007; Willig, 2013). I attended the AME church services in Bethlehem, then identified and approached the potential participants and invited them individually for an interview in the church boardroom after the church service.

Researcher as key instrument - Qualitative researchers often collect data themselves through examining documents, observing behaviour, and interviewing participants. They seldom use questionnaires or instruments developed by other researchers. They may use an instrument for collecting data, but they are responsible for gathering the information (Creswell, 2007; Willig, 2013). Because I am a member of the AME church in Bethlehem I already knew some participants who were open about their sexuality in church. I observed and identified them through prior knowledge of their sexuality. I developed and designed my own interview schedule that I thought would be suitable and relevant for the topic under study.

Multiple sources of data - Qualitative researchers normally gather various forms of data, such as documents, interviews, and observations, instead of depending on a single data source. The researchers then review all of the data and organise it into themes that cuts across all of the data

sources (Creswell, 2007; Willig, 2013). I collected data through firstly observing potential participants from a distance without them knowing that they are being observed. I then approached and asked them for a further detailed interview. From the interviews and observations, I was able to gather, sort the data and categorise it into different themes.

Participants' meanings - In qualitative research, the researcher focuses on the meaning brought forth by the participants, not his/her pre-conceived ideas (Creswell, 2007; Willig, 2013). As I was using a semi structured interview method to collect data, I made sure that I asked follow up questions that urged my participants to explain further where I needed clarity on certain issues in order to avoid making assumptions about what participants were trying to communicate with me. Lyons and Coyle (2007) also emphasise this point by warning researchers that "too much reflection should be avoided as it may create an impression that analysis is more about the researcher than the researched" (p. 20).

Emergent design - The research process for qualitative researchers is emergent, meaning that the initial plan for research cannot be strictly prescribed, and that all phases of the process may change after researchers begin to collect data. For instance, the questions may change, the forms of data collection may shift, and the individuals studied may be modified (Creswell, 2007; Willig, 2013). During the data collection phase of this study, I decided to add two more questions to the interview schedule which I realised were relevant and would be beneficial to the study when another participant mentioned them during her interview. I had to revert to participants whom I had not asked those questions for a follow up interview. One participant who had initially signed a consent form and agreed to take part in the interview decided to withdraw during the interview which forced me to find a replacement for her so that my participants remain the same number that I had proposed in my research proposal which was eight participants.

Theoretical lens - Qualitative researchers are often required to use a lens to view their studies, for instance, the concept of culture, central to ethnography, or gendered, racial, or class differences from theoretical orientations. Occasionally, the study may be organised around identifying the social, political, or historical context of the problem under study (Creswell, 2007; Willig, 2013). In this research study I focused on gender-oriented theories as the research topic is centred on female same sex relationships. In the previous chapter I discussed theories that explored gender development, sexuality and religion including the psychoanalytic theory, social learning theory and gender schema theory. These theories were used to try and explain how religion influences and informs people's values, norms and principles especially when it comes to sexuality. In addition, other theories explained how sexuality and gender develops and in particular same sex relationships. These theories assisted with the comprehension of how these religious participants turned out to be attracted to the same sex.

Context - Seale et al., (2004) emphasise that context is very important when conducting qualitative research and that researchers must look at how participants in interaction continue to co-produce the very context they inhabit through that very interaction. They further mention that one may approach context from either the top or bottom as context is experienced as part of a complete lived reality and it is impossible to explain where, when, or how its manifestations begin and end (Seale et al., 2004). The top approach goes from the general to the specific, while the bottom approach begins at the specific and moves to the general (Seale et al., 2004). This study took context into account because I was aware that the research context was in a traditional and conservative church which needed me to conform to a certain extent in order to be able to access participants. The population where the study was conducted had not received research attention at all regarding the topic of study or any similar studies as sexuality was a taboo subject in their specific context.

Holistic account - Qualitative researchers report multiple perspectives, identify the many factors involved in a situation and sketch the larger picture that emerges in efforts to develop a complex picture of the issue under study. They are not bound by strict cause-and-effect relationships among factors, but rather by identifying interactions of factors in a situation (Creswell, 2007; Willig, 2013). While I was conducting the study, through observations and interviews, I noticed that multiple factors affected how the participants perceived direct and/or indirect treatment from their fellow church congregants. I also noticed that the church congregants have different manners in which they perceive and react to the females in same sex relationships in the church. Reasons for these differences include values, morals, cultural and family backgrounds, church rules and norms. Bogdan and Taylor (1975) also emphasise the point that this approach directs itself at settings and individuals within those settings holistically; "that is, the subject of the study, be it an organisation or an individual is not reduced to an isolated variable, but is viewed instead as part of a whole" (p. 5).

According to Bogdan and Taylor (1975), qualitative methodologies refer to "research procedures which produce descriptive data, which is people's own written or spoken words and observable behaviour" (p. 4). When we reduce people to statistical values, we lose sight of the subjective nature of human behaviour (Seale, Gobo, Gubrium and Silverman, 2004). Qualitative methods allow researchers to know research participants personally and see them as they are developing their own definitions of the world. Qualitative research allows researchers to vicariously experience the challenges and obstacles participants face on a daily basis (Flick, 2014). Qualitative methods allow researchers to explore concepts whose essence is lost in other research approaches for instance quantitative research method. Concepts such as beauty, pain, faith, suffering, frustration, hope, and love can be studied as they are defined and experienced by real people in their day to day lives (Flick, 2014; Willig, 2013).

Qualitative research has its own disadvantages. Firstly, qualitative researchers are unable to generalise their findings to other settings or subjects. In other words, they cannot verify that the settings or subjects that they study are representative (Bogdag and Taylor, 1975). Second, Bogdag and Taylor (1975) point out that the qualitative researcher, being the sole instrument, acts like a sieve which selectively collects and analyses nonrepresentative data. Third, some critics charge that qualitative researchers elicit unrepresentative data by virtue of their presence among subjects, meaning that the researcher's presence might affect their subject's behaviour which may yield inaccurate data (Cooper, Camic, Long, Panter Rindskopf and Sher, 2012).

3.3 Research Design

This study explores the lived experiences of black Christian females who are in the same sex relationships particularly the direct and/or indirect treatment that they receive from their fellow church members due to their choice of sexual orientation. IPA, according to Willig (2013), is a phenomenological method that accepts the impossibility of gaining direct access to research participants' life worlds. Even though this method aims to explore the experiences of the research participants from their own perspectives, it recognises that such an exploration must implicate the researcher's own view of the world as well as the nature of the interaction between researcher and participant (Javornicky, 2018; Willig, 2013).

Yin (2003) as cited in Creswell (2007) defines research design as "the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study's initial research questions and, ultimately, to its conclusions" (p. 20). Creswell (2007) further explains that a research design refers to the entire process of research from conceptualising a problem to writing research questions, and on to data collection, analysis, interpretation, and report writing.

The main research question for this study was: What challenges do female congregants in same sex relationships in the AME church in Bethlehem encounter as a result of direct and/or indirect actions, attitudes or behaviour of their fellow congregants and the pastor towards them? I explored black women's experiences and perceptions in depth to shed some light on how they perceive these actions, attitudes and behaviour in their immediate natural environment (i.e., church).

The design that I used was an interpretative phenomenological analysis. Smith et al., (2012) defines phenomenology "as a philosophical approach to the study of experience" (p. 11). They further highlight that for psychologists, one key value of phenomenological philosophy is that it provides people with a rich source of ideas about how to examine and understand lived experiences (Smith et al., 2012). Transcendental phenomenology postulates that things should return to themselves, as they appear to us as perceivers, and we should set aside that which we think we already know about them (Willig, 2013). Working with Christian females in same sex relationships from a phenomenological (transcendental) perspective allowed me to bracket (set aside) my assumptions, ideas, prepositions and interpretation about them. Wertz, Charmaz, Mcmullen, Josselson, Anderson and McSpadden (2011) emphasise that bracketing prior knowledge of the subject matter allows the researcher to attend to what they call the "lifeworld" and to freshly reflect on concrete examples of the phenomenon. I knew some of the participants personally as we are fellow church members, but I consciously decided that I will not allow prior knowledge of them to cloud me. It is, however, often impossible to bracket and that is the reason why I decided to make use of interpretative analysis (Willig, 2013). With epoche of natural attitude, the researcher abstains from the natural tendency of consciousness to unreflectively positing and focusing on the existence of objects independent of experience (Wertz et al., 2011). This procedure enables the investigator to closely examine how situations present themselves through experience. However, this is very difficult to attain as it requires

one to critically reflect on one's customary way of knowing while constructing an interpretation of the participants' world (Willig, 2013). For the purpose of this inquiry, my approach was interpretative in a sense that it is the interpretation of participants' account of lived experiences, emotions and cognitions in the church as it relates to their sexual orientation.

There are two major approaches within phenomenological research in psychology, namely descriptive phenomenology and interpretive phenomenology (Javornicky 2018; Willig, 2013). Descriptive phenomenology suggests that perception can be infused with ideas and judgements. In addition, it posits that it is possible to minimise interpretation and focus on "that which lies before one in phenomenological purity"(p. 85). This, then, means that the researcher should be able to analyse and make sense of the phenomena without being influenced by his or her presuppositions, thoughts and values. This type of research is concerned with the phenomena as it is experienced by the participant rather than the phenomenon as material reality

(Creswell, 2007; Willig, 2013). On the other hand, with interpretive phenomenology, the aim is also the same as that of descriptive phenomenology with regards to understanding the nature and quality of phenomena as they represent themselves. However, interpretive phenomenology does not separate description and interpretation; instead, it argues that all description constitutes a form of interpretation (Flick, 2014; Willig, 2013).

In this study, I decided to specifically use Smith's Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), because it is concerned with the detailed examination of human lived experiences. It aims to conduct this examination in a way which, as far as possible, enables that experience to be expressed in its own terms, rather than according to predefined category systems (Smith et al., 2012). Interpretative phenomenological analysis is an approach to qualitative research which has been informed by concepts from three key areas of the philosophy of knowledge,

namely, phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography. One cannot understand IPA without being conversant with these three theoretical approaches (Creswell, 2007; Seale et al., 2004). Phenomenology is concerned with the phenomena that appear in our consciousness as we engage with the world around us. In other words, it is interested in the world as it is experienced by human beings within particular contexts and at particular times, rather than in abstract statements about the nature of the world in general (Willig, 2013). Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation and hermeneutic theorists are concerned with interpreting the "texts" of life and the sort of things like: "what are the methods and purposes of interpretation itself?" (Smith et al., 2012, p. 21). It is said that the IPA researcher is engaged in a double hermeneutic because the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them (Creswell, 2007). Idiography completes the triad structure of IPA and with this approach insights produced as a result of intensive and detailed engagement with individual cases (e.g. transcripts, texts) are integrated only in the later stages of the research (Willig, 2013). With this perspective researchers are concerned with the particular rather than the general and the aim is to understand an individual case, in its particularity. In addition, with idiography the aim of the study is to gather information from small samples that will enable a deeper understanding of the participant's experience to emerge (Richardson, 1996; Willig, 2013; Piekiewcz and Smith, 2012).

As I have mentioned before and in light with the aim of IPA, this study aimed to understand the lived experiences that black females in same sex relationships go through in their respective local churches in the townships of South Africa due to their choice of sexual orientation. Schleiermacher (1998) as cited in Willig (2013) highlights that there is a circularity built into the process of meaning-making that is referred to as the "hermeneutic circle" (p. 86). This means that "parts can only be understood from an understanding of the whole, but that the whole can only be understood from an understanding of the parts" (Schmit, 2006, p. 4). Willig

(2013) demonstrates this in relation to understanding a simple sentence. She mentions that we cannot understand the whole sentence until we have made sense of the parts (i.e. the words) that make up the whole (the sentence). However, at the same time, we cannot make sense of a word's specific meaning until we have understood the sentence as a whole. This means that understanding needs a "movement from presupposition to interpretation and back again" (Willig, 2013, p. 86).

Idiography was applied in the study by treating each participant as an individual entity by conducting one-on-one interviews between researcher and participant only. In as much as an interview guide was used, probing questions were asked where necessary to other participants when clarity was needed. Each interview and transcript were individually transcribed, analysed and engaged with intensely and they were not compared to each other as each participant had unique experiences. In as much as participants were all from the same church and had the same sexual orientation, they had different backgrounds, opinions and feelings. Idiography was also applied by the use of a small sample of eight participants which enabled me to gain a deeper understanding into each participant's narrative.

One of the challenges that I faced during the study in terms of using IPA was that some participants struggled to differentiate between 'me' as the researcher and 'me' as a fellow church member. They kept referring to me as 'sister' which is the name they use to address fellow female church members. I made sure that before the interview commenced, during the process of consent giving that they should disregard the fact I am their fellow church member and view me as the researcher during the interview process. I also reassured the participants that my church membership will not influence or affect their answers and that their responses will not be shared with anyone even the congregation, church executive board or pastor as this was a concern for some of them.

3.4 Research process

3.4.1 Participants: Sampling and sampling characteristics

Purposive sampling technique was used to select participants for this research study. Wagner, Kawulich and Garner (2012) highlight that with purposive sampling; the researcher relies on his or her own experience, previous research or ingenuity to find participants. As I was also a member of the African Methodist Episcopal church in Bohlokong, Bethlehem, it was much easier for me to approach participants as I was a familiar 'church' face to them. Rapport was easily and quickly established due to my positionality as a congregant at the church. This also enabled them to willingly agree to be interviewed, even though it was uncomfortable for them to divulge sensitive information especially because it concerned sexuality, which is somewhat taboo considering the context of the study. After informing the congregation about my study, I did not wait for participants to come to me, but rather approached them individually to ask them to voluntarily participate in my study. I approached three participants who I knew prior to conducting the study that they were open in church about their sexuality. The other participants who were not open about their sexuality were recommended to me by the participants who I initially approached. Only two participants approached me voluntarily to ask to participate in the study.

Furthermore, according to Neuman (2006) as cited in Makhubele and Mdhluli (2018) with purposive sampling, cases are chosen because they illustrate some features or process that is of interest for a particular study. Hence purposive sampling was appropriate as this study was qualitative in nature and was concerned with meanings and understandings, unlike quantitative approaches that focus on random sampling that is representative of a larger population. These meanings in this particular study were discovered by means of in-depth face-to-face interviews.

Purposive sampling was therefore advantageous as it provided me with information-rich cases (Mouton, 2006).

The inclusion of participants in the study depended on their race, gender, age, sexuality and church membership. Participants had to be eighteen years of age and above, female, black, fully confirmed AME church members and be in a relationship or attracted to the same sex for at least one year. The exclusion criteria related to language that could potentially affect the reliability of the results of the study. For example, one participant who wished to participate in the study was excused, because she was Zulu speaking and partially understood English and Sesotho. There were going to be language barriers between the participant and I as I also understand Zulu partially.

In total, I interviewed eight participants. As mentioned earlier, the research participants were black African female congregants of the AME church who were in the same sex relationship. My participants were fully confirmed members of the church and were 18 years of age and above as I considered the legal age of consent in order to be interviewed. All the participants were in the same sex relationship for at least one full year and most open about their sexual orientation in the general public (community). However, only three participants were open to the church community about their sexuality. Although these participants were open, they continued to conform to the church's rules and norms. The sample size was not determined prior to the research study commencement. I used sampling to redundancy when I felt like no new information arose from additional participants.

3.4.2 Research setting and context

The research setting was at Mt. Pisgah African Methodist Episcopal Church in Bohlokong, Bethlehem, where congregants gather to praise and worship every Sunday. Visitors are also

welcome to join the weekly worship services and to also formally join the church and become confirmed members.

The study was conducted in Bohlokong, Bethlehem, Free State. According to Statistics South Africa (2011) Bohlokong falls under the Dihlabeng Local Municipality which is situated within the boundaries of Thabo Mofutsanyana District Municipality. It has a population size of 35 003 which makes up 27.19% of the entire local municipal population. There are several churches in and around Bohlokong that are both registered and unregistered. These churches include the: Catholic Church, Methodist Church, Zion Christian Church, Anglican Church, African Methodist Episcopal church and several Pentecostal churches amongst others (National register of independent churches, 2017). The community here has a deep sense of commitment to their respective churches and they cherish the values and principles instilled by their churches (Dihlabeng, 2017: National register of independent churches, 2017).

The AME church is governed by laws put in place to guide the church on how it should operate with regard to the different church services, the hierarchy of church positions and the roles played by different members within respective church auxiliaries (Buka ea Merapelo ea African Methodist Episcopal Church, 2013). There are also norms and rules put in place such as ideal or appropriate female and male dress codes and general acceptable conduct at the church.

3.4.3 Entry and Establishing Researcher Roles

According to Usher (1997) as cited in Kadzomba (2019) a researcher is an indispensable part of the research, and cannot be isolated from the research process – 'biases', ineliminable part of us, which can be recognized, but not willed away; "the marks of the trajectory of our desires and emotional investments in the research exercise" (p. 132). The qualitative researcher is an instrument for data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2007). He or she conducts interviews as

opposed to giving participants questionnaires. I approached the executive board of the AME church, Bethlehem to get permission to use their premises to recruit and conduct my interviews. I compiled the interview schedule, conducted, recorded, translated and transcribed the interviews. My role as the researcher during the interview process was not to intervene or control, but rather to be neutral and to provide a safe space for participants to describe their experiences, emotions, interpretations and meanings without being influenced by my perceptions as the researcher. Throughout the research process, I always remained aware of my own preconceptions and beliefs and strived to bracket them while exploring the lived experiences of the study participants. One of the major preconceptions I had was that females in same sex relationships are tough and do not show any emotion. This gave me the perception and fear that the participants would not be as open when answering the interview questions. I bracketed the preconception by consciously blocking and stopping my ideas from affecting the way I conduct the interviews and the way I interact with the participants. I went to the extent of asking follow up questions to enable the participants to elaborate on some of their answers. Rapport with the participants was established by discussing the aims and objectives of the research project and addressing any questions or concerns they may have had prior to the interview process. Establishing trust and support for the participants was aided by spending time together initially before the interview. I also shared the reason behind the fascination around the topic of the research study with them. This, in turn, assisted in putting the participants at ease and they became more comfortable sharing their narratives.

Gaining entry into a religious institution in order to collect data on a topic that is deemed as taboo comes with its fair share of obstacles. I identified myself as a research psychology student who would be collecting data for research purposes. Prior arrangements were made with the local church pastor and the church executive board for me to access the church. Even when permission was granted to access the church for research, some congregants were sceptical and

uncomfortable with me doing research at their church. Even though they knew me as one of their fellow church members, that did not change their prejudiced opinion that I am condoning and promoting sinful behaviour through conducting the research study that is sexual in nature, more so at the church.

Fortunately, my research supervisor gave me some pointers as to how to conduct and handle the interviews and how I should structure the interview schedule. Reading literature written on data collection methods also assisted me in conducting interviews effectively and accurately.

3.4.4 Data collection methods

Seidman (2013) highlights that the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experiences of other people and the meaning they make of that experience. Furthermore, at the heart of interviewing is an interest on other individuals' stories because they are of worth. That is why people whom we interview are hard to code with numbers, and why finding pseudonyms for participants is a complex and sensitive task (Seidman, 2013). Willig (2013) stipulates that it is important to reflect on the meaning and experience of the interview for both the interviewer and the interviewee, and to take care not to assume that the interviewee's words are simple and direct reflections of their thoughts and feelings. At the end of the interview, I asked each participant to reflect on the interview experience and if they would like to add something that was not discussed during the interview.

Individual semi structured interviews were conducted, using the interview guideline developed by myself, as a method of data collection to obtain information from the participants. A semi structured interview allowed me, the researcher, to hear the participants talk about their different experiences (Willig, 2013). It is sometimes postulated that a semi-structured interviewing is non-directive. However, it is important to acknowledge that it is the researcher whose research question drives the interview (Creswell, 2007; Seidman, 2013). An in-depth

interview was used to obtain rich descriptive data that helped me view the participants' experiences through their eyes (Wagner et al., 2012). An interview schedule with open-ended questions was used, that allowed participants to elaborate their responses in order to give more vivid and accurate answers. An open-ended question, unlike a leading question, establishes the territory to be explored while allowing the participant to take any direction he or she wants (Seidman, 2013). Interviews were recorded with an audio tape recorder, translated from Sesotho to English and transcribed. Interviews were conducted in Sesotho, because all of the participants' home language was Sesotho and I as the researcher felt that they would best express themselves in a language that they were comfortable with to avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Recordings offer a benefit of preserving the words of the participants and for the researcher to have his or her original data for future reference (Seale et al., 2004). A consent form was given to each participant to sign before the commencement of the interview. The consent form provided information about the purpose of the study and what the participants' responses would be used for.

3.4.5 Data analysis

According to Business Dictionary (2013) as cited in Nala-Preusker (2014), data analysis is the process of evaluating data by using analytical and logical reasoning to examine each component of the data provided. This process entails "gathering, reviewing and sorting data from various sources in order to reach findings" (p. 34). Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to analyse data. The goal of IPA is to "look at participants' lived experiences in detail and determine how they make sense of that personal experience" (Wagner et al., 2012, p. 239).

My participants were able to share their experiences in an open manner and were able to elaborate as well as answer in an in-depth manner, because the interview questions were open-

ended. The open-ended interviews led to rich and detailed information. According to Tesch (1990) as cited in Mbatha (2014), data analysis commences after the first interview. I also implemented this strategy in this inquiry by informally trying to make sense of the data from the onset. All eight interviews were recorded, transcribed and translated in order to facilitate structured and detailed interpretative phenomenological analysis. Transcription and translation were done by myself. This process helped me to acquire a vivid picture and understanding of how participants' lived experiences and perceptions of the treatment they receive from their fellow church congregants (because of their sexual orientation) was and how it shaped their thoughts and emotions. Listening to participants' stories, recording, transcribing, and translating them put me at an advantage of being able to identify recurring themes. I also incorporated member checking, whereby I identified themes and went back to my participants to verify if the themes extrapolated from the interviews were an accurate reflection of their narratives. The analysis was performed by making use of the original Sesotho transcripts and then later translated into English by myself.

Biggerstaff and Thompson (2008) point out that the IPA is a cyclical process where the researcher proceeds through several iterative stages. These stages are presented and explained in detail below. I will also discuss how they were applied in the data analysis process of the current study.

Stage one: Initial reading of the transcript. IPA analysis revolves around the close reading and re-reading of the text. The researcher makes notes of thoughts, reflections and observations that occur while reading the transcript. Such notes usually include "any recurring phrases, the researcher's questions, their own emotions, and descriptions of, or comments on, the language used" (Biggerstaff and Thompson, 2008, p. 218; Murray and Holmes, 2013). At this stage the notes are used to document points that the researcher observes while engaging with the text. I

transcribed the interviews myself. Therefore, it was easier for me to engage with the text as I still remembered it.

Stage two: Identifying and labelling themes. It is at this stage that the researcher moves on to re-read the text and identify themes that best capture the essential qualities of the interview. The researcher usually identifies themes from within each section of the transcript and is also looking for possible or likely connections between the themes. The researcher may encounter material that does not seem to fit the emerging picture. Such dissonance will prompt the researcher to revisit earlier transcripts in case something important was missed or misunderstood. Only then would the researcher posit a disconfirmatory or contrasting theme (Biggerstaff and Thompson, 2008; Willig, 2013; Murray and Holmes, 2013).

Stage three: Linking themes and identifying thematic clusters. At this stage the researcher attempts to provide the overall structure to the analysis by relating the identified themes into clusters. The aim, at this stage, is to arrive at a group of themes and "to identify super-ordinate categories that suggest a hierarchical relationship between them" (Biggerstaff and Thompson, 2008, p. 218).

Stage four: Producing a summary table of themes with illustrative quotations. This stage involves the researcher developing a list or table representing the themes. This tabulation consists of evidence from the interview using a quotation which best captures the essence of the person's thoughts and emotions about the experience of the phenomenon being explored (Biggerstaff and Thompson, 2008; Willig, 2013).

3.5 Ethical Considerations

As research is planned, attention must be given to ethical concerns – both to avoid harm and to prevent legal implications after the study. Permission for the commencement of study was

granted by the Department of Psychology at the University of South Africa. Verbal permission was also obtained from the AME church, Bethlehem to conduct interviews on the church's premises. It is important for researchers to practice ethical behaviour more especially when conducting research with humans. Participants should be treated with dignity throughout the research study (Leedy, Ormrod, Neuman, and Salkind, 2010). Ethics guide the actions and behaviour of the researcher. Below are some of the ethical concerns that should be addressed by researchers prior to the commencement of an inquiry.

3.5.1 Protection from harm

It is the researcher's primary responsibility to ensure that the participants are in no way harmed as a result of their participation in the research study. Harm includes, but is not limited to physical, psychological and emotional harm (Wagner et al., 2012). In my study, provision was made for a counsellor to provide counselling services to participants should a need arise as the topic was sensitive and participants might have needed emotional and psychological services after the interviews. The interview venue was in a quiet and secure place where there was little risk for physical harm.

3.5.2 Coercion

People should not be forced, for whatever reason, into participation in a study. If they do not want to participate, then an alternative way to get another participant should be considered (Leedy et al., 2010). Before each interview was conducted, I reminded the participants in their mother tongue, Sesotho, that participation was voluntary.

3.5.3 Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity

Privacy refers to that which "normally is not intended for others to observe or analyse; anonymity means that the researcher does not know the identities of the participants; and

confidentiality means that the researcher knows, but will not disclose" (Wade, 2009, p. 282). Anonymity was maintained by referring and identifying my participants with pseudonym rather than with their actual names. Their names were not revealed at any stage of the research process. The value of confidentiality was discussed with each participant. I assured them that the discussions would be used for research purposes only and that their names were not necessary. They were further assured that the recorded information will be stored safely and the transcribing of the interviews will be done by the researcher alone. When the research process was complete, the data which included the recordings and transcripts was discarded. Since the participants' information was anonymous, privacy was ensured.

3.5.4 Informed consent

The guiding principle of informed consent is an individual's personal right to agree (or not) to participate in a research study after fully understanding the research process and consequences thereof (Wagner et al., 2012). Before commencing with the interview, I ensured that my participants have read and signed an informed consent form as an indication that they indeed agree to the contents of the form and agree to participate in the study. I further explained and translated the contents of the consent form in their mother tongue, Sesotho. I gave the participants the opportunity to ask questions where they needed clarity before the commencement of the interviews and prior to signing the consent form.

3.5.5 The right to withdraw

Researchers should clarify to the participants that they have a right to withdraw from the research at any time (Wade, 2009). I verbalised and also stated on the consent form the right that the participants have to withdraw from the interview. I assured them that there will not be any penalty put against them for refusing to participate or withdrawing.

3.5.6 Debriefing

Wade (2009) emphasises that the researcher should discuss participants' experience of the research with them so that unintended effects of the research can be identified and monitored. After the interview, I had a conversation with the participants in an attempt to gauge how they experienced the interview process and if they needed any psychological intervention. The participants were also informed that should they require a copy of the complete research masters dissertation, it will be made available to them upon request.

3.5.7 Measures to ensure trustworthiness

In a research study it is important to show how one maintains trustworthiness so that the study could be considered methodologically appropriate. Lincoln and Guba (1985) as cited in Wagner et al (2012) highlight that according to the model of trustworthiness, a researcher must strive to demonstrate credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability.

Credibility refers to confidence in the truth of the data and interpretations thereof. It is shown when the research participants identify the research findings as their own experiences (Gule, 2013). In this study, credibility was ensured through member checking and peer debriefing. I continuously asked the participants if what was recorded was the true reflection of their narratives. Debriefing was achieved by means of sharing the study with my supervisor and further submitting my study for examination. **Dependability** of qualitative research refers to the reliability of data over time and over conditions (Mamabolo, 2006). I achieved dependability in my study by identifying consistencies in my participants' perceptions and interpretations of their lived experiences in the church based on their sexual orientation. **Transferability** refers to the generalisability of the data; the extent to which findings can be transferred or be applicable to other settings (Gule, 2013; Wagner et al., 2012). Purposive sampling was used to select the participants and the research study explored and reflected

stories of black South African females that are going through similar experiences as my participants at their respective churches and communities. **Confirmability** refers to objectivity, which is the potential for congruence between two or more independent people about data's accuracy (Mamabolo, 2006). In this study, I set aside my preconceived ideas surrounding sexuality, same sex relationships, religion, Christianity and spirituality within the African context in order to prevent bias. I was also sensitive that my personal beliefs about the topic should not interfere with the study.

3.6 Practicalities of doing research

Research is defined by Creswell (2002) as cited in Wagner et al (2012) as:

> "A cyclical process of steps that typically begins with identifying a research problem or issue of study. It then involves reviewing the literature, specifying a purpose for the study, collecting and analysing data, and forming an interpretation of the information. This process culminates a report, disseminated to audiences that is evaluated and used in the educational community" (Wagner et al, 2012, p.3).

Referring to the above-mentioned definition of what research is, it is quite clear that one needs to learn or have certain skills to carry out a successful research study. I had little research exposure prior to doing the current study. Hence, I was slightly intimidated during the data collection process. However, I soon got a hang of the process.

The congregation did not receive me well when they learned that I was seeking participants who would part take in the study, especially when they found out that it would be around a topic that is sexual in nature. Some of the members were under the impression that my purpose was to lure the youth into promiscuity and did not understand that my aim was to conduct

research and collect data. The fact that I was the first person to actually conduct a study in that context also affected my reception as this was foreign to the congregation.

Therefore, it was very difficult to achieve rapport with the congregation even though the research study was not with them or about them. After informing the congregation that I had been granted permission by the local church pastor and the church executive board to conduct the research, I was eventually perceived as less of a threat and a researcher. I was then offered the pastor's counselling office to conduct the interviews with the participants. I had initially planned to complete the data collection process within a month. However, due to unforeseen circumstances and other life events either of the participants or the researcher, there were delays. Sometimes the pastoral counselling room would be occupied at a time scheduled for an interview with a participant and I would have to reschedule for a later date which caused further delays.

3.7 Conclusion

Willig (2013) postulates that "interpretative phenomenology aims to gain a better understanding of the nature and quality of phenomena as they present themselves" (p. 86). In addition, Holroyd (2001) further explains that the phenomenological methodology attempts to explicate the meaning structures developed through the experience of those being researched. The research design that I have chosen helped me in gaining a better understanding of the lived experiences of my participants.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter begins by outlining and summarising each participant's narrative. This is followed by a tabular presentation of the main themes derived from the transcripts. Finally, the themes that emerged from the data are discussed in relation to existing literature on same sex relationships. The discussion includes, but is not limited to, the participants' family history, relationship dynamics in the family, sexuality, spirituality, religiousness and their perception of how they are being treated by their fellow congregants due to their choice of sexual orientation.

Pseudonyms are used throughout the discussion to protect the identity of the participants.

4.2 Summary of participants' narratives

I begin with short summaries of each participant's narrative in order to provide a picture of the lived context within which the themes that are discussed later should be understood.

Participant 1 (Mmamohau)

Mmamohau is a 23-year-old female in her final year of studies at a university. She rents out a flat in Johannesburg which is nearby her university. When she is at home she lives with her mother and her father. She is the only child and an apple of her father's eye. Her father even tells her that he wishes that Mmamohau was a boy. She was raised by her maternal grandmother in QwaQwa as her parents worked in Johannesburg and Pretoria respectively. She returned to her parents' home when she was 13 years old after her mother had lost her job and decided to come live at home permanently while her husband posted money every month. Mmamohau

had a happy childhood and had both male and female friends growing up. Her parents were not strict with who she could be friends with just as long as she behaved well. She also did household chores that were both perceived as traditionally male and female oriented. Mmamohau has been attracted to females since she was in the fifth grade. However, due to the fear of being victimised, she led a bisexual lifestyle. She would date boys publicly and date girls privately. She has officially been in same sex relationships for the past 5 years.

Participant 2 (Kaboentle)

Kaboentle is a 36-year-old unemployed female who stays at home with her younger sister and niece. She grew up in a stable home with both of her parents as well as her younger sister. Her family is very traditional. Her parents passed away when she was in her mid-twenties and she was left to take care of her younger sister. She grew up as a 'typical girl' who played feminine games, dressed in a feminine way and had female friends until she reached puberty. Once she reached puberty, she started developing romantic feelings for other girls and dated them. She dated females secretly as she feared how her family would react to her. She once felt depressed when her younger sister got pregnant because she was teased by her family and community that she was infertile and afraid of boys. In 2007 she finally gained the courage to 'come out' with the help from a local support group made up of homosexual females. She first 'came out' to her sister who was shocked initially; however, she came around eventually. She then disclosed her sexual orientation to the rest of the family and the community at large. She is now in a stable relationship with her partner of 8 years.

Participant 3 (Lerato)

Lerato is a 26-year-old female who has been in the same sex relationships for the past seven years. She grew up as a tomboy and even played traditional boy games like soccer and playing with cars. As a child, her mother dressed her in a feminine way, for example, in pink colours

and dresses which she hated. She has always been an independent child and was not really raised up to portray a certain image. Even though she was surrounded females (i.e., her mother and elder sisters), they did not force her into being a certain person. Her family was, however, against her tomboy behaviour, but did not display their approval directly. They somehow convinced themselves that the reason why she was friends with boys was that she was avoiding conflict with the same sex as girls are usually get involved in gossip and fight a lot. Her mother was initially against her being in a same sex relationship, but a friend of hers then sat her down, educated and explained to her everything she needed to know about people who are in the same sex relationships. She eventually came around and then let the rest of the family know about her sexual orientation. She is now open about her sexual orientation but wishes that people would be more accepting of those who are in same sex relationships as she feels like we are all the same.

Participant 4 (Mmathapelo)

Mmathapelo is a 28-year-old female who believes that she has been attracted to females in a sexual manner her entire life. She however became free and 'came out' about her sexual orientation in 2008. She tried to fit into the heterosexual stereotype and dated a boy once, but realised that she was not comfortable and did not 'fit in'. Her mother used to call her "her boy" because she grew up loving and playing soccer. She has never liked to wear dresses and would even wear pants to school, which would always get her into trouble. Mmathapelo disclosed her sexual orientation to her family in 2009 but says that her family had expected it and they were waiting for her to confirm their suspicions. She was raised by her grandmother who was strict, but also spoiled her as she was allowed to behave whichever way she wanted. Her grandmother, however, did not compromise on church attendance every Sunday morning. She now rarely attends church and when she does, she attends a different one from the one she was raised in.

She is now comfortable in 'her own skin' as a female in a same sex relationship and often ignores any negativity towards her with regards to her sexual orientation.

Participant 5 (Karabo)

Karabo is a 22-year-old female who stays with her mother and two older brothers. Although she grew up as a tomboy, she only realised that she was sexually attracted to other females after she had sexual intercourse with another girl when she was in grade nine. However, she dated boys before then in order to conform to the heteronormativity stereotype, not necessarily because she was attracted to them. Her mother has not fully accepted her sexual orientation and was hurt because Karabo is the only female child she has. Her mother is still embarrassed by Karabo's sexual orientation especially when in the company of her friends who often talk about her. She does not appreciate being labelled and would rather have people call her by name or call her 'lady' as she identifies as a female although she is attracted to other females. She has received a lot of criticism and insults from the community, but has taught herself to overcome them and embrace life. She believes that if the community and church could be conscientised about the LGBTQI community, they may learn to acknowledge and accept them as they are.

Participant 6 (Tumelo)

Tumelo is a 27-year-old lady who was raised by her grandmother and later lived with her mother when she was 10 years old. She is currently studying towards her undergraduate degree through distance learning. She grew up very closely to her brother who would hand her his old clothes when he outgrew them. This led her to dress up in a boyish manner most of the times. She feels like she has been attracted to other females for the longest time. However, she started developing romantic feelings for them when she turned thirteen and started dating another female at fifteen. She says that 'coming out' was not difficult for her as she had always been a

tomboy and people were expecting that she would turn out the way that she did. The only person in her family who struggled to accept her was her grandmother, as she is a traditional and religious person. She is now free to approach any girl and propose to her without the fear of being ridiculed by the public as she does not care about anyone's comments concerning her sexual orientation anymore.

Participant 7 (Letlotlo)

Letlotlo, a health nut and fitness fanatic, is a 36-year-old female who grew up as a feminine girl and used to date boys. She lives in a very strict household where everything has to be done 'according to the book'. This is the reason why her family still does not know that she dates and is attracted to other females, even though she plans on telling them one day. The few people that know about her 'changed' sexual orientation are her close friends and some of her cousins. Unlike others, Letlotlo started her current relationship with a female out of anger and pain from failed heterosexual relationships and heartache. At first, she thought that she was experiencing mixed emotions and was not thinking straight. However, her feelings grew stronger for females as time passed. She believes that nothing about her has changed and that people should not treat her differently now that she has a different sexual orientation. She hopes that she will one day overcome the fear of rejection from others so that she may be able to embrace her new identity.

Participant 8 (Tshepiso)

Tshepiso is the first born of five children in her family and helps her mother with supporting her siblings as she is the breadwinner. She is 46 years of age and grew up as a tomboy. However, she did everything that 'straight' girls did, including dating boys. Although she was always a tomboy, her family was shocked and saddened by her 'confession' that she was dating other females. She even experienced discrimination in her own community and church due to

her sexual orientation. She is seen as a rebel, because she does whatever makes her happy, for instance, she wears pants to her very conservative and traditional church. Despite all of the obstacles and challenges that she endured, she continues to be confident and strong as she will not allow anyone's opinion of her to dull her sparkle. She believes that open mindedness will help people perceive same sex relationships in a different light and will eliminate stigma and discrimination around individuals in same sex relationships.

4.3 Presentation of results

According to Smith and Eatough (2007) when using IPA, one should interview, listen to participants' stories, record them, transcribe them, translate them and finally identify recurring themes. Table 2 is a summary of the main themes and sub-themes that emerged during my analysis of the transcripts. In addition, I also provide representative extracts demonstrating each theme and sub-theme. For easy reference, I also provide the participant's name and line number in the transcript that corresponds to the theme that I am referring to. A more detailed explanation of the themes and sub-themes will be discussed in the following section.

Table 2: Main themes and sub-themes emerging from the transcripts

Main themes	Sub-themes and descriptive extracts	
Theme 1:	**1.1 Family – Gender role socialisation**	
Upbringing	*(Strict)*	
	Punishment for non-conforming behaviour	"From a very young age I was never interested in playing or performing female oriented chores.

		My mom often punished me for that behaviour." (Kaboentle, line 43-45)
	Raised to be a typical girl	"I grew up being a typical girl. Whereas I had to do everything a girl does. I did household chores like cleaning and cooking." (Letlotlo, line 56-57)
		"I did chores that were said to be appropriate for a girl child, like cleaning the house, cooking and doing the laundry." (Tshepiso, line 50-52)
	(Lenient)	
	No gender role expectation	"My grandmother taught me a lot about how to carry myself as a female. I have not forgotten that I am a girl (i.e. I still grow my hair and would wear dresses if necessary)." (Tumelo, line 64-65)
		"I was raised by my grandmother who was very strict, but I had no rules of how I was supposed to act or behave." (Mmathapelo, line 56-57)
		"My parents were not strict on me as I did anything I felt like doing. They did not force me into playing or fitting into a certain role." (Mmamohau, line 55-56)

		"I was an independent child and was not really raised up to portray a certain image." (Lerato, line 39-40)

"At home I was never taught how to act or carry myself. I discovered everything by myself." (Karabo, line 101-102) |
| **1.2 Church – Grooming** | | |
| | *Importance of dress code* | "They taught me the significance of my missionary uniform and why I should respect myself when wearing it." (MmaMohau, line 61-62)

"In our church girls wear dresses hiding their shoulders." (Letlotlo, line 64) |
| | *Constitution and discipline of church* | "My church is very traditional and is guided by constitution and discipline. As woman you have to wear a dress, cover your head, and wear long sleeved shirts." (Kaboentle, line 50, 56-57) |
| | *Church's code of conduct for women* | "My church is very strict and boys are supposed to act a certain way and girls a certain way. If |

		anyone breaks a law there will be unpleasant consequences."(Lerato, line 45-46)
		"We were raised in such a manner that we would one day end up like those women who are married and have stable families and abide by the Bible." (Mmathapelo, line 74-75)
		"They would teach us how to behave e.g. humble ourselves and the length of the dresses we should wear, etc." (Karabo, line 113-114)
		"You have to act in a respectful manner and be a 'lady'." (Tshepiso, line 59)
	Teachings	"At church we had sessions for young ladies where they teach us how to behave and carry ourselves as young women." (Tumelo, line 77-78)
Theme 2: Disclosure of sexual orientation	**2.1 Personal emotions prior to disclosure of sexual orientation**	
	Fear of victimisation	"I always had doubts and fears of what if I come out openly to the community and get attacked or raped" (Mmamohau, line 45-46)

		"I was scared of being victimized and raped by males who will want to "correct me" and turn me into a straight woman." (Mmathapelo, line 49-51)
	Fear of rejection / disappointment	"They (family) would put pressure on me more especially because they saw my younger sister "maturing" faster as a woman than I did." (Kaboentle, line 38-39)
		"I mostly feared being rejected by my family, because I would not know how to handle it." (Tshepiso, line 46-47)
		"I had fears of coming out in my family because I knew that my grandmother would be resistant to accepting me." (Tumelo, line 46-47)
		"My major one is fear of acceptance (family)." (Letlotlo, line 45)
		"I had fears of coming out as some of my members had warned me before to not develop into being a lesbian as that would be a disgrace to the family" (Mmathapelo, line 45-46)

		No emotion	"I did not have any fears or doubts of coming out as I am doing me at the end of the day." (Lerato, line 33-34)
		Fear of gossip	"I did have fears in the beginning of what people would think of me and treat me now that I open about my sexuality." (Karabo, line 86-88)
		Fear of Judgment and discrimination	"I keep it a secret from them because I want to avoid judgment, rejection and discrimination from my church." (Letlotlo, line 50-51)
	2.2 Family dynamics		
	2.2.1 Familial response upon disclosure of sexual orientation		
		Stress and tension	"There was a lot of tension and stress in the household." (Tshepiso, line 13)
		Disbelief and confusion	"There were also statements like "this is not you" and "maybe it's just you reacting and retaliating from the hurt of previous failed relationships." (Letlotlo,line22-24)
		Acceptance	"It was something that they were expecting from me" (Tumelo, line 9)

		"My mother did not have a problem at all." (Mmathapelo, line 16)
	Understanding	"I then explained to her and she (mother) understood." (Lerato, line 12)
	Shock	"They were all very shocked." (Kaboentle, line 11)
	Denial	"They thought that it was a stage that I was going through during the time of me being away from them." (MmaMohau, line 15-16)
	Rejection	"My parents honestly rejected me at first." (MmaMohau, line 33)
	2.2.2 Feelings / reaction towards family's response	
	Feeling of support	"My family's support has really helped me eliminate the negativity that comes from external people." (Kaboentle, line 26-27)
	Ignorance	"Not that I did not care, but I just became ignorant." (Lerato, line 25)

		"I ignore negative comments, because there's always going to be comments whether you do good or bad." (Letlotlo, line 38-39)
	Happiness	"I was very happy when my family accepted me the way I was, even though I was scared to tell them." (Mmathapelo, line 31-32)
	Pain	"It was painful for me to hear my mother refer to me as her son as I do not identify myself as a male." (Karabo, line 57-58)
		"My grandmother also felt like I had failed her as a granddaughter which broke my heart." (Tumelo, line 29)
2.3 Church dynamics		
2.3.1 Church's reaction upon disclosure of sexual orientation		
	Discrimination	"They once made me sit in the male section of the church knowing well that I am a woman." (Lerato, line 19-20)
		"Some girls (church peers) would not allow me to sleep on the same bed with them when attending church events because they believe that

		I would harass them." (MmaMohau, line 129-131)
	Disciplinary measures	"A disciplinary hearing was called against me and I was suspended and then the issue got resolved." (Tshepiso, line 18-19)
	Efforts of church to discourage sexuality	"Even during sermons, the pastor would pass comments that hinted that homosexuality was a sin against Christianity." (Tshepiso, line 19-20)
		"The pastor then prayed for me and told my mother to give me time, and maybe I would change." (Karabo, line 22-23)
	Gossip	"They (fellow congregants) do not tell it straight to my face, but I see them gossiping about me." (Karabo, line 55)
	Division amongst church members	"Even though my pastor has accommodated me the women in church are the ones resenting me." (Karabo, line 54-55)

	Resistance	"The church had a problem with me wearing pants, so I decided to stop attending." (Karabo, line 51)
	2.3.2 Feelings / reaction towards church's treatment	
	Non-disclosure	"At church I do not think that they know that I am a lesbian. The last time I attended church I dressed up in a Christian acceptable way in efforts to hide my sexual orientation and avoid judgment and reprimands from the church members." (Tumelo, line 19-23) "For now, I am not yet open about my sexual orientation as it is still new. Even though I have changed my mannerisms a bit I make sure that I abide by all the church rules as to avoid judgment and rejection." (Letlotlo, line 13 + 33-34)
	Quitting	"I decided not to challenge them (church) and move on to a church that would accept me as I was." (Mmathapelo, line 28-29) "The church had a problem with me wearing pants, so I decided to stop attending." (Karabo, line 51)

	Compromise	"Church wise they do know about my sexual orientation. I was not reprimanded for being lesbian as I did not show the typical signs of lesbians, such as wearing pants." (MmaMohau, line 19 + 23-24)
	Acceptance of reality	"I guess church will always be against homosexuality." (Lerato, line 22-23)
	Anger	"The church makes me angry as I feel like they do not have knowledge" (Lerato, line 17)
	Pain	"The way the church treated me was very painful as all I wanted to do was to praise and worship God in His house and nothing else." (Mmathapelo, line 39-40)
		"It is very daunting and sad as this makes me feel isolated from my peers (from church)." (MmaMohau, line 132)
Theme 3	**3.1 Victimisation from general public**	
Victimisation due to sexual orientation	*Verbal / Emotional*	"The community mistreated me especially heterosexual males. They have negative and derogatory comments / questions about homosexual females." (Kaboentle, line 16-17)

		"They (men) gave comments like "you cannot be a woman and date other women. Your responsibility is to be in a relationship with a man and bear him children" " (Lerato, line 14-16)
	Physical / Sexual	"But comments did come up from people especially males in my community." "Comments such as "you want to become a boy / you are imitating boys" "You just need to have sex with a man to fix you up" I just ignored the comments and moved on." (Mmathapelo, line 19-20 and 21-22)
		"There were people who judged me and said that I was afraid of a penis and of having sex with boys. Most of these sexual comments came from males in the community." (Karabo, line 34-35)
		"In one incident I was almost raped by a person I thought was my friend." (Karabo, line 36-37)
3.2 Consequences / reaction to victimisation		

		Depression	"I went into a state of depression as I isolated myself a lot and used to stay indoors." (Tshepiso, line 33-34)
		Ignorance	"I ignore negative comments, because there's always going to be comments whether you do good or bad." (Letlotlo, line 38-39)
			"So, I choose to be ignorant to the society." (Lerato, line 30)
		Hurt	"The treatment of older members of the community was very discriminatory and hurtful" (Tumelo, line 31-32)
			"Community wise and how they treated me, it was very painful for me in as much as I tried to ignore their negativity and comments." (Mmathapelo, line 34-35)
			"I was really hurt by the community's response and reaction to my sexual orientation especially that of heterosexual males." (Kaboentle, line 21-22)

	Plan for revenge	"But whenever I bump into my perpetrator, I always plan for revenge against him and I guess that is also why I dropped the charges." (Karabo, line 64-65)
	Social distancing and fake "normalcy"	"I would sometimes hide myself or conduct myself in a way that is "acceptable" to my community in order to avoid judgment." (MmaMohau, line 38-40)
Theme 4:	**4.1 Christianity and same sex relationships**	
Religion / church versus sexual orientation	*Same sex intimacy is a sin*	"The Bible speaks about whoever sleeps with a person of the same sex as them shall be punished." (MmaMohau, line 83-84)
		"In Christianity it is sinful to have sexual relations with people of the same sex as you." (Kaboentle, line 77-78)
		"Homosexuality is condoned in the Christian religion and regarded as a sin." (Karabo, line 121)
		"Me being lesbian contradicts with my religious belief system." (Tumelo, line 87)

	Same sex relationships have been in existence	"It is contradictory as it is considered to be a sin in Christianity to be in same sex relationships." (Letlotlo, line 76-77) "They forget that homosexuality has existed in Christianity long before now, e.g. catholic priests." (Lerato, line 53-54)
	Unacceptable	"I think that these churches are just accommodating us, but not accepting."(Lerato, line 53)
	Not practical	"However, practically I would say that being a homosexual female contradicts Christianity because in the beginning God created Adam and Eve (a man and a woman) for each other and not two males or two females." (Tshepiso, line 72-74)
	Bible contradicts itself	"I am not sure as the Bible sometimes contradicts itself. It depends on how one reads and understands the Bible and also how each person interprets it." (Tshepiso, line 69-70)

	Bible says "love one another"	"I do not believe that my sexual orientation contradicts my religious belief system (Christianity), because somewhere in the Bible it talks about loving one another and that is exactly what I am doing by loving my girlfriend." (Mmathapelo, line 90-92)
	4.2 Freedom of expression in church	
	Express sexual orientation freely	"I would feel very free to openly express my sexual orientation without being afraid of how I might be treated for that." (MmaMohau, line 114-115)
		"I am very free to express my sexual orientation at church." (Kaboentle, line 101)
		"I have nothing to hide. I come to church to praise and worship as I am." (Lerato, line 74)
		"I feel that I have all the freedom that I want because I continue to wear pants at church, even though it has negative consequences at times" (Tshepiso, line 95-96)

	Not free (Fear of judgment)	"0% freedom. People in church are too judgmental." (Karabo, line 43)
		"I feel like I do not have any freedom at all to express myself freely as a lesbian female in church." (Mmathapelo, line 114-115)
	Will be free upon disclosure	"The freedom I do have, it's just that I have to utilise it." (Letlotlo, line 113)
	Indecisive	"I do not know. I feel like it would be impossible for a female in a same sex relationship to be openly free about her sexual orientation" (Tumelo, line 111-112)
Theme 5: Addressing stereotypes and discrimination in church	**5.1 Suggestions / discrimination**	**possible solutions to the stereotypes and**
	Educating congregation and community	"I think the best way to tackle this issue is by firstly starting to talk to the youth of the church. Eventually and hopefully matters like homosexuality will arise and Christian youth will be comfortable sharing their sexualities with

		their peers." (MmaMohau, line 123-124 and 124-126)
		"I believe that people should be taught about same sex relationships. The best way I would teach my church about same sex relationships would be doing presentations and also inviting lesbians from other churches to talk about each other's experiences and how we can tackle this issue on how our congregations can be more accepting of us" (Letlotlo, line 122 and 126-129)
		"Organising question-answer sessions in strict institutions like the church would also be beneficial for everyone so that we too can feel free and accommodated in the church and community at large." (Kaboentle, line 110-112)
		"I think that congregations around, not just in my church, need to be educated about LGBTQI. We should just hold education sessions where congregants are taught and are also allowed to ask questions where they seek clarity." (Karabo, line 150-151 and 152-153)

		"People must be educated about sexual orientation and not just a selected bunch of people, but everyone including church goers." (Mmathapelo, line 119-120)
	Do not judge a book by its cover	"The only solution that I can provide is for people not to judge a book by its cover and for people to love one another purely." (Lerato, line 77-78)
	Support groups for rejected females in same sex relationships	"I would encourage rejected lesbians to attend support groups in their communities because there are support groups who are devoted to supporting and lending an ear to such people." (Mmathapelo, line 121-123)
	Learn acceptance	"I would like to say that all the churches should accept people like us, because we do not know what sins "straight" people commit." (Tumelo, line 121-122)
	Open-mindedness	"Christians should start being more open-minded by accepting and willing to learn about same sex relationships. This will help curb the judgments and discrimination that a lot of female congregants in same sex relationships face on a

		daily basis at their respective churches." (Tshepiso, line 104-106)
	5.2 Coping mechanisms	
	Abiding by the norms	"So, at church it was not really a challenge as I abide by all their rules and norms, e.g. females wear dresses and cover their heads." (MmaMohau, line 21-23)
	Marches to create awareness	"I organized something similar to a "gay pride" in my community last year which really helped answer a lot of misunderstandings and taboo questions that people had." (Kaboentle, line 113-114)
	Joining support group	"It was in 2007 when I eventually came out publicly with the help of a local support group made up of homosexual females." (Kaboentle, line 3-4)
	Ignorance	"Not that I did not care, but I just became ignorant." (Lerato, line 25)
	Avoidance	

	Meditation through prayer	"I decided not to challenge them and move on to a church that would accept me as I was." (Mmathapelo, line 28-29) "However, I always find comfort in prayer and it keeps me going so that I can be able to overcome my challenges." (Karabo, line 56-57) "I would also like to advise and motivate everyone who is in a same sex relationship to pray as prayer is the only thing that pulled me through the difficult times." (Tshepiso, line 107-109)
	Parental support	
	Silence	"When things get rough I run to her (Mother) for advice and support." (Tumelo, line 30-31) "I keep it a secret from them because I want to avoid judgment, rejection and discrimination from my church." (Letlotlo, line 51-52)

4.4 Discussion of themes emerging from the data

As previously mentioned, the aim of this study was to explore the lived experiences of African females who are in the same sex relationship. In particular, I wanted to unpack the conscious experiences that these females encounter as a result of attitudes, behaviours and actions directed to them by their fellow congregants. Psychology is the scientific study of the mind and behaviour that is multifaceted and includes human development, health, clinical, social behaviour and cognitive processes (Passer et al., 2009). From the transcripts and themes that emerged from the interviews I will explore some of the different psychological facets that surfaced.

4.4.1   Upbringing

4.4.1.1 Family – Gender role socialisation

Louw and Louw (2009) define a gender role as the cultural norms that dictate what femininity and masculinity is. Participants were asked to describe how they were raised as children in their family and community so as to establish whether they were brought up in a strict or lenient familial and communal environment that enforced traditional gender roles. In addition, this question aimed at analysing the current relationship status with family members who were directly involved in their upbringing and specifically if they were socialised into developing a certain "gender" conforming role. All the participants are still living in their family homes where most of them also grew up in, except for one who was raised in her grandmother's home and now lives with her parents at their home. Most of the participants grew up identifying as tomboys, of which most of their family members disapproved of. Others grew up as typical girls and then later during puberty developed sexual feelings towards other females, except for Letlotlo who had never been in same sex relationships before or had an attraction to other

females. She developed sexual feelings for other females as a result of heartbreak from her previous relationships where she used to date only males. She said:

"But as time went on while dating boys, I went through heart breaks in relationships. As a result, I started having a fear of men. Someway somehow the people that I confided in and who supported me became more than just friends to me."

In terms of their upbringing, most participants were raised in strict households in terms of conforming to traditional gender roles. For instance, in the case of Kaboentle, who was punished as the consequence of non-conforming behaviour. On the other hand, the rest of the participants were somehow raised by lenient parents. They also mentioned that their childhoods were easy-going and that they were allowed to learn and explore everything by themselves. Being raised in a 'traditional' family where there is a clear mother figure, father figure and children arguably contributed towards the participants' conforming behaviour as they learned it from observing their family structure. According to Albert Bandura's observational learning theory (Bandura, 1977), when an individual first learns a behaviour by observing another individual, that individual serves as a model through whom other individuals learn the behaviour (Seda, 2016). This is also how most of the participants learned some of the 'traditional' gender conforming roles, through observational learning. Some psychoanalytic literature, as mentioned earlier by Downey and Friedman (1997), attributes same sex attraction amongst females to developmental disturbances in mother-child relationship as well as neglect and abuse from both parents. However, with all of the participants, these psychoanalytic causal factors were not reasons for their attraction towards the same sex. This goes to show that the psychoanalytic perspective may not always be accurate when interpreting some phenomena.

4.4.1.2 Church – Grooming

All the participants were born, baptised and have been attending the AME church in Bethlehem except for one participant who was raised by her Catholic grandmother until she was in her teenage years in QwaQwa, Free State. This participant, however, eventually moved to Bethlehem to live with her parents who attend the AME church. This church is very traditional and conservative. It groomed the participants and the congregation to conduct themselves in a certain way that is deemed to be acceptable. For instance, most of the participants pointed out the fact that female congregants should wear long sleeved shirts, long dresses and cover their heads when attending church. One participant highlighted that the church even goes to the lengths of investing time on young female congregants where it teaches them how to behave and carry themselves as young women in the church. According to the gender schema theory, developed by Sandra Bam in 1981, as mentioned earlier by Cherry (2019) children learn about male and female roles from the culture in which they live. It is evident from the participants' responses that female gender roles were instilled within them from a young age by both their families and church at large even though they developed an attraction to the same sex. They grew up in a church that embraced heterosexual marriages and, in their families, most lived in homes that had both mother and father figures.

All the participants agree that the church grooms them to become respectful and law-abiding women who would also be good wives in future. According to socio-biologists, all moral and religious systems, including Christianity, exist because they assist in promoting the survival and reproduction of the group (Caltabiano and Sarafino, 2002). It is clear when observing the responses provided by some of the participants that indeed the church requires of them to be in heterosexual relationships and marriages with Christian men. This, therefore promotes survival and growth of the church. Mmathapelo mentioned:

"We were raised in such a manner that we would one day end up like those women who are married and have stable families and abide by the Bible"

If congregants do not conform to the rules and regulations set out by the church, there "will be unpleasant consequences" as stated by Kaboentle.

4.4.2 Disclosure of sexual orientation

4.4.2.1 Personal emotions prior to disclosure of sexual orientation

I asked the participants to explain how they felt before disclosing their sexual orientation and if they had any fears or doubts prior to disclosing their sexual orientation to their families, church and community at large. Levy and Reeves (2011) mentioned that "awareness of the conflict between church doctrine and same-sex attraction often left participants confused and fearful" (p. 60). Disclosure was mostly uncomfortable and uneasy for all the participants due to fear of how significant others would react. Being raised in traditional families and communities contributed to the participants' fears as same sex relationships were unknown and unconventional. From the transcripts (see also Table 2), victimisation, rejection, disappointment, gossip, judgment and discrimination were amongst the reasons cited by the participants for being hesitant to disclose. Only one participant, Lerato, stated that she had no emotion whatsoever before disclosing her sexual orientation to others as she said that "I am doing me at the end of the day".

4.4.2.2 Family dynamics

4.4.2.2.1 Familial responses upon disclosure of sexual orientation

The participants were asked to explain how their family members reacted to their disclosure of their sexual orientation. This was not only to find out about their feelings about the disclosure but was also to gauge the families' thoughts and ideologies around same sex relationships. All the participants indicated that they are the first in their families to be in the same sex relationship as they grew up in traditional households where there was a mother, father and children. Even though some were raised not to follow any traditional gender roles, a stable traditional family structure remained in their households. For a daughter to get married and procreate is something that is common and expected in most traditional black families in South Africa (Ferim, 2016). Therefore, it can be very devastating and shaming for a family to learn that their daughter is attracted to other females and may never produce children (p. 7413).

It is evident that most of the participants' family members were against the same sex relationship upon the participants' disclosure to them as indicated in the transcripts and illustrative extracts in Table 2. There were a variety of responses and reactions from family members to the disclosure of the participants which included disbelief, confusion, shock, denial and rejection. Karabo said:

"My mother even took it upon herself to take me to church for prayers as she was under the impression that I was not a lesbian and that I was confused or joking."

However, some of the participants' family members were more accepting and understanding upon finding out that one of their own was attracted to the same sex. Some family members were even expecting it. Tumelo said:

"My family was okay with it, because it started when I was young as I grew up as a tomboy. So, it was something that they were expecting from me and I also did not hide it from them."

As time passed, some family members of the participants started to warm up to their sexual orientation and accepted them completely. Mmamohau said:

"They thought that I would change when I came back from varsity, but I remained that way. So, they eventually accepted me the way I was."

Another participant said:

"The close family that I do have eventually understood and supported me."

Unfortunately, for Karabo not all of the family members accepted her sexual orientation. To this day, her mother is embarrassed of her daughter's sexual orientation. She explained that:

"My mother now even calls or addresses me as her boy to her friends when she maybe needs to send me to somewhere. She prepares her friends mentally before they meet me of what kind of a person they are going to see when they meet me. I think she is embarrassed of me."

4.4.2.2.2 Feelings / reaction towards family's response

When asked about the feelings they felt upon their families' response to their sexual orientation, participants had different responses. Two participants did not comment on their feelings, but further explained how their family reacted towards them. I then noticed that they were uncomfortable and somewhat disturbed by providing short, brief and indirect answers. I did, however, ask if they were comfortable continuing with the interview and they both gave me a go ahead. One of them responded to the question by saying:

"My parents honestly rejected me at first."

Some participants' reactions included emotionally shutting out and ignoring any comments or responses from their families regarding their disclosure. It seemed, however like ignoring was a form of coping mechanism for them. Even though the comments may have disturbed them, ignoring negative comments has helped them not to take those comments and reactions to heart. Lerato said:

"Not that I did not care, but I just became ignorant."

Two other participants expressed that they were pained by some of their family members' responses upon the disclosure of their sexual orientation. Pain was experienced from either seeing their loved ones go through pain due to their disclosure and/ or the direct emotional and intentional pain exerted on them through words and actions from their families. Tumelo said:

"My grandmother also felt like I had failed her as a granddaughter which broke my heart."

The remaining participants had a sense of relief and happiness, because their family members were more accepting and understanding of their sexual orientation upon disclosure. From the transcripts, one participant, Kaboentle, revealed that her family even allows her "girlfriend visit me at home." In addition, she expressed that her fear was not warranted because her parents told her that they had seen it coming long time ago and were waiting for her to disclose. Kaboentle also said:

"My family's support has really helped me eliminate the negativity that comes from external people"

4.4.2.3 Church dynamics

4.4.2.3.1 Church's reaction upon disclosure of sexual orientation

In his research, Botha (2006) revealed that the Old Testament from the Bible was unanimous in its rejection of homosexual practice as were the Jewish authors in the centuries before and after Jesus' birth. It is the participants' perceptions that most of the church members do not accept their sexual orientation mainly because the AME church is a traditional church with very strict gender norms. In addition, the AME church is guided by constitution and the laws set out by the Bible. Traditional churches are focused and consistent with their message that God's commandments, promises, and love are solid and they reinforce this method of delivering these truths (Botha, 2006). From the transcripts and illustration in Table 2, it is evident that the church displayed a negative attitude towards congregants that are in same sex relationships. Not all the participants are open about their sexual orientation to the church. Some choose to conform to the norms instead, due to multiple fears as stated earlier in the discussion. Mmamohau mentioned:

"Church wise they do know about my sexual orientation, but I respect the church and wear dresses. I was not reprimanded for being lesbian as I did not show the typical signs of lesbians such as wearing pants."

However, there are those who decided to disclose their sexual orientation and portray themselves openly and freely in the church. The church responded in a variety of ways, which include discrimination, gossip, resistance and disciplinary measures being taken against those who were in same sex relationships. Tshepiso explained how the church reacted to her sexual orientation as follows:

"Even during sermons, the pastor would pass comments that hinted that homosexuality was a sin against Christianity."

Congregants who are in the same sex relationship even caused some division amongst the church members. One participant said:

"Even though my pastor has accommodated me, the women in church are the ones resenting me"

4.4.2.3.2 Feelings / reaction towards church's treatment

The participants were asked to describe how they felt about the reaction and treatment they received from the church regarding their sexual orientation. This question was asked in order to gauge how they felt as a result of the response from the church, and whether or not the relationship between them and the church changed or evolved in any way. Two participants reacted by stopping church attendance all together. One participant went to the extent of finding another church that would accommodate her. She said:

"I decided not to challenge them (church) and move on to a church that would accept me as I was"

From the transcripts and illustration from Table 2, it is evident that other participants felt pained and angered by the treatment that they received from the church regarding their same sex relationship status. They somewhat thought that they were being excluded and judged unfairly. Mmathapelo expressed:

"The way the church treated me was very painful as all I wanted to do was to praise and worship God in His house and nothing else."

One participant is convinced and has accepted that church will always be "against homosexuality". The remaining participants decided not to disclose their sexual orientation or act out in a suspicious manner to the church. From the transcripts, most of them decided not to be open in church because they feared the maltreatment that they might receive from the church due to their sexuality. Tumelo said:

"At church I do not think that they know that I am a lesbian. The last time I attended church I dressed up in a Christian acceptable way in efforts to hide my sexual orientation and avoid judgment and reprimands from the church members."

4.4.3 Victimisation due to sexual orientation

4.4.3.1 Victimisation from general public

Victimisation of females in same sex relationships has been a problematic issue in South Africa over many years (Koraan and Geduld, 2015). Despite legal and policy advancements in South Africa, prejudice, discrimination and victimisation are still a reality for people in same sex relationships (Victor, 2013). In his study, Engelke (1999) discovered that members of an organisation that was against same sex relationships in Zimbabwe did not consider their condemnation of homosexuality as a violation of human rights. Unfortunately for some participants, they experienced victimisation from community members due to their sexual orientation. Emotional and verbal victimisation were the most prominent forms of abuse that most participants experienced. Kaboentle who experienced verbal/ emotional abuse said:

"The community mistreated me especially heterosexual males. They have negative and derogatory comments/ questions about homosexual females"

Unfortunately, victimisation often at times does not end with the emotional and / or verbal abuse only. As mentioned in the literature review chapter, Mkhize et al., (2010) highlighted

that in many South African communities, negative thoughts and feelings have manifested into violent criminal acts against females in same sex relationships such as corrective rape and ruthless murders. For Karabo, victimisation manifested in physical and sexual abuse. She described her ordeal by saying:

"In one incident I was almost raped by a person I thought was my friend. Fortunately, I was stronger and was able to hit him with a bottle on his head."

4.4.3.2 Consequences / reaction to victimisation

Victimisation can have dire after effects to the victim including long term psychological problems, especially if not dealt with properly. Barton (2010) mentioned that "informants explained that negative social attitudes about homosexuality caused a range of harmful consequences in their lives including the fear of going to hell, depression, low self-esteem, and feelings of worthlessness" (p. 471). Most participants that were victimised suffered from emotional and psychological pain. One participant was diagnosed with a psychological disorder. In the transcript she said:

"I went into a state of depression as I isolated myself a lot and used to stay indoors."

Although there were two participants who expressed that they chose to ignore the "negative comments", three participants were emotionally affected by victimisation and could not simply ignore the comments any longer. One of them said:

"Community wise and how they treated me, it was very painful for me in as much as I tried to ignore their negativity and comments."

Unfortunately for one participant who was almost raped by a trusted person this incident still haunts her to the point where she feels like she could also attack her abuser every time their paths meet. In the interview, she explained that she laid charges but later dropped them as she was convinced that her perpetrator would never attempt doing that again after being arrested. The participant said:

"But whenever I bump into my perpetrator, I always plan for revenge against him and I guess that is also why I dropped the charges."

4.4.4 Religion / church versus sexual orientation

4.4.4.1 Christianity and same sex relationships

"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" (Leviticus 20, verse 13, New International Version). This scripture from the Bible arguably advocates for heterosexual relationships and views homosexuality as an immoral sexual orientation. In addition, Trammell (2015) highlighted that homosexuals are still seemingly invisible to one large body of evangelical Christians "where there are gays and Christians, but supposedly no gay Christians" (p. 2). The participants were asked whether they thought their sexual orientation was complimentary or contradictory to their belief system. The aim of this question was to unpack the participants' understanding regarding Christianity doctrine and its position on same sex relationships. All the participants expressed that as a Christian, one must live in a "morally" acceptable manner and abide by what the Bible teaches. Most of them shared a similar sentiment that the same sex relationships are forbidden by both Christianity and their church.

However, one participant was under the impression that the Bible contradicts itself and that one interprets it according to how one reads and understands it. Mmathapelo said:

"I do not believe that my sexual orientation contradicts my religious belief system (Christianity), because somewhere in the Bible it talks about loving one another and that is exactly what I am doing by loving my girlfriend."

When analysing from a cognitive perspective viewpoint we can see that Soliman, Johnson and Song (2015) presuppose that religion is an embodied cognition which is the belief that the mind is the locus of religiousness. However, this assumption may be limited by people's own ideology of mind. For example, from Mmathapelo's response one can see that she defends her sexuality by justifying and referring to a Bible scripture that she thinks accommodates and suites her sexuality, even though there are other scriptures like (Leviticus 20, verse 13, New International Version) that dispute and clearly state that same sex relationships are an abomination.

4.4.4.2 Freedom of expression in church

Freedom of expression refers to the ability of an individual or group of individuals to express their beliefs, thoughts, ideas, and emotions about different issues without censorship, restraint or legal penalty (Mattsson, 2019). The participants were asked how much freedom they felt they had as females in same sex relationships to openly express their sexual orientation in the AME church. Most participants felt that they were comfortable with freely expressing themselves as females in same sex relationships within the church. However, two participants had no courage and confidence in their sexual orientation being publicly known in the church or for them to reveal their sexual orientation for all church members to know. One of them expressed that people within the church were "too judgmental". She did not feel comfortable

expressing herself freely in church. One other participant, Tumelo, was indecisive, although the congregation did not know about her sexual orientation yet. She said:

"I do not know. I feel like it would be impossible for a female in a same sex relationship to be openly free about her sexual orientation."

4.4.5 Addressing stereotypes and discrimination in church

4.4.5.1 Suggestions / possible solutions to the stereotypes and discrimination

After learning that all the participants had experienced atrocious and unpleasant ordeals in the hands of 'the church', family and community at large, I asked them a follow up question. The question that I asked the participants was what they thought the solutions may be to help eliminate stigma and discrimination against people in same sex relationships. This question was asked with the aim of finding out from the participants if there were ways in which they thought their abuse and discrimination could be minimised or eliminated in order for them to lead their lives freely without fear. Trammell (2015) suggested that gay and lesbian Christians should not be silent participants to the heteronormative hegemony in order to overcome the "obstacle of invisibility" in Christendom (p. 3). All the participants had different opinions and views on how to tackle their issues, but one common response amongst them was that people should be educated about same sex relationships especially in churches. One of them said:

"I think that congregations around, not just in my church, need to be educated about LGBTQI. We should just hold education sessions where congregants are taught and are also allowed to ask questions where they seek clarity."

On the other hand, other participants' responses leaned towards advising people on how they should treat and act towards people in same sex relationships. Participants felt that people should be more 'open-minded' and that the church should 'accept people like us'. One

participant focused on the wellbeing of fellow females in same sex relationships. This participant advised:

"I would encourage rejected lesbians to attend support groups in their communities because there are support groups who are devoted to supporting and lending an ear to such people."

4.4.5.2 Coping mechanisms

A coping mechanism is any conscious or non-conscious adjustment or adaptation that decreases tension and anxiety in a stressful experience or situation (Passer et al., 2009). From the conversations with participants, I picked that they adopted coping mechanisms en route as they faced challenges and ordeals due to their sexual orientation. These coping mechanisms assisted them to overcome some of those challenges and to continue with their daily lives. Two participants mentioned that meditation through prayer helped them get through trials.

Levy and Reeves (2011) mentioned that in their study, all the participants "upon being aware of the conflict between same-sex attraction and church doctrine worked tirelessly to keep their sexual desires a secret" (p. 59). In the current study, four participants coped by actively deciding through various actions not to provoke people who mistreat those in same sex relationships. These actions included ignoring, avoiding, silence and abiding by norms. One of the participants said:

"I keep it a secret from them, because I want to avoid judgment, rejection and discrimination from my church."

Some participants relied on support from others and this helped them to face the challenges and struggles they experienced. This support either came from the family or external people. One participant organised a march to create awareness; another joined a support group while another got support from her mother. The last participant said:

"When things get rough, I run to her (mother) for advice and support."

4.5 Conclusion

Barton (2010) mentioned that "Like a creepy mirrored fun house, abusive language about and threatening actions toward homosexuals is reflected from the pulpit and echoed in the pews, on the playground, in the bar, at work, and during family dinner" (p. 471). This is evidence that institutions such as the church and family influence each other in one way or another and in turn influence the individual.

Sociology often uses the ecological model with three major levels of analysis (of society), namely, micro-level analysis, meso-level analysis and macro-analysis. The micro-level is the minimum unit which involves social interactions of individuals or very small groups. The meso-level is the intermediate level and it involves movements, associations, groups, formal organisations and social institutions. The macro-level is the maximum unit which concerns the process of differentiation, stratification and social integration at the national and global levels (Serpa and Ferreira, 2019). The macro-level contributes and influences how the meso-level functions, in addition, the meso-level contributes and influences how the micro-level functions (Van Den Heever, 2017).

Below is an image (Figure 3) illustration of the ecological model demonstrating the micro, meso and macro levels as well as examples of where and how the participant, family, church and Christianity fit in in the illustration.
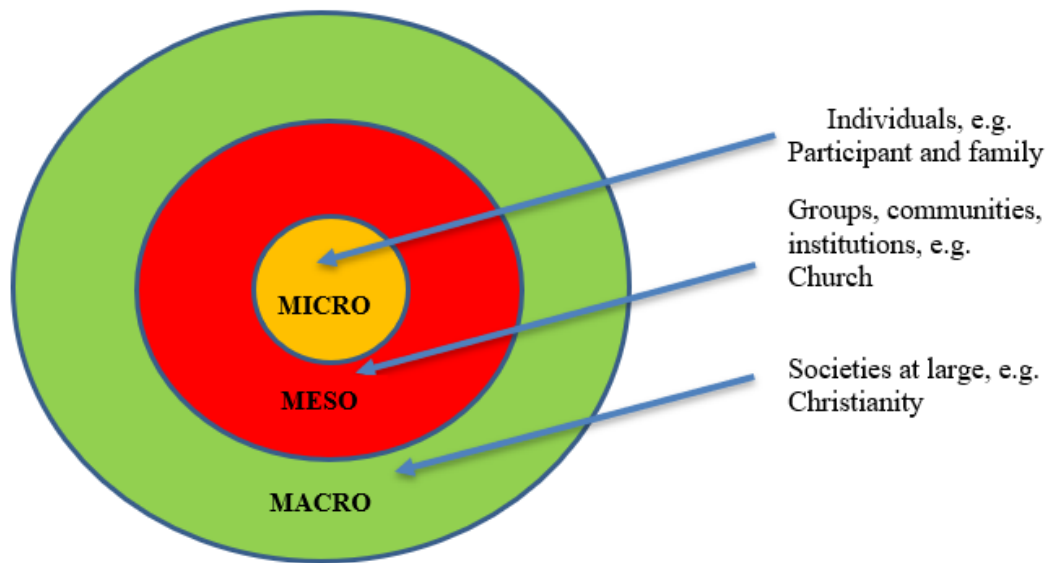
Figure 3: Illustration of the micro, meso and macro levels (Source: Researchgate.net)

From the illustration above one can clearly identify and classify the participants and their families as falling within the micro-level, the church falling under the meso-level and Christianity falling under the macro-level. Christianity (macro-level) as a religion has its own constitution, the Bible, of which each Christian should follow and abide to. The church (meso-level) then uses the Bible to formulate their rules, norms and regulations, which the church, the pastor and the congregation abides to. The rules, norms and regulations of the church are passed on and incorporated into the daily lives of families and individuals (micro-level).

Kok (2004), as mentioned above, stressed that these days, human sexuality should be discussed from a biopsychosocial perspective that acknowledges biology, psychology and sociology. These three perspectives overlap and also influence one another as all are equally important and valid in shaping and determining one's sexual orientation (Kok, 2004). I believe that this perspective makes a valid point as humans are physical, emotional, spiritual and religious beings amongst other aspects. An individual is a wholistic being that cannot be divided or

separated into smaller parts and if these participants can be viewed in that way by their church and families maybe they could be understood and accommodated more.

The many challenges, stereotypes and discrimination that the participants endured from fellow congregants, pastor and their families had a clear impact on their emotions, cognitions and mental health. Most participants experienced negative and painful reactions from their families and church upon the disclosure of their sexual orientation. Although some of the females' family members eventually warmed up to their sexual orientation, the church and congregants remain stern that same sex relationships are a sin in Christianity and in the eyes of God.

This positioning has caused a significant amount of pain to the participants and has affected how they view the church and Christianity as a whole. Some participants have even gone to the extent of questioning the validity of the Bible as they claim that some scriptures contradict each other in terms of sexual orientation issues. Some participants decided to cut all ties between themselves and the AME church in an effort to seek churches that were more accepting of same sex couples.

It was surprising and an eye opener for me to learn about the reality of participants who are in same sex relationships. Despite the challenges that they face, these females managed to overcome their obstacles by adopting coping mechanisms and seeking support from others.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary and conclusion of study

The purpose of this inquiry was to unpack the lived experiences of black female congregants in same sex relationships. The psychology of religion was explored with reference to the psychoanalytic, sociobiological and cognitive perspective (Masango, 2002; Passer et al., 2009; Smith and Horne, 2007). Psychology and sexuality were then discussed with reference to the psychoanalytic perspective, social learning theory and the gender schema theory (Beabout, 1998; Kloppenberg, 2016; Rogers and Rogers, 2001; Ryle, 2015) . In order to fully understand sexual orientation and where same sex interest stems from, the determinants of sexual orientation where discussed from the biological perspective (Kok, 2004), sociological perspective (Passer et al., 2009), psychological perspective (Longley, 2018; Visser and Moleko, 2012) and the biopsychosocial model (Kok, 2004). The different theoretical perspectives from the literature review chapter helped in putting matters into perspective and also in understanding the different concepts within and around sexuality.

Female same sex relationships and Christian churches were then discussed and it was pointed out that gender stereotypes such as those that construct women as submissive, sensitive and weak exist in social institutions such as Christian churches (Taylor and Snowdon, 2014). However, for individuals in same sex relationships these stereotypes do not completely apply into their lives and do not fit into their sexual orientation. As a result, same sex attraction is typically kept a secret and personal so that a person's identity is not threatened as these individuals do not possess the typical qualities that a heterosexual individual has (Lapinski and McKirnan (2013). Levy and Reeves (2011) also emphasise this by highlighting the fact that females in same sex relationships who have had a Christian upbringing often experience

conflict between religion and sexual identity. While interviewing and interacting with the participants, it became clearer that this was a reality for most of them too. One participant said: *"For now, I am not yet open about my sexual orientation as it is still new. Even though I have changed my mannerisms a bit I make sure that I abide by all the church rules as to avoid judgment and rejection."*

In this study the phenomenological research design was used, in particular the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and qualitative interpretive paradigm. IPA is a phenomenological method that aims to "explore the experiences of the research participants from their own perspectives, but also recognises that such an exploration must implicate the researcher's own view of the world as well as the nature of the interaction between researcher and participant" (Willig, 2013, p. 87). Phenomenology is defined by Smith et al (2012) as a "philosophical approach to the study of experience" (p. 11). In addition, one key value of phenomenological philosophy is that it provides people with a rich source of ideas about how to examine and understand lived experiences (Smith et al., 2012).

As a researcher, my aim was to explore the lived experiences of individuals who are in the same sex relationships, but simultaneously be aware and put aside my own personal opinions, thoughts and biases about individuals in same sex relationships. In addition, I ensured that I establish rapport with the participants in order to make them feel comfortable when sharing their narratives with me. As this study was qualitative in nature, characteristics that are common within qualitative research were incorporated which included natural setting, researcher as key instrument, multiple sources of data, participants' meanings, emergent design, theoretical lens, context and holistic account (Creswell, 2007; Seale et al., 2004; Willig, 2013).

I decided to specifically use Smith's Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in this study, because it is concerned with the detailed examination of human lived experiences. In addition, it aims to conduct this examination in a way which enables an experience to be expressed in its own terms, rather than according to predefined category systems (Smith et al., 2012). An in-depth semi structured interview, using an interview guide with follow up probing questions (in cases where clarity was needed) was used to assist in obtaining rich descriptive data that helped me view the participants' experiences through their eyes (Wagner et al., 2012).

From the interview transcripts, main themes and sub-themes emerged while embarking on the IPA analysis as recommended by Willig (2013). Most participants shared similar experiences, while there were some narratives that stood out uniquely for some participants. All the participants were raised in a conservative and traditional AME church. This, in turn, resulted in most participants being raised in strict households that adopted and enforced the church's and Bible's laws on them, especially on traditional gender roles, particularly heterosexuality as the acceptable sexual orientation for Christians (Botha, 2006). Majority of the participants' families were and some still are against the same sex relationship status of the participants, mainly because they were brought up in a biblical manner whereby same sex relationships are considered immoral and sinful. Since all the participants attend the same church, they often went through the same experiences in the church, including discrimination, disciplinary hearings, gossip and resistance from fellow church members. The treatment by fellow church members resulted into different reactions from participants. Some of these reactions and/ or emotions included fear, anger, pain, acceptance, compromise and quitting the church. Two participants went to the extent of deciding not to disclose their sexual orientation out of fear of what may happen to them as they have personally witnessed what had happened to congregants who have disclosed their sexual orientation. Sexual education was pointed out by most

participants as the only tool that would assist the church and public in general in understanding and accepting same sex relationships.

O'Connor and Ryan (1993) as cited in Izzard (2006) are against the creation of 'lesbian' as a descriptive or ontological category. They suggest that females in same sex relationships may share certain experiences, problems and dilemmas which result from living in a homophobic world, but it is a mistake to assume that females in same sex relationships have something in common psychologically by virtue of being in a same sex relationship. In addition, the Freud's theory of sexual development is critiqued by addressing the split between identity and desire (one cannot be and have the same sex) which is seen as underpinning the classical Oedipus complex. Izzard (2006) further suggests that same sex relationships involve a different construction of the role of gender in relation to desire. This may involve "translating gender difference into forms which are not represented concretely by male and female individuals – thus loosening the tie between gender identity and biological sex" (Izzard, 2006, p. 51).

In conclusion, from the results provided above from the study, one can clearly see that same sex relationships or homosexuality is still quite a difficult subject in black communities in South Africa. Acceptance is the main issue for communities and fear of bringing shame into families and churches is also an issue. Religion, and Christianity in particular, plays a big role in the communities' values, principles and norms. Therefore, behaviour that contradicts or challenges religion is seen as unacceptable and taboo. The older generation in the community and church are the ones who are most reluctant to accept same sex relationships as compared to the more younger generation.

Fear of victimisation, rejection, disappointment, gossip, judgment and discrimination were amongst the reasons cited by the participants for being hesitant to disclose. Victimisation of females in same sex relationships has been a problematic issue in South Africa over many years

(Koraan and Geduld, 2015). Up until these factors are addressed and resolved in South African communities and churches, individuals in same sex relationships will remain in fear and not live and express themselves freely within their sexuality. As suggested by most participants, I too believe that educating the society about same sex relationships and other sexualities will indeed assist in making people more accepting of people who choose sexualities that are not heterosexual. The results of the study have revealed that the lived experiences of black lesbian congregants at the AME church in Bethlehem are unpleasant. These results may be a reflection of the greater black South African society.

5.2 Limitations of the study

Not all research studies are perfect and they all have some limitations. The purpose of this study was to investigate and explore the lived experiences of black female congregants who are in same sex relationships within a church setting. Due to the small sample size that was selected through purposive sampling, the research findings cannot be generalised in a statistical sense. In addition, the participants were not representative of all black females in same sex relationships with traditional Christian backgrounds in South Africa.

It was difficult to find and persuade female Christians in same sex relationships who attend a traditional church to participate in an interview that might question their feelings towards their religion and church. Nyarenchi (2004) mentioned that sexuality in Africa is one of the most difficult topics to tackle or discuss openly, because "traditionally except under ritually constrained circumstances, it is not publicly discussed and this makes the whole subject to be encircled by a lot of secrecy and hedged around with many taboos" (p. 44). Therefore, another limitation is that participants may have withheld some crucial information due to their feelings, thoughts and opinions during the interview because of the sensitivity of the topic.

5.3 Recommendations for future research

Alozie et al. (2016) found that very little research has been done to explain variation in attitudes toward homosexuality in non-Western countries. Even though there is a general belief that people in Africa are deeply homophobic and unaccommodating of gender diversity, there has never been any factual information supporting that claim, as hardly any research has been conducted on Africans to gather their views on this matter (Mamba, 2016). From the above-mentioned statement, it is evident that more research should be conducted in African countries in future, in order to have accurate references that properly represents the black population, especially from South Africa.

Since only eight individuals who identified as female Christians in same sex relationships were included in the study, I recommend that more similar studies be conducted in South Africa using bigger and more representative samples. In addition to bigger samples, I suggest that research should be conducted using different population groups as South Africa is a multi-racial and multi-cultural country. I believe that it is also essential that research be conducted on the LGBTQI community as a whole and not only be focused on one sexual orientation (in the case of this study, females in same sex relationships).

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APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Researcher: Miss Lebohang Moloi

                          MA Psychology (Full Dissertation)

Supervisor: Dr. Khonzanani Mbatha

                          Department of Psychology

                          University of South Africa

Dear participant

The aim of this study is to explore black lesbian participants' lived experiences at the AME church in Bethlehem, Free State. Participation is voluntary and you are requested to take part in an interview which will be recorded. The interview will last between 30 to 45 minutes and there might be a need for a follow-up interview. You may discontinue the interview at any point or skip any questions you do not feel comfortable to answer without any negative consequences.

All information obtained during the course of this study is strictly confidential and will only be used for research purposes towards my dissertation. Data that may be reported in scientific journals and in my dissertation will not include any personal information which could identify you as a participant in this study.

Thank you for your cooperation

Yours sincerely

Lebohang Moloi

I _____ certify that I have read the consent

form and volunteer to participate in this study.

Signed _____at_____(Place) on_____(Date)

Name:

Interview Number:

Date:

Time:

Questions:

1. How long have you been in a same sex relationship?

Answer –

2. Are you open about your sexual orientation to the general public (family, community, etc.)

Answer –

3. If yes, how was coming out received by them (family, community + church)?

Answer –

4. How was this experience for you?

Answer –

5. Did / do you have any fears / doubts when you came out? What are / were they? Why do / did you have them?

Answer –

6. How were you raised / taught to act / carry yourself like as a female child in your family, community and church in general?

Answer –

7. Did you always abide by these norms and why?

Answer –

8. Is your sexual orientation complimentary or contradictory to your religious belief system? Why and How?

Answer –

9. In your opinion, can a female be in a same sex relationship and still be a member of the AME church in good standing and why?

Answer –

10. How does the treatment of same sex relationship congregants and heterosexual congregants compare? In particular females.

Answer –

11. How much freedom do you feel you have as a female in a same sex relationship to openly express your sexual orientation in the AME church?

Answer –

12. What do you think the solution might be to eliminate stigma and discrimination against homosexual people?

Answer -

APPENDIX C: ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER (UNISA)

Ref. No: PERC-17063

UNISA | university of south africa

Department of Psychology

Ethical Clearance for M/D students: Research on human participants

The Ethics Committee of the Department of Psychology at Unisa has evaluated this research proposal for a Higher Degree in Psychology in light of appropriate ethical requirements, with special reference to the requirements of the Code of Conduct for Psychologists of the HPCSA and the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics.

Student Name: L I Moloi   **Student no.**   55669417

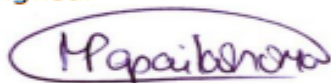**Supervisor:** Mr K Mbatha   **Affiliation:** Department of Psychology, UNISA

Title of project:

Lived Experiences of Black Lesbian Congregants at The AME Church In Bethlehem, Free State.

The proposal was evaluated for adherence to appropriate ethical standards as required by the Psychology Department of Unisa. The application was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Department of Psychology on the understanding that –

- All ethical conditions related to voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality of the information and the right to withdraw from the research must be explained to participants in a way that will be clearly understood and a signed letter of informed consent will be obtained from each of the participants in the study;
- Any formal procedures that may be required to get permission from the institutions from which the participants are to be drawn, and all conditions and procedures regarding access to information for research purposes that may be required by these institutions are to be met;
- If further counseling is required in some cases, the participants will be referrec to appropriate counseling services.

Signed:

Prof. M Papaikonomou   Date: 2017-10-31
[For the Ethics Committee   ]
[Department of Psychology, Unisa]